

City to extend eased tent restrictions into 2021

By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY — City Council introduced an ordinance to remove restrictions that limit commercial properties to three tent permits per year for 72 hours each.

The ordinance states that during the COVID health emergency, the use of temporary tents by Class 4A commercial property owners would not be limited to a period of 72 hours or the annual three-license limit but on the condition that the temporary tent is used in connection with a temporary site plan and not used to increase the number of previously approved tables and seats.

At a Jan. 19 virtual council meeting, city solicitor Chris Gillin-Schwartz said the process for approval has been on the books since last year and has been working with some success.

Deputy Mayor Stacy Sheehan said the city manager must approve a temporary site plan and any tent on city property would need the approval of council. She said the tent permit carries a \$100 fee.

Councilman Chris Bezaire said venues were limited to 25 percent capacity indoors. He said events that use tents, such as weddings, are planned six months in advance.

"That's the only intention behind it, it's not to try

and add occupancy, not to try and allow businesses to circumvent the rules in place..." Bezaire said.

The exception for tents will disappear when the COVID emergency ends, he said.

Mayor Zack Mullock complimented Bezaire and Sheehan for their work on the ordinance.

"I think we have a good product in the end," Mullock said.

At a Jan. 5 virtual council meeting, Bezaire said business owners told him they had a number of weddings scheduled for 2020 that have been moved to 2021. He said the three tent permit annual limit prohibited businesses from confirming

dates to wedding customers.

At that time, Sheehan said some commercial properties in Cape May were in residential neighborhoods.

"I guess my concern is disrupting the neighborhood too much with having tents, maybe on a weekly basis..." she said.

Bezaire said there would be some effect on residential properties but at the same time individuals may have bought residential properties knowing they were located near a commercial property.

"I agree under normal circumstances you don't want to ruin the quiet enjoyment of a property owner, but I would hope that most property owners would un-

derstand that we're trying to continue to bring in revenue to the city that would help effect property taxes and our budget..." he said.

Sheehan said taxpayers had a right to some enjoyment of their properties.

"If they're having a party every weekend next door to them, I don't think that's fair to the taxpayer that's not making an income off the property next door to them," she said.

Bezaire said a "happy medium" existed and he was not suggesting offering unlimited tent permits or one permit per week.

Sheehan said an issue occurred on a Lafayette Street property holding more ceremonies than permitted by

the city. She asked about a rental property using a tent for an event.

Mullock said the city should differentiate between commercial and rental properties.

"I don't think any of us thought we would have to discuss this again for next season," he said. "Unfortunately, obviously it's looking like at least the beginning of the season is going to have these exceptions again."

He said businesses were looking for clarity as they prepare for the season.

Bezaire said the larger hotels in Cape May typically held weddings in their ballrooms or meeting rooms but that has been prevented by COVID restrictions.

Conrad

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response with red lights and sirens is not always needed and, in most cases, should not be done for the safety of the public and the responders.

"It also states in cases where fast response is needed, such as cardiac arrest, police are arriving on scene with an AED or there may be one on location," Conrad said.

The state Department of Health Office of Emergency Management Medical Services and insurance companies adopted the findings of the Fire Administration study and have adopted guidelines for slower, safer responses, he said, adding that the public will see ambulances with paramedics transporting patients without red lights and sirens.

"No one really keeps track of response times anymore unless for a specific time track or other reasons," Conrad said.

He said Lower Township Rescue Squad software no longer allows response time to be kept. Conrad said the state Office of Emergency Medical Services logs response times that it averages with county response times but does not allow Lower Township Rescue Squad to run a report of response times.

"The only way for Lower Township to obtain an average response time is for someone to go through every report by following HIPAA (Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act) and all privacy regulations and guidelines and then do the math," he said.

"The response time to Diamond Beach is not 13 minutes, that was the response time for one call," Conrad continued.

He said a "gentleman in an effort to be helpful" supplied dispatch records with non-emergency calls taken out, with the average response time to Diamond Beach at 10 minutes, 42 seconds. Conrad said that average response time is actually faster than the 10 minute, 54 second average time for all of Cape May County emergency responses, according to the state.

The state Department of Health Emergency Medical Services provides average response time for each county on its website, he said. Cape May County is tied for second among all counties'

response times statewide, according to Conrad.

"There are a few counties with over 20-minute average response times, he said.

In 2018, Lower Township Rescue responded to 4,632 calls, transporting 3,513 persons, according to Conrad. In 2019, the squad responded to 4,433, transporting 2,965 persons. In 2020, the squad responded to 4,197 calls, transporting 2,350 persons.

During each of those years, Diamond Beach represented 2 percent of all calls and 1 percent of all emergency transports.

"No one is going through 4,200 reports just to get an average response time," he said.

Conrad said one month was chosen to sample, November 2020. Lower Township Rescue Squad responded in Lower Township to 311 ambulance requests with 228 persons transported. The average response time was 6 minutes, 2 seconds for the entire township, he said.

Villas had 93 emergencies with an average response time of 5 minutes, 54 seconds representing about 41 percent of all calls. Conrad said North Cape May had 106 emergencies with an average response time of 6 minutes,

14 seconds, representing 46 percent of calls handled by the rescue squad that month.

Erma had 29 emergencies with an average response time of 5 minutes, 19 seconds, representing 12 percent of calls, Conrad said. Diamond Beach had 4 emergency calls with an average response time of 10 minutes, representing 1.75 percent of calls.

He said most of the emergency calls come from North Cape May and Villas.

"Neither I nor the Lower Township Rescue Squad has an issue with a possible agreement with Wildwood Crest concerning EMS for Diamond Beach, if it can be made," Conrad said. "Understand one of the reasons Lower Township Rescue moved their operations to the airport was to reduce the response time to the Diamond Beach section and south of the canal."

During public comment, Sanford asked whether the township had made any progress with reaching an agreement with Wildwood Crest. Mayor Frank Sippel asked Sanford to call Township Manager Mike Laffey.

Sippel said public meetings are not intended to be a question-and-answer session.



John Cooke/Special to the STAR AND WAVE

Promotions at the firehouse

Cape May Fire Department Lt. Michael Eck, above being sworn in by Mayor Zack Mullock, was promoted to deputy chief and firefighter William Szemcsak was promoted to lieutenant during a ceremony Jan. 21 at City Hall.

| TIDES: Jan. 27-Feb. 3, 2021 | | | | |
|-----------------------------|-------|-------|-------|------|
| DATE | HIGH | | LOW | |
| | A.M. | P.M. | A.M. | P.M. |
| 27 | 6:50 | 7:16 | 12:04 | 1:08 |
| 28 | 7:31 | 7:57 | 12:48 | 1:48 |
| 29 | 8:11 | 8:38 | 1:32 | 2:27 |
| 30 | 8:51 | 9:21 | 2:17 | 3:08 |
| 31 | 9:33 | 10:05 | 3:03 | 3:49 |
| 1 | 10:17 | 10:53 | 3:53 | 4:33 |
| 2 | 11:05 | 11:46 | 4:46 | 5:19 |
| 3 | 11:58 | | 5:45 | 6:11 |

MOON PHASES
Full moon, Jan. 28 • last quarter, Feb. 4

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