

# Petition

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mayor and new council member to be seated (for the bond ordinance)," Tolley said.

Tolley said the people who live in Cape May wanted to have input on Convention Hall, or at least more than they had at this point.

"We want to really make this open and transparent so people understand and trust right decisions are being made," she said.

Several members of the petition committee were also members of the referendum committee on a referendum halting a bond ordinance on the Washington Street Mall revitalization project. In August 2006 voters rejected a \$6.4 million bond ordinance, of which \$5 million was to be dedicated to the Washington Street Mall project.

Asked about potential criticism at the same people being involved in a previous referendum, Tolley said, "We have been criticized before. It's part of being an active citizen."

At the May 20 city council meeting, Mahaney urged council to hold off on passing the bond ordinance, saying there should be more public input. He said otherwise the city might end up with another referendum.

Mahaney said he didn't ask for the referendum, but he wasn't surprised by it either.

"The citizens of Cape May have made it very clear during the campaign and from the election results they don't have adequate inclusion in the planning, design and agreement for funding on city projects," he said. "During my campaign people made that very clear to me, and that's what related to council last week."

Mahaney said people were not happy with the mall project and they are similarly not happy with the process of the Convention Hall project. He said the city needs to determine the location, uses, and total cost of the project before funding the project.

"It's that simple," he said.

Mahaney said he is not concerned with delays caused by the referendum. He said last week city manager Lou Corea agreed with his assessment the project could not be completed before the summer of 2010.

"We will lose three summers - the summer of 08, 09, and 2010," Mahaney said.

Corea disputed that claim saying with the plan to demolish the old structure at the end of the year or the beginning of 2009, they would put together specifications in September or October, and begin construction in the early part of 2009.

"Anticipating 14 to 16 months for construction we looked to finish in April 2010," Corea said.

Asked about the repercussion of potential delays caused by the referendum, Corea said delaying the project a year would add about another \$1 million to the total cost. He also said he was not sure whether the waiver of the down payment on the bond ordinance would still be in effect, or if another would have to be sought.

"If not that's another \$500,000 in 2009 budget - about 2.5 cents added to the tax rate," Corea said.

Corea said the general election Nov. 4 is too far out, so the city would have to spend another \$25,000 to \$30,000 for a special election.

"The question is 'For what reason?'" Corea said. "We will probably build new Convention Hall anyway, and sooner or later we're going to have borrow up to \$10 million. The difference is do it now when can get waiver or

perhaps lose the waiver and do the same thing in X-number of months."

Corea said the city needed a funding source to award contracts, and the bond ordinance is like a line of credits - there if needed, but if you don't need it it's not spent. He said the longer the project is delayed the more revenue the city would lose from the new facility.

"There is no win in any of this. The only people who lose are taxpayers," he said.

Mahaney said there was still time to complete the project in the timeframe he specified, and believed the city should immediately set up special, town meetings to elicit responses from residents and business people. He said there needed to be more input on what the building would be used for, what the design should be, and where it should be located. Mahaney said during his campaign he didn't think the beachfront was the best place for a multimillion-dollar Convention Hall.

Mayor Jerry Inderwies addressed the notion of building Convention Hall in some other location.

"Glory be to God, where?" he said. "Every shore community has a convention hall on the beach front."

Mahaney said the residents and business community could agree on a model and put together a proposal, finish the design and obtain funding.

"Until you know and have formally what you are going to implement and build, it will be difficult to get permits and funding. We learned that with the desal(ination) plant

and East Cape May. No one will give money based on a concept," he said. "And the public expects some aid for this project."

He said what he proposed can be accomplished if approached in a systematic way.

"Preparation is half the game. We can run multi facets at the same time, permitting, design, fundraising," he said.

Mahaney said he believed most people wanted a new Convention Hall that would provide the same services as the current Convention Hall, describing it as a multipurpose facility for recreation for residents and tourists, for craft shows, band concerts, and small beauty pageants, for example.

"I don't see Cape May being a large convention city. We don't have resources to make that a profitable enterprise," he said.

Tolley said the petition committee needs to have 159 signatures by June 9 to get a referendum on the ballot. She said she believes the committee has the support.

"I don't think there's any question on that. We were involved in the Jeanne Powick (campaign) committee and talked to a lot of people and that seemed to be the concern of the citizens," she said.

Tolley said the committee is seeking about 200 signatures to secure a referendum on the ballot, which would apparently have to be on a special election.

Inderwies said he hopes the referendum doesn't happen. He said it is not guaranteed the city could get another waiver for the down payment, saying the panel was reluctant to grant the waiver in the first place because of wording that referred to the building in one place as a convention hall, in another as a performance center, and again as a community center.

"I told them we just wanted to use it for the same purpose as now," Inderwies said.

Inderwies believes if the \$10.5 million bond ordinance

is struck down by referendum it would cost the taxpayers another \$500,000 for the down payment.

Inderwies also repeated his denial that he was trying to push the project through before he leaves office.

"That's baloney," he said. "The date to go to Trenton was made long before May 13."

Inderwies said he brought up the trip when the budget was introduced and the Department of Community Affairs only meets on these issues at certain times. He said if the city couldn't get on their agenda in a timely manner it could be months before the opportunity comes up again.

Inderwies also lashed out at the organizers of the referendum.

"Doggone it! There's a special interest group that tries to squash everything city administration tries to do," he said.

Inderwies said he is also a taxpayer and he is not planning to move from Cape May, where he said he has led numerous improvements and helped maintain a stable tax rate.

"We have miles of improved roads, sewer lines, the mall, Harbor View Park, an improved entrance to city...look around see what we've got in the last six or seven years without a tax increase," he said.

Inderwies added that no project work is done without first appropriating the money.

Tolley said the city didn't need to raise the money to construct a new building until they knew what they were going to build, adding it would be nice to bid the contract for the architect. The city awarded a \$448,000 contract to Kimmel-Bogrette without going through a bid process.

Those interested in learning more about the referendum, or who would like to sign, can call Jo Tolley at 609-898-0851.

Inderwies believes if the \$10.5 million bond ordinance



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**PUBLICATION SCHEDULE:** Weekly, every Thursday.

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