

Lower OKs architectural contract for Foster House

By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave

VILLAS — Lower Township Council approved a \$45,000 contract with architect Michael Calafati for design services, bid and construction management for the Judge Nathaniel Foster House, one of the county's earlier known buildings.

The home was constructed in about 1727, significant as an example of a well-preserved early heavy timber frame house, later remodeled around 1826 in the Federal style, according to a proposal submitted to Lower Township grants coordinator Colleen Crippen.

The property received support from the county Open Space Board and New Jersey Historic Trust.

In 2021, the asbestos

tile roof was removed and replaced with cedar shingles. New gutters and leaders were installed, asbestos siding was removed and the underling wood clapboard siding was patched and restored. Strategic repairs were also made at the time to the underlying original heavy timber sills and vertical studs of exterior walls.

Exposed brick foundation walls were repointed and exterior doors and windows were repaired and restored. The exterior siding was painted, and a basement electrical panel was replaced and the first floor rewired.

Progress on restoring the historic home for public use stalled during the COVID pandemic.

In his proposal, Calafati stated the goals of the project were to address site conditions and sta-

bilize the property's two ancillary structures — a freestanding shed and out-house — and make provisions to open the building for public visitation.

In addition, two deteriorated chimneystacks from attic level up would be repaired, fabrication and missing window shutters would be installed based on period photographs, fragmentary evidence and surviving hardware.

The historic iron fire-back in the first-floor parlor would be conserved and the second floor would be rewired.

The proposal notes a lift could be installed in the enclosed porch to provide access in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act. The work would involve widening an exterior doorway to the enclosed porch and rebuilding two exterior walls and windows that enclose the porch.

The proposal calls for a gravel parking area and accessible path within a reasonable distance to the ADA access point and constructing a new landing, steps and railing to serve the kitchen's north door.

The proposed professional team includes electrical engineers Schafer Kieninger Engineering



Jack Fichter/CAPE MAY STAR AND WAVE

Lower Township Council approved a contract for design services and construction management of renovation at the Judge Nathaniel Foster House.

Group and archaeologists Richard Grubb and Associates that previously collaborated on the project.

According to the proposal, the project's con-

struction budget would be about \$205,000. Construction time is expected to be no longer than five months with work beginning in July 2025.

Township Council authorized applying for a \$150,000 grant from the New Jersey Historic Trust with a cash match of \$100,000.

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Simonsen

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ports our schools, teachers and students is what I want going forward, but at this point we have to sur-

vive and help these school districts hit hard weather the S2 storm a little longer."

S2, enacted in 2018, dictates how public school aid is distributed and creates unpredictable cuts for so-called "overfunded" school districts.

"A dozen of the districts that I represent in Atlantic and Cape May counties are being cut and it's even more if you factor in the one-time stabilization aid the Legislature provided last year. The bills we heard today are Band-Aids. We need to work together to replace S2 and properly fund schools as Republican leader John DiMaio has proposed," Simonsen said.

DiMaio's "Fully Funding Schools and Cutting Property Taxes Act" (A1125) would fund schools up to

their adequacy budget and require property tax cuts equal to the increase in state aid.

The adequacy budget is the minimum amount necessary under the school funding formula to provide a constitutionally mandated thorough and efficient education. It is calculated by adding how much a district should be able to afford and state equalization aid — the current state target for school funding.

"Taxpayers are being burdened by increasing property taxes to make up for cuts to state aid when our income taxes should be providing all the funding schools need to operate. There needs to be a seismic shift in how we approach school funding to save the future of our public-school systems,"

Simonsen said.

Currently, New Jersey's formula measures each school district's wealth by property value, not income. As a result, New Jerseyans are being taxed as if they were nearly 2.5 times wealthier. Despite the 2 percent property tax levy cap, the average property tax bill rose by 3.3 percent last year to \$9,803.

Under the Republican plan, state aid to each district would increase by \$3.9 million this year and the average property tax cut would be more than \$870.

"We've learned a lot over the last several years and understand what changes need to be made. Our kids and their education are of the utmost importance. It's time to regroup and fix school funding for good," Simonsen said.

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