

Cape May City limits public comment to 3 minutes

By **CHRISTOPHER SOUTH**
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY – Cape May City Council adopted a new public comment policy, Tuesday, which will limit members of the public to three minutes of comment and will prevent the public from engaging city council members in dialogue during the meeting.

The new policy, which was put into effect immediately, was explained by Deputy Mayor Niels Favre at the beginning of the meeting. The new policy says:

1. The public comment period will be limited to three minutes (per speaker).
2. The city clerk will monitor the three-minute time limit and it will be strictly enforced for all individuals seeking to speak at this time.
3. An individual will be allowed to address the council only once during the public portion of the meeting.
4. The mayor will indicate to the public what the policies are concerning public comment, prior to the comments being initiated.
5. Council members will refrain from making any comments or respond to any

statements made by the public until after the person has finished his or her comments.

6. A statement will be made indicating that, should anyone from the public wish to ask questions of the council or seek an opinion, they should contact the individual council member(s) before or after a council meeting to get that member's opinion or comments on certain issues.

The motion to adopt the new policy was made by Councilwoman Linda Steenrod and seconded by Councilman David Craig. "We've all been talking about the fact that there

needs to be more consistency in the public comment portion," Steenrod said.

Some individuals, Steenrod said, speak at length, after which others end up being told to keep their comments brief because the meeting is running long. Steenrod said rather than limiting free speech, the council is trying to make the public comment time more courteous and consistent, and to make the speaker be more focused in his or her comments.

"We're trying to take a more positive and consistent approach to give everyone a chance to speak," she said. "Some people are told at the end of the night to make it short and that's not fair."

Steenrod said part of the new policy means city council members would not be interrupting the speakers during their three minutes. At the same time, council members will not respond to any questions or comments during the three-minute time period.

"We want to know how people feel, but this is not a time for grilling us," Steenrod said. "We want people to give us opinions on what's being discussed, or will be discussed, or will be acted on. I think it's a step in right direc-

tion."

The new policy was almost immediately challenged by resident Christine Miller, who asked every council member to state whether or not they had given city manager Lou Corea the authority to investigate selling Cape May's desalination plant to a private operator. Miller said privatizing the desalination plant would "raise water costs through the roof."

"Are you done?" Favre asked, while Miller waited for a response.

Favre said city council would not respond until Miller was finished with her comments and questions.

Miller said she would take the council's silence as a "yes."

When Miller returned to her seat, Favre said there was "no plan, nothing authorizing the sale of the desal plant."

"You can take that to the bank," Favre said. "You can put 17 books of the faith in front of me and I'll swear on them."

In other Cape May City Council news:

Bond ordinance for new Convention Hall design passed

City council passed Bond Ordinance 126-2007 authorizing the city to spend nearly \$1 million for the planning and design of a new Convention Hall. Corea said the cost was about 10 percent of the estimated cost of the entire project.

City council also tabled Ordinance 124-2007 giving the city manager the authority to close certain streets for public events until the January work session. Favre asked for the ordinance to be removed until the work session when the fire and police chief could attend the meeting and offer their opinions.

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CM Stage final raffle days

CAPE MAY – Ever dream about lounging at a large Cape May beach-house for a week and bringing lots of your friends and/or family with you? Cape May Stage, in cooperation with local real estate offices, is offering such a fantasy thru a Vacation Raffle being held up until

Dec. 23.

Cape May Stage Board Member Dagmer Chew, the broker/owner of a thriving local real estate office, spearheaded a very unique opportunity for the Equity theatre this season. Through purchasing raffle tickets (one ticket for \$5 or three for \$10),

one lucky winner will receive a week's free vacation in 2008 at 205 Pittsburgh Avenue, Cape May. All proceeds from the raffle go to support the non-profit theatre's operations, and hopefully raise more awareness about the Arts in our Victorian vacation town.

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"What better way to support Cape May Stage than to simply purchase a raffle ticket?" comments Chew. "If, or should I say when, you win, you will be able to share this fantastic home with up to 14 of your friends. Make it a college reunion party or a family reunion; just imagine all the great fun you will have."

Chew continues, "Even if you live in Cape May you can still enjoy a house retreat with your own company, have all the kids at once, and it would only cost the price of a raffle ticket. And, just think of the wonderful theatre organization that you are supporting. I encourage all of you to help support the local arts."

During the 2007 season local real estate offices acted as a conduit to make this raffle available to those visiting from outside Cape May County. Raffle tickets were offered to every vacationer renting through one of the local real estate offices this summer. The raffle tickets are still available to the public at these real estate offices. Cape May Stage will also continue selling raffle tickets at the box office before and after each production of the Stage's holiday comedy, "Every Christmas Story Ever Told!" This most-popular family holiday show is now running Wednesdays through Saturdays at 8 p.m. and Sundays at 3 p.m. through Dec. 30.

The drawing will take place on Sunday, Dec. 23 before the show begins. Call (609) 884-1341 for tickets and further information.

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