

Design shows Middle Thorofare Bridge moving south

By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave

VILLAS — The current favored design would build new bridges from the Garden State Parkway to Diamond Beach with an alignment south of the current bridges.

Lower Township Manager Jim Ridgway said a meeting was held March 14 with business stakeholders for a new bridge between the parkway and Diamond

Beach. Engineers presented a preferred plan for a bridge that would travel south of Snow's Canneries. "You're going to go down where you would normally go to the bridge, that will end up being a cul-de-sac, at Lund's (Fisheries) and that area at the base of the bridge," he said.

The new bridge would go south toward the Bree-Zee-Lee Marina and fly up and over Snow's Canneries, Ridgway said. The bridge

would be 80 feet high and 80 feet wide.

"This is an incredible structure," Ridgway said. In August, the design was presented as Alternative 8 by the South Jersey Transportation Planning Organization (SJTPO), in conjunction with Cape May County and the state Department of Transportation. The design would realign the Mill Creek and Upper Thorofare bridges to the north and realign the

Middle Thorofare Bridge to the south. The Middle Thorofare Bridge would fly over the Bumble Bee Tuna processing facility.

Eight possible design concepts were created for replacement of the Mill Creek, Middle Thorofare and Upper Thorofare bridges and elevating Ocean Drive above flood level from Route 109 at the base of the parkway to Diamond Beach.

The three bridges were

built in 1939 and are beyond their serviceable life at over 75 years old, according to SJTPO. Due to the overall condition of the Middle Thorofare Bridge, heavy truck traffic is prohibited with a sign indicating no loads over 15 tons.

At that time, project manager Joseph Romano, of Michael Baker International, said the project encompasses 2.7 miles. In addition to the three bridges, reconstruction of a culvert

is included that serves sensitive ecological and environmental resources, he said.

Ocean Drive would be raised about 4 feet, which would require a regrading of driveways along the road.

The Middle Thorofare Bridge will continue to be a toll bridge. Cost estimates of the total project range from \$200 million to \$250 million, depending on which alternative is chosen.

Grant sought for natural areas

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city to receive \$1.8 million from the state.

Council also approved a \$20,250 contract with Mott MacDonald for environmental investigation services for the park. Thornton said the services were needed as part of a separate loan application to Green Acres, which requires a preliminary assessment be conducted of Block 54, which makes up a large portion of Phases II and Phase IV of the park.

Thornton said a preliminary assessment was conducted and several areas of concern were found.

"Nothing major but the things the DEP requires you to follow up on," he said.

The contract approved by council was to hire a licensed site-remediation professional to follow up on earlier findings and use a subcontractor to conduct sampling. He said his firm, Mott MacDonald, would prepare a document that would be a step toward

resolution of the problem.

The property is in the vicinity of a former coal-gasification plant that left widespread contamination underground. Thornton said the parcel of land in question was not part of a remediation project undertaken by Jersey Central Power & Light. He said the site includes the school.

He said an empty metal drum was found in the woods. He said there were no odors associated with the empty drum.

"When you see those things, the DEP requires you to do something about it," Thornton said.

The area also has fill dirt of unknown origin dating back many years, he said. An elevated berm into the marsh appears to consist of "historic fill," he said.

Thornton said he believed the investigation could run parallel to the design and permitting process.

"We hope we don't find more to delay it," he said.

Cape May adds to budget

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sons would be hired to pick up recyclables.

Young said recycling salary and wages in the budget would increase from \$50,000 to \$119,000. The recycling "other expenses" line item would be reduced by \$170,000. Young said \$400,000 from recycling would be moved to the capital section of the budget for the purchase of the recycling trucks.

He said to handle revenue offsets for the changes in the proposed budget, he increased anticipated surplus by \$80,000, increased anticipated construction revenue fees by \$40,000, increased anticipated parking meter revenue by \$20,000 and the balance was offset by raising the tax rate.

Auditor Leon Costello said council could change any line item except debt service at the April 16 budget public hearing. He said the budget is far below any state caps and the city could have spent an additional \$950,000.

Councilman Shaine Meier said several council members felt strongly additional firefighters needed to be hired.

"When we did that the budget went up to a 1.36-cent increase and I'm thankful to Neil for bringing it back down to 1.25 cents," he said.

Sheehan said council

did not have a work session to discuss the budget. City solicitor Frank Corrado suggested council could have discussion of the budget at its April 2 meeting.

Deputy Mayor Patricia Hendricks said she had a number of questions about the budget answered by calling or stopping by to see Young.

Councilman Zack MULLOCK said he was pleased the hiring of additional firefighters was added to the budget and he looked forward to discussing the budget as a group.

Council approved a resolution that will allow the city to bid for trolley or jitney transportation services for visitors. Corrado said the state has an alternative to the traditional bidding process called competitive contracting.

"The advantage to competitive contracting is that it allows the city to engage in a process that requires requests for proposals that are then scored and ranked, similar to what is done with a professional services contract," he said. "The city does not have to necessarily award the contract to the lowest bidder."

Corrado said the contract could be awarded based on a multitude of factors such as experience or whether the vehicles are Americans with Disabilities Act-compliant.

He said the other advantage of competitive contracting is the contract can be awarded for five years rather than the 24 months that would be the maximum under Local Public Contracts Law.

Sheehan asked if a new trolley service would be subsidized by motel owners as it had been in the past.

"It wouldn't need to be," Young said. "This would take care of that service."

Corrado said the city did not have control of the trolley's route in the past. He said the city had an informal yearly contract with the trolley company.

With a new contract, the city can specify the route, months of service, the frequency of service and how many units are on the street at any given time.

During public comment, John Van de Vaarst said

the city's population is declining and most of the full-time residents are "older and on a fixed income of some type." He said he thought it was important that fire department staffing was being increased.

"But I think each council member need to get out their red pen and really look at this budget carefully," he said.

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Katy O'hara/PROVIDED

Oprah visits Uncle Bill's

Oprah Winfrey visited Cape May last week and was seen dining at Uncle Bill's Pancake House and the Ebbitt Room at the Virginia Hotel. She posed for a photo with Tommy O'hara, left, Nancy O'hara and T.J. O'hara.

Parking meters on April 1

CAPE MAY — Cape May has lengthened the time when drivers must pay to park their vehicles at meters/

Metered parking, from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m., is set to begin April 1 and extend through Dec. 31 in the following areas in the city:

— Carpenter's Lane: Both sides from Perry Street to

Ocean Street

— Lyle Lane: Both sides from Decatur Street to Perry Street

— Mansion Street: from Jackson Street to Perry Street

The cost is 25 cents for 15 minutes or \$1 per hour and there is a 3-hour time limit for a vehicle to remain in the same location.

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