

Board to study tree removal for lanternfly eradication

By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY — The city will undertake a campaign of removing tree-of-heaven, a favorite host of spotted lanternflies, to quell the population of the invasive and destructive insects.

The city has \$20,000 in grant funds from the state Department of Agriculture to control the insects.

A subcommittee of the city's Shade Tree Commission will oversee the issue. At an Oct. 8 meeting of the Shade Tree Commission,

City Manager Paul Dietrich suggested the commission take the lead on controlling spotted lanternflies.

"My suggestion was that we look at removing tree-of-heaven within the city limits and we'll use the grant money to pay for that," he said.

Commission member Barbara Preminger suggested an advertisement with a photo in the newspaper to help residents identify tree-of-heaven. Dietrich said the tree-of-heaven attracts spotted lanternflies along with fruit trees

and grapevines.

"If you go around town and find a tree-of-heaven, I guarantee you that's where most of the spotted lanternflies in town are hanging out," he said.

Shade Tree Commission Chairman Jay Schatz compared tree-of-heaven to sumac trees. He said if you crush tree-of-heaven leaves, they smell like rancid peanut butter.

Councilman Shaine Meier, City Council's liaison to the Shade Tree Commission, said he concurred with Dietrich to create a

subcommittee to deal with tree-of-heaven removal.

Dietrich said tree-of-heaven must be removed by a specific process that includes digging up the root system, otherwise the tree will send up new shoots.

Schatz said the commission would not charge a permit fee to a property owner who wanted to remove tree-of-heaven. Removal by a property owner must be coordinated through the Shade Tree Commission to receive reimbursement from the city

for the expense, Dietrich said.

During an Oct. 15 City Council meeting, resident Ros Johnson said her neighbor received an estimate of \$6,800 to remove several trees.

Mayor Zack Mullock compared the tree-of-heaven to a "very big weed."

The spotted lanternfly is native to Asia but arrived in the U.S. in Berks County, Pa., on a shipment in 2014. The species has been advancing ever since. Due to the insect's excellent

hitchhiking ability, there are now 14 states that have confirmed populations.

According to the state Department of Agriculture, as it feeds, spotted lanternfly excretes honeydew (a sugary substance) that can attract bees, wasps and other insects.

The honeydew also builds up and promotes the growth of sooty mold (fungi), which can cover the plant, forest understories, patio furniture, cars and anything else found below spotted lanternfly feeding locations.

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Beach tags

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voting no.

"In light of Sandy Allison's comments and the lack of other information, I'll vote no at this time," Busch said.

In other borough news, Busch reported the Cape May Point Taxpayers Association had a successful Dunes and More Day, with 80 shrubs, trees and grasses planted along Whilldin Avenue.

"Public Works has already watered it twice this week, so they don't die," she said. "We planted a lot of beach grass on the beach side at the [Cape May Point] Sci-

ence Center."

Busch attended the final steering committee meeting in Cape May on Oct. 8. Representatives from Cape May, West Cape May, Cape May Point and Lower Township are preparing a safety action plan to prevent fatalities and serious injuries on Cape Island's roads.

"[At] one of our upcoming meetings, there will be a presentation for us," Busch said. "Each jurisdiction is being asked to adopt a resolution to endorse this plan, as it is the first step in securing funding to do things to make the road safer for everyone."

Residents wanting further information can contact Dale Foster at dfsoter@

gpinet.com, David Kuhn at dkuhn@gpinet.com or call (908) 236-9001.

Deputy Mayor Anita van Heeswyk said she is planning on meeting with the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP), the Army Corps of Engineers and a contractor regarding periodic beach replenishment.

"The word I have now is that Cape May Point doesn't need any sand," van Heeswyk said. "Hopefully, we will see the new [Stockton University] survey that the contractor has done. The prior survey from last year that was used to send out for the bid specs showed we didn't need any."

Van Heeswyk walked the beach with the NJDEP representative who handled Cape May Point and said the borough looked good.

"I'm trying to wrangle some sand for another area of our beaches outside of our project area and hopefully they might give us some," van Heeswyk said.

The annual report of the municipal beaches from this year to 2014 is available on the borough's website under floodplain management, capemaypoint.org.

The Coastal Research Center at Stockton University compiles the reports.

Van Heeswyk said she would report on the findings at the next meeting.

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Health plan

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employees have not had to date.

Dietrich thanked city

employees for reviewing the plans. The city was able to obtain good rates because the employees take care of their health

needs, he said.

McDade said each city employee received an individual benefits letter.

Mullock said the Ameri-Health plan had less copays. Including dental and vision coverage was attractive for recruiting and retaining employees, he said.

During public comment, Dennis Crowley, chairman of the city's Municipal Taxation and Revenue Advisory Committee (MTRAC), said call the change a smart move.

"It's the kind of process that MTRAC was designed to encourage," he said.

Crowley said Sea Isle City recently dropped the state health benefits program.

Dietrich said the city received quotes from multiple insurance carriers.

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