



House of the week

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Tough week on the court for LCMRHS

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167th YEAR NO. 7

CAPE MAY, N.J. Serving America's National Historic Landmark City

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 17, 2021 \$1.00

City to submit park layout for JCP&L review

Remediation finished, utility wants to ensure work won't be disturbed

By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY — While the city's new administration would like to get construction of Lafayette Street Park under way, a few environmental issues remain with Jersey Central Power and Light (JCP&L).

From 1853 to 1937, a manufactured-gas plant on Lafayette Street burned coal to provide Cape May with gas for heating, cooking and lighting. In the process, benzene, naphthalene and other chemicals were left underground.

Through a number of mergers, JCP&L inherited the site that included the former Vance's Bar property, the city's dog park and property on St. John's Street, all now the future site of a city park.

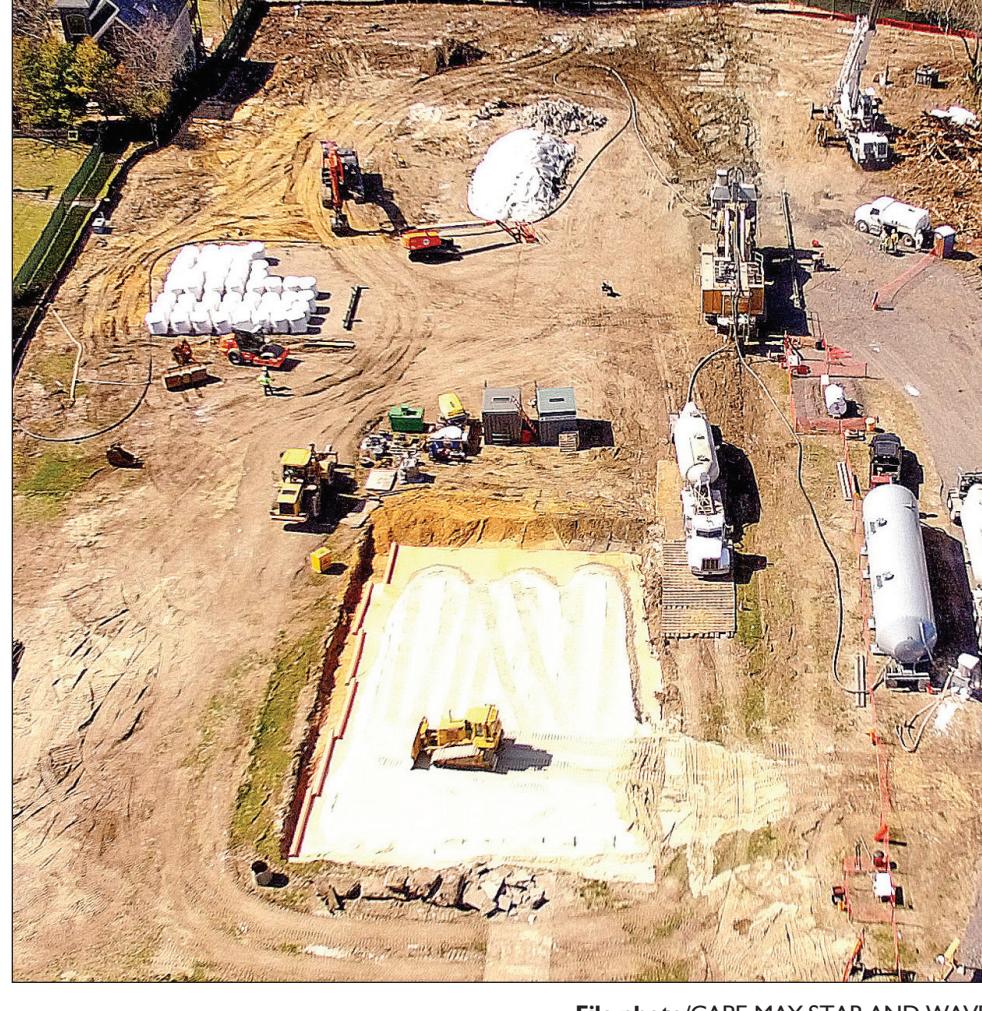
During a virtual City Council meeting Feb. 2, Councilman Chris Bezaire said city officials met with JCP&L two weeks ago to understand its position in the remediation of the park and a timeline of when the city could move forward with its plans to advance the park project.

"For the most part, JCP&L is done with their remediation," he said. "They have some administrative things they need to take care of."

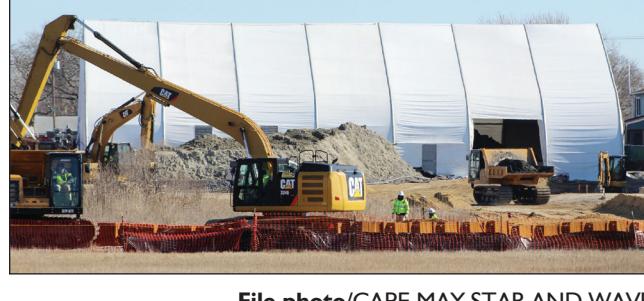
Bezaire said the state Department of Environmental Protection is satisfied with the remediation.

In 2019, JCP&L Project Manager Anna Sullivan said the remediation was a combination of excavation of shallow impacted soils to prevent potential direct contact, installation of an engineered system to contain deeper impacted soils and impacted groundwater, and collecting groundwater, treating it and monitoring it to determine how it affects the overall plume of contamination and placement of administrative controls.

"There is still some question across the street with the Housing Authority and there is still some issues



In this photo from 2016, the site of the former coal-gasification plant in Cape May undergoes remediation work by a contractor for Jersey Central Power & Light. The city will submit plans for the layout of the park so the utility can ensure its work will not be disturbed.



This large tent was used to drain water from soil excavated from wetlands to remove contaminants left behind by the former plant. At top, a one-pass trencher was used to build a containment wall 55 feet deep.

See JCP&L, Page A2



Jack Fichter/CAPE MAY STAR AND WAVE

A brush of color in the snow

A cardinal adds a little color to a backyard feeder in Cape May during a gray week in southern New Jersey.

City may overturn dog ban on Washington Street Mall

By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY — While an ordinance bans dogs from the Washington Street Mall, it is not unusual to see leashed dogs walking among shoppers.

During a virtual City Council meeting Feb. 2, Councilman Chris Bezaire said the Washington Street Mall Business Improvement District Committee had been discussing the matter

of reversing the ban. He said it has been a long-standing topic of debate.

"We have the signs on the mall that state 'no dogs allowed,' there's an ordinance in place and we know that it is not being enforced," he said.

Bezaire questioned whether allowing dogs would raise the city's liability in the case of a dog bite since the ordinance is not

See Dog ban, Page A5

Movement afoot to save St. Mary building in Point

Citizens hope to preserve century-old retreat house

By JACK FICHTER

Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY POINT — The announcement from the Sisters of Saint Joseph that St. Mary by-the-Sea Retreat House is closing permanently, and the possibility of its demolition, unnerved a number of borough residents who are now proposing to form a nonprofit group to save the building.

In 2016, the Sisters of St. Joseph announced the building may be demolished after 2021 with the property returning to nature. Two weeks ago, the sisters announced the retreat has close permanently due to COVID-19. They initially planned to use the retreat for one final season.

"Therefore, we bring our ministry at St. Mary by-the-Sea to a close. These are difficult words to express and absorb," the Sisters of Saint Joseph stated.

During public comment during a virtual Borough Commission meeting Feb. 11, a number of residents asked what the borough was doing to save the historic building and suggested a community group be formed to possibly buy the property.

Resident Marc Wrotny asked what conversations borough officials have had with the sisters.

Deputy Mayor Anita vanHeeswyk said the sisters did not want their conversations with the borough to be public. She said the sisters were "fact finding."

"The sisters have come up with what I think was a heart-rending decision for them," vanHeeswyk said.

She said she respected their right to do what they wish with their property. The sisters have operated St. Mary by-the-Sea for more than 100 years, vanHeeswyk noted.

Wrotny asked if borough officials spoke with personnel at the Sisters of St. Joseph who were part of the decision-making process. Mayor Robert Moffatt said the sisters that borough officials spoke with in the past are no longer in that position.

"There's a new group of sisters that have been elected that have taken over that," he said.

Moffatt said the sisters continue to state they want to return the property to nature.

Wrotny said the property is the largest and most iconic and historic parcel of land in the borough. He asked if borough officials asked the sisters why they are focused on returning the property to nature.

Borough solicitor John Amenhauser said the property is privately owned real estate and the borough has no control.

"I'm not sure the commissioners are going to be able to provide you with answers as to disposition of a property they have no control over," he said.

Borough Administrator Ed Grant said commissioners thought they had a strategy for saving the building and were surprised by the announcement from the sisters.

"It appeared there was a strategy and that there was negotiations, there was contact, there was everything that you need in order to try to find that mutual ground," he said.

In every news release and conversation, the sisters stated they wanted the property to return to nature, vanHeeswyk said. She said the sisters have been consistent in their wishes.

It is time for the borough to return to the negotiating table, Wrotny said. Amenhauser said he believed

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Jack Fichter/CAPE MAY STAR AND WAVE

The iconic St. Mary by-the-Sea retreat house in Cape May Point is a hot topic of conversation in the borough as its now closed and its future is uncertain.

Free Lung Cancer Screening • Saturday, February 27

Shore Medical Center, a proud member of the Penn Cancer Network, Advanced Shore Imaging Associates, and ScreenNJ are hosting a

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Consultations provided by Dr. Charles Roche of Shore Physicians Group.

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