



Public comment open on plan for seawall

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House of the week

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167th YEAR NO. 10 CAPE MAY, N.J. Serving America's National Historic Landmark City WEDNESDAY, MARCH 10, 2021 \$1.00

City OKs purchase of Allen AME Church

Orders additional testing for underground contamination

By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY — City Council approved the purchase of the Allen AME Church on Franklin Street for \$350,000, which includes an adjacent single-family dwelling that currently is the home of the Center for Community Arts. The church is being purchased in “as-is” condition.

Council also approved appropriating \$450,000 for the project with \$428,571 in bonds or notes and a

down payment of \$21,429.

Council also passed resolutions authorizing additional environmental testing and a survey of the property.

In June 2018, the church caught fire as the result of a moving truck driving down Osborne Street catching a guy wire from a utility pole, which pulled the pole over into the church. The high-voltage lines caught the church's steeple tower, setting it on fire.

The church was sprayed with foam to prevent rekindling. Later

in the afternoon, the church's tower, heavily damaged by the blaze, was demolished.

During a virtual council meeting March 2, Councilwoman Lorraine Baldwin asked for progress in determining the amount of contamination around the church. She said areas of environmental concern were found by the city's former engineering firm of Mott MacDonald. Baldwin asked if the city's current engineer, Vince Orlando, of Engineering Design Associates, was able to verify information on nine areas

of concern.

Orlando said his firm extensively reviewed the Mott MacDonald report and assembled a request for proposals for further environmental testing. He said his firm solicited three proposals.

“We’re making a recommendation to award a contract to Northstar Services to do the further testing of those nine points,” he said.

The proposal totals \$7,735, considerably less than another proposal received totaling \$18,000, Orlando said. He said Northstar Services

President Paul DeBlasio indicated the company could meet a time-frame of March 26 with testing beginning next week.

“He was reaching out to his testing lab to make sure that could be accomplished,” Orlando said. “I think it’s very important the city go through with the secondary testing to ascertain if there are problems with those nine points.”

He said he also solicited a proposal from the Martinelli Group to

Allen AME Church, Page A5

City Council will return to live meetings

Has been gathering virtually since start of COVID pandemic

By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY — City Council has been meeting on a virtual basis through much of the COVID-19 pandemic but will resume meeting in person at City Hall starting March 16.

On March 2, Mayor Zack Mullock said some council members have expressed a preference for meeting in person.

“I understand certain concerns that folks have in regard to the amount of people that would be allowed into City Hall and I think it should be restricted,” he said.

Mullock said members of the public could phone in their comments as they had when the meetings were convened using Zoom. A very limited number of the public would be able to attend the council meeting in person, he said.

“I think we would en-

courage folks to continue to call in from home for the safety of everyone there,” he said.

Councilwoman Lorraine Baldwin said she is in favor of council meeting in City Hall, noting some technology issues made it difficult for members of the public to phone in their comments during a previous meeting. She said she was concerned about the number of persons allowed to attend in person.

Councilman Chris Bezaire said council could limit the number of those in attendance further than the state-mandated maximum capacity regulation allows. He suggested “one door in and one door out” to control the number of those in attendance.

City Clerk Erin Burke said she would have to publish instructions to the

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City school returning to a full-day schedule

By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY — The city's elementary school will return to a full school day beginning March 15. It has been operating on a half-day schedule due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Principal Zack Palombo stated in a letter to parents that the state Department of Education and county Superintendent Judith DeStafano, in consultation with school physician Dr. Diana Deignan, approved the final phase of a reopening plan.

“This additional time will allow for more coverage of curriculum, additional instruction time and more resources for our students,” Palombo stated. “We are planning to address standardized testing when guidance is provided.”

Students will arrive at 8:30 a.m. and have 15 minutes for a school-provided breakfast. Instruction time will run from 8:45 to 2:50 p.m., when all students will be dismissed. On early-

See Full day, Page A2



John Alvarez/Special to the STAR AND WAVE

Brian Barker makes trays of lasagna in the kitchen of the Willow Creek Winery tasting room. The New Jersey Farmers Cooperative, of which Willow Creek Winery owner Barbara Wilde is president, received a grant from the New Jersey Economic Development Authority aimed at helping struggling restaurants that committ to using the money to provide for needy populations.

Grant helps Willow Creek Winery provide food for needy in region

By JOHN ALVAREZ
Special to the Star and Wave

WEST CAPE MAY — The tasting room kitchen of a local winery has become a supplier of meals to the needy in southern New Jersey as a byproduct of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Willow Creek Winery's tasting room was completely shut down for months in spring 2020, and its owner immediately volunteered its kitchen to do meal prep.

The New Jersey Economic Development Authority (NJEDA) is an organization that works as an independent government entity dedicated to broadening and expanding New Jersey's economic

base. The NJEDA does this by reaching out to nonprofit organizations with grants to help the organizations develop apprenticeships, reach out programs or whatever is needed in the community.

Last December, the NJEDA reached out to several organizations to inquire if they were interested in applying for grants through its Sustain and Serve NJ Program. The program was established to allocate funding to organizations to make meals by working with New Jersey-based restaurants that were negatively affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. From the restaurants, the nonprofits would take the meals and supply them to food banks, outreach programs and

other organizations that aid people who may need assistance in acquiring a good meal for themselves or their family.

One such nonprofit is The New Jersey Farmers Cooperative (NJFC) which will be working over the next few weeks with outreach organizations such as the Community FoodBank of New Jersey and The Branches Center of Rio Grande to help distribute 150,000 meals to residents in the area who are in need.

“Last week was our first week and there was such a learning curve,” said Barbara Wilde, president of the NJFC and owner of Willow Creek Winery in

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Lower budget calls for 2-cent rate increase

By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave

VILLAS — Lower Township Council introduced its 2021 proposed budget featuring a 2-cent increase in the local purpose tax rate.

In his budget message March 1, Township Manager Mike Laffey said the tax levy is \$22.1 million compared to

last year's \$21.3 million, an increase of \$855,770.

The amount of surplus supporting this year's budget decreased from 2020 by \$186,359, or 4.45 percent.

Laffey said the township follows a policy of utilizing only as much surplus as can be replenished during the budget year.

“This year, fund balance is

being used to pay down \$1.5 million in unfunded debt, which lowers our outstanding unfunded liability from \$7,280,000 to \$5,780,000,” he said. “We fully anticipate replenishing the \$2.5 million balance to fund balance at year-end 2021.”

Anticipated revenues for recreation and court fees have been decreased from last year,

due to a reduction in collections as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. State aid was reduced based on notification that the increase anticipated in 2020 would not be realized and state aid would revert to 2019 levels.

Lower Township's 2020 tax collection rate was 98.99

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