After weeks of tightly managed public appearances, embattled New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie will revive his extemporaneous side on Thursday, holding a town hall meeting in Middletown, N.J. But the public forum, Christie’s first such event since several of his advisers were implicated in a bridge-closing scandal, will probably be a low-key affair, with less of the swagger and made-for-YouTube confrontations that were once his political trademark.

The videos touting Christie’s accomplishments and Garden State grit, which have opened past town hall meetings, have been shelved by his advance team. So have the banners advertising the Republican governor’s slogans of the week. Happily tangling with teachers and Democratic critics, a favorite pastime for him during his first term, also isn’t part of the plan.

Instead, the thrust of the meeting will focus on the state’s recovery from Hurricane
Sandy, the 2012 storm that severely damaged the state’s coastline, Christie will open his presentation by discussing the latest $1.4 billion installment of federal rebuilding funds, surrounded by members of his Cabinet who will manage those dollars.

According to Christie’s allies, future town-hall meetings may see a return to the governor’s usual bravado and elaborate set up, full of light fixtures fit for a movie set and an enormous video screen. But Thursday’s session will be deliberately downbeat and formal, with the storm and related funding at the top of the agenda.

“I think he may feel a little stung by what has happened,” said Anthony Carbonetti, a longtime Christie associate. “He’s going to get back to what got him to where he is, and if he’s more cautious, that’s okay, as long as he doesn’t change his whole style.”

“You can’t come under this level of scrutiny without being affected in some way,” said Ruth B. Mandel, the director of the Eagleton Institute of Politics at Rutgers University. “He is certainly in a defensive position and how he will emerge from this situation, whether we will see a fundamental change in his temperament, is still an open question.”

An hour after the doors open at 10 a.m., Christie will be introduced briefly, with a few words from a local official and without any grand entrance at Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 2179, which is nestled less than a mile from the Jersey Shore. His only props will be a microphone, an array of flags, and a thin rope surrounding the circular floor space he will pace around.

The simple stagecraft is part of an effort by Christie’s team to keep the governor’s persona tethered to his gubernatorial work, rather than a days-long traffic snarl last year on the George Washington Bridge, an apparent act of retribution that has ensnared many of Christie’s aides. With state and federal investigations are ongoing, Christie is looking to avoid the kind of combative political theater that launched him to national prominence soon after he was elected in 2009.

“He’s been focused like a laser beam on Sandy, and we’ll see more of that on Thursday,” predicted Mike Ferguson, a former Republican congressman from New Jersey. “This is going to be Governor Christie unvarnished, face to face with people, getting his message out there without having to go through media outlets. This is his best kind of setting and I think it’s important for him to get back to this setting and show people that he’s being governor, regardless of the distractions.”

If pressed on the scandal, friends and aides expect his tone to be frank but not
pugnacious in response, turning the discussion back toward his administration’s agenda and away from the controversy.

“Governor Christie is focused on doing his job and an important aspect of that is directly hearing from the people of New Jersey,” said Maria Comella, Christie’s deputy chief of staff, adding that the forum will enable attendees to “engage him directly on issues that matter in their communities and receive one-on-one constituent support.”

A second Christie adviser, speaking on the condition of anonymity to discuss private deliberations, said Christie’s staff is optimistic that Middletown, a Republican enclave represented by Christie confidant Joe Kyrillos in the state senate, will be friendly territory, for the most part. Christie’s last town hall meeting, held in the same building, was seen by Christie’s inner circle as a success and was part of the reason the site was chosen for a repeat visit.

After the town hall, Christie’s Cabinet and their aides will stay at the VFW hall, setting up a “mobile cabinet” to assist residents dealing with Sandy-related issues. Christie, however, is expected to quickly depart following the town-hall meeting, taking no questions from the crowd of state and national journalists who are slated to cover the event.

Due to inclement weather, Thursday’s town hall meeting, Christie’s 110th since taking office, has twice been canceled. On Tuesday, Christie used Twitter to make light of the rescheduling, writing “#3rdTimesACharm.”

Christie spent Presidents’ Day weekend in Puerto Rico on vacation with his family. On Tuesday night, Christie, this year’s chairman of the Republican Governors Association, was in Manhattan, speaking at a dinner for the National Republican Senatorial Committee at the Harvard Club. Last month, Christie raised more than $6 million for the RGA, and he has continued to travel nationally to support Republican candidates, including recent stops in Florida and Illinois.