

Ponderlodge

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ly carried out of building, such as a badly damaged water fountain. Metal tanks, the kind used to hold oxygen or other gases, can be seen lying on the ground around other metal debris. Broken vent covers and metal sections of mechanicals, such as exhaust fans, are strewn around buildings. A number of rotting, rusted dumpsters sitting near the former maintenance building are full of refuse.

The buildings and the area around them are full of hazards, and are obviously an attraction for vandals, who are undoubtedly responsible for creating many of them. However, the state owns the land and the building on them, and it would appear they carry the burden for maintaining the property and cleaning up debris.

According to Mayor Mike Beck, he was aware of workmen being at the Ponderlodge securing buildings. Beck said he was at the Ponderlodge, known as the Villas Wildlife Management Area, and they told him they were hired by the state to secure the buildings. Two weeks ago that may have been true, the security has been compromised since then. Still, Beck said, the buildings and debris could be gone in a matter of months.

"My understanding from the people up at state is we can expect it to be gone in a couple months," Beck said.

"It has to be cleaned up," State Sen. Jeff Van Drew said. "I've spoken to the (DEP) commissioner a number of times. He promised to fast track this to get the buildings demolished and make it safe."

Van Drew said he is satisfied DEP Commissioner Bob Martin understands the importance of cleaning up the site, because he visited it himself. Van Drew said he was hopeful when the site



Christopher South/Cape May Star and Wave
Above, windows broken out of the main building at the former Ponderlodge Golf Course. Right, a section of railing appears to have been used as a ladder to access the second floor of the dilapidated building. Far right, a section of plywood sealing the building was removed in an attempt to gain entry. Below right, the tennis court showing crumbling concrete and jagged pipes. Bottom, right, metal debris is strewn around the outside of buildings.

was potentially going to be a satellite campus, but now the buildings, which he called an "attractive nuisance," are beyond the condition where they can be rehabilitated and they have to go.

Hajna said the state is in the process of preparing bids for a demolition contractor.

"We expect to have the bids in early January and possibly doing the demolition in the February time frame," Hajna said.

Demolition was in cards for Ponderlodge until the state entered into negotiations with The Richard Stockton College for the creation of a satellite campus on the 253-acre site. A memorandum of understanding between the state and Stockton was negotiated and then withdrawn after the U.S. Department of the Interior nixed the deal. The federal agency said the funding used by the state to acquire Ponderlodge was allocated for lands to be used for recreation or conservation only. A college campus did not meet those criteria.

Beck said the memorandum of understanding was signed at the end of the Corzine

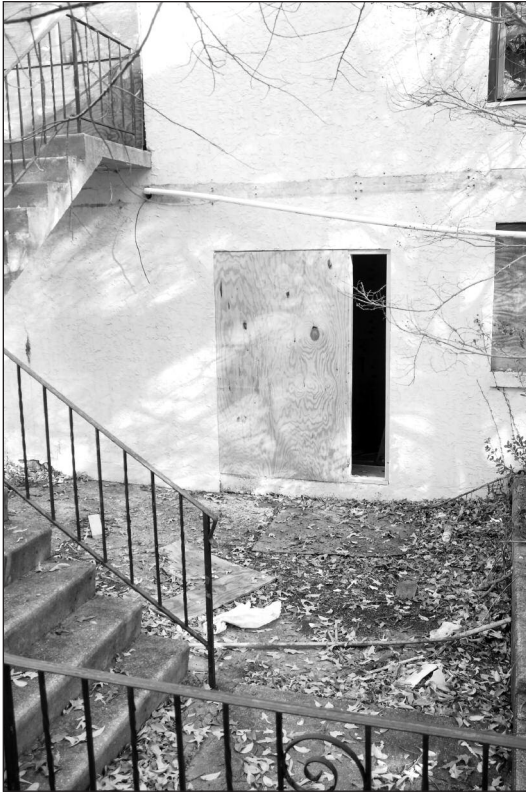
administration. He said a change of administration took six months out of the middle of the process. Beck said when it got down to brass tacks, since the federal government supplied all the money, they were calling the shots.

"The curriculum had to be heavily weighted toward the environment. They said you can have a college but it has to be strictly environmental. It would have been nice if they said put a college in there, but they said it has to be devoted to environmental sciences," Beck said. "It's crazy to limit it to a specific curriculum."

"Someone in Washington has a book with their rules, but it is our town, and their book and their rules are a road block. This is your classic red tape," Beck said.

Beck said the entire process took so long, the buildings became so damaged as to make it almost made prohibitive to do anything other than tear them down. But he doesn't regret trying to have something positive done with the former golf course buildings.

"If I got the same offer tomorrow I would do it. Anytime you get a chance to bring something to the township which is a positive we have to do it...and we tried



everything. Sen. Van Drew did everything he could," Beck said.

Looking on the positive side, Beck said the township would not be losing anything. He said the wildlife management area would still be an heirloom for many generations, calling it "a treasure our grandkids and the residents of Lower Township will enjoy forever."



Van Drew said he is still trying to gauge the interest of Stockton and the DEP for cre-

ating a small branch campus in the Lower Township area.

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Reverse

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Sunday, with the projected starting date to be Dec. 1. In response to a question from Ed Johnston of the Cove Restaurant, City Manager Bruce MacLeod said the project should be completed by April. Johnston said he hoped something would be done to prevent windblown sand

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