

Point commission pledges transparency, urges volunteerism

By RACHEL SHUBIN

Special to the Star and Wave

CAPE MAY POINT — Sitting at the continent's edge, Cape May Point may be vulnerable to the ocean and Mother Nature, but the new Borough Commission has a firm footing for the future term rooted in experience.

"We're vulnerable; we get the good and the bad, and we have to be very conscious of that," Mayor Anita VanHeeswyk said. "We get all the beauty that [this location] gives us, too."

VanHeeswyk, Suzanne Yunghans and Elise Geiger were sworn in during the Jan. 15 reorganization meeting. Geiger will serve as deputy mayor.

"I think everything is great for Cape May Point," VanHeeswyk said. "We're on strong footing financially, the beaches are in great shape and there is something special about [the town]."

Despite the commission having its first all-female officials for the first time, the group believes that gender doesn't matter.

"To me, it's competent people and four competent people who just happen to be women ran for office," Geiger said. "My hope is that even the next time around, we're such inspirations that people, men or women, step up and want to give time and effort and give back to the community."

Yunghans agreed with Geiger that it is up to whoever is willing to put in time and be present.

"At the same time, I'm grateful to serve with these two women and grateful that we have such a great time."

VanHeeswyk told the Star and Wave that this was not the first time she had been asked about being a woman on the commission.

"In 2008, I was asked about being the first woman elected commissioner in Cape May Point," VanHeeswyk said. "I think women are equally as capable for doing jobs as men and I didn't want to be singled out for that."

Commissioners' backgrounds

VanHeeswyk has lived in the Point since the 1960s, and this year marks 17 years on the commission.

"There is nothing I can't handle; that's why I ran again," she said. "Things are not new to me and things may pop up within each category, but I've dealt with it before. The town looks beautiful."

Preserving the town for her grandchildren is essential to VanHeeswyk's service.

Geiger moved to the borough from northern New Jersey, where she had "a pretty successful career in pharmaceutical management on the executive level."



Rachel Shubin/Special to the STAR AND WAVE

Cape May Point Mayor Anita VanHeeswyk is flanked by Deputy Mayor Elise Geiger and Commissioner Suzanne Yunghans. They are the borough's first all-female Board of Commissioners.

As deputy mayor, she will oversee the safety and public affairs departments and serve as a class III member of the Planning Board.

Yunghans will oversee the Public Works Department and VanHeeswyk will continue to oversee the revenue and finance departments.

"My background was the executive director of a large non-profit in Pennsylvania for 30-plus years," Yunghans said. "That [position] gave me expertise I felt I could contribute [to the commission]."

While the women are newcomers to the commission, the borough is not new to them. Yunghans has lived in the Point full time since 2017 and Geiger has lived there for four years.

Geiger said giving back to the community made her want to run.

"I was running the Cape May Point Taxpayers' Association (CMPTA) and it was all about community and getting people to volunteer and work together," she said. "This step was the next logical one to take, to up my game for the community."

Stepping into public service is not always easy.

Serving as an elected official can take time away from family obligations.

"There were people who encouraged me, and [it was] very kind of them," Yunghans said. "It was a [point] in my life where I felt like I could make the commitment, and at some [time] in your life you know you want to give back and this was the right moment for me."

VanHeeswyk said it is essential that Cape May Point is secure, and she wants to continue to serve while she has the ability.

"We are very lucky to be here; our tax rate is low, and I'm optimistic and really looking forward to working [with the commission]," she said. "We're so lucky to have the staff that we have here. We meet every deadline that we are supposed to meet."

Looking forward

Geiger and Yunghans hope this year will allow them to gain a deeper understanding of their respective areas of responsibility.

"This year, we have a contract with Cape May on the police, and I'm also responsible for the lifeguards

and the beach," Geiger said. "My year one goals are to understand all those areas of responsibility, and then, watch out, I'll come up with lots of other ideas."

Yunghans echoed Geiger, hoping to understand her departments and take an in-depth look at state requirements.

"We recognize the vulnerabilities of the climate and public works has an important role in protecting the community around that," she said.

One worry the commissioners will not have this year is beach replenishment.

"I think our beach restoration should be in the Public Works Department more, [but] I'm very happy to say [last year] we were due for beach replenishment, and we didn't need it," VanHeeswyk said. "We have more sand than the template shows we need."

She added that she would like to expand the understanding of what has been done for beach restoration for both Geiger and Yunghans.

"The Army Corps of Engineers and the Department

of Environmental Protection have done a great job keeping us replenished," VanHeeswyk said. "We're in a good position now, and I'd like a broader understanding of that outside my department."

VanHeeswyk said continuity is essential in a town of this size, and Geiger and Yunghans agreed.

"The more we all learn and can understand, the more we can make the right decisions," Geiger said.

Yunghans said former commissioner Catherine Busch provided the town continuity in her tenure.

"We do so much in-house. I know a lot of towns hire out for everything," VanHeeswyk said. "I think we're able to do a lot in our departments because we can, and we're knowledgeable and often take the time to learn how to do everything."

Coming from serving as president of the CMPTA, Geiger said she is big on community volunteers.

"One message I'd like to send out to the community is to please step up and get involved," Geiger said. "For example, [volunteer] for the planning board, and we have an environmental commission we need people. We need people to be involved."

Running a transparent commission requires the community to be involved and ask questions.

"I think we're all committed to be running a very transparent government here, because it's for the good of everyone," Geiger said.

When Geiger moved to the Point, she said there was an opportunity to join the environmental commission, and once you start with one position, it keeps going.

"There are really smart, wonderful people here who have something to contribute," Yunghans said. "If they would step up, we would welcome that. I think the other part of it is there might be some towns where it feels forbidding to be engaged, but I hope that we project a welcome attitude that we want people."

TIDES: Jan. 29-Feb. 5, 2025

DATE	HIGH		LOW	
	A.M.	P.M.	A.M.	P.M.
29	7:39	8:03	12:57	1:52
30	8:21	8:45	1:43	2:31
31	9:04	9:29	2:29	3:12
1	9:48	10:16	3:17	3:54
2	10:36	11:07	4:10	4:40
3	11:28		5:09	5:30
4	12:01	12:23	6:12	6:22
5	1:00	1:25	7:18	7:19

MOON PHASES

New moon: Jan. 29 - last quarter: Feb. 2

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Many projects under way in Lower Township

By RACHEL SHUBIN

Special to the Star and Wave

VILLAS — Engineer Will Hanson updated Township Council on capital projects during a meeting Jan. 22, noting many improvements are in the works.

Hanson said five of the 15 proposed extensions of bay-side outfalls are being readied for public bid, noting the Department of Environmental Protection granted approval and the township is still waiting to hear from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

"It should be landing [in February]. We've been getting the final designs ready," he said.

Hanson also discussed reconstruction of Ridgewood Avenue.

"The township has already received \$200,000 in funding, and an opportunity became available last year for local aid, a separate grant program," Hanson said. "The township applied for a grant to fund this project as well; however, we still have not heard [back], so that's held up that project."

Hanson said the project is primarily designed, allowing it to go out to public bid once news about the grants is received.

He also provided updates on the 2023 stormwater GIS master services, which include updating the master draining plan to include all stormwater infrastructure and improvements to date.

"We're working with (Public Works Department Superintendent) Gary Douglass from public works on this and it has been coming along smoothly," Hanson said. "This project is due at the start of next year, so that's going to be an ongoing project we're chipping away at."

For the David Douglass Senior Memorial Park renovations, Hanson said the scope of the project includes reconstructing and expanding the parking lot and relocating and redesigning the memorial. A new bathroom building, a decorative footpath along Cape May Canal and an observation deck will also be built.

"We've been pursuing a Cape May County Open Space Board grant for this project and had the opportunity to present the final concept plan yesterday, which went well," Hanson said. "We got the recommendation for somewhere along the line of a \$2.1 million grant. We haven't received anything in writing, but that's good news

that the county open space board endorsed the project."

Hanson added they are seeking an ADA improvement grant for this project and have prepared a compliance report.

"The grant application has been submitted," Hanson said. "Once we get through this grant phase, we'll move on to permitting and design."

Proposed work for the Lower Township Public Works building includes a new administration building with associated utilities and a new site layout, which would eliminate the southern entrance to the site to improve safety.

"This project is well under way, and our office's most recent work is testing pits for foundation and septic designs," Hanson said. "We're now under way designing those and are working for the final design to get this out to bid."

Another project is the storm sewer roadway improvement project, which aims to alleviate flooding along Holmes, Hughes and Scott avenues.

"The proposed work includes resurfacing the roadway and installing concrete curbs and sidewalks in various areas," Hanson said. "The project area has been

surveyed and base-mapped, but we've been holding off on design as the LTMUA has been investigating if they want to do some work — they plan to replace the water main."

Hanson said he is working with Douglass to design the roadway and move the project along with the water main replacement.

"We're going to be doing all that work together, which is good news for the township," he added.

Hanson also updated the commission on the proposed municipal pool building work, which includes an application for a DCA Small Cities grant. The township was awarded \$400,000 for this project, which includes replacing the building.

Another project involves milling and paving Beach Avenue from Spruce to Maryland avenues. Hanson said a grant of \$158,190 was awarded for this project, which will soon be put out to bid.

A final project includes resurfacing Cardinal Avenue, milling, and paving from Beach Avenue to Main Street.

"The survey is scheduled to be completed next month, and the design will commence soon," Hanson said.

Playground

Continued from Page A1

play areas and ramps and transfer points," he said.

Hanson presented a visual concept design, noting the playground's odd shape.

"The reason why we did that is there are wetlands behind the park," Hanson said. "We had grant money we had to use to get to phase I, and in the process we had to get four different permits to build phase II."

The phase II proposal includes accessible tables allowing visitors to roll wheelchairs up to the endpoints. Hanson noted there are similar tables at Diamond Beach.

"There will be a new seating area, and in terms of the play areas, we're going to have three dedicated zones that we segregate through walking pathways," Hanson said. "We're going to have a sensory play area with other sensory play equipment."

Another requirement of Jake's Law playgrounds is

a designated quiet place for play.

"We'll designate [that area] through signage," Hanson said. "We're going to have inclusive swings on the swing set and a team player play area to target that 2- to 5-year-old demographic."

The concepts also include ADA-compliant bathrooms.

The Lower Township Municipal Utilities Authority (LTMUA) entrance will be renovated for safety as part of the project.

"The [LTMUA] has given us \$150,000 for this work, and the excess is going to places to park," Hanson said. "As part of the LTMUA refurbishment, we're going to be paving up to their gateway and putting in ADA-accessible concrete ramps."

Hanson added that it would add access to the site, which is currently not ADA-compliant. Six additional parking spots and accessible parking spaces are planned.

"I think this is a great

opportunity for the council and everything is going to be conformed to Jake's Law," Hanson said. "This [phase] is still a concept, so as Colleen said, we're still receiving feedback from the public and is open to change."

Councilman Tom Conrad said the park is long overdue and needed in the township.

"I've had people asking about swings for six or seven years," he said. "People are going to enjoy it — not just little kids but older ones — and I'm glad to see it's finally coming about."

In other news, council passed authorized the sale of property at 9600 Seaview Ave. through an open public auction at 9 a.m. Feb. 7 at Township Hall.

"The minimum bid will be set at \$1 million, and all members of the public are invited to participate in this auction if you're interested in purchasing this property," Deputy Mayor Kevin Coombs said.