

Lower resident, mayor ask for preview of beach path plans

By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave

VILLAS — Should the public be allowed to preview plans for changes to 33 beach-access paths before the engineering firm of Hatch Mott MacDonald presents the concepts at Lower Township Council's Feb. 1 meeting?

A Beach Drive resident suggested such at a Jan. 4 council meeting. She asked if the plans would be available for

residents to review prior to the meeting.

Councilman Tom Conrad said he thought the plans would be available the night of the meeting but having them ready before the meeting was asking a lot of the engineering firm.

Mayor Michael Beck said it would be a good idea to have the plans online so residents could study them and have their questions answered at the Feb. 1 meeting. The woman asked if residents would have a

public comment period beyond the one council meeting.

"People get a chance to look at it and it eliminates confusion," Beck said of having the plans available ahead of time.

He said residents then would not ask questions about information readily available in the plans.

"Now you want them to give the presentation before they give the presentation?" Conrad asked.

He said he did not intend

council to vote for the beach path project at the Feb. 1 meeting; it was to spur discussion.

Township Manager Jim Ridgway said if discussion was healthy at the Feb. 1 meeting, at that point, council could decide the direction in which it wants to move.

"What's the harm of having it on the website the Friday before the meeting?" Beck asked.

Ridgway said he wasn't sure Hatch Mott MacDonald would have the presentation ready be-

fore the Feb. 1 council meeting.

"This is not to vote for it, this is a presentation," Conrad said.

Ridgway said the project was large because so many of the beach-access paths were different. Councilman Erik Simonson noted the meeting would be televised on YouTube and Comcast's Channel 9 for two weeks before the next council meeting.

In December, Township Council approved a contract with Hatch Mott MacDonald

to design improvements to 30 beach paths from David Douglass Park in North Cape May to Ocean Avenue in Villas and apply for a Coastal Permit for Maintenance from the state Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) that lapsed.

The project would place a gravel roadbed on the beach paths with split-rail fencing on either side. Hatch Mott MacDonald's proposal called for beach paths with a width of 8 feet.

Hospital bill

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The legislation would have nonprofit hospitals that have for-profit operations make community service contributions to the host municipalities. The payment formula would be \$2.50 per day for each acute care hospital bed and \$250 per day for each facility providing Satellite Emergency Care.

There are 72 acute care hospitals in New Jersey. Acute care hospitals provide short-term treatment for severe injuries or illness, recovery from surgery or treatment for urgent medical conditions.

The municipality payment would be dedicated to property tax relief and for public safety, such as police, fire and emergency service. Five percent of the payments would be sent to the county where the hospital is located.

The legislation, approved by the Senate Budget and Appropriations Committee, would also establish the Nonprofit Hospital Community Service Contribution Study Commission to evaluate the system and make recommendations for needed improvements.

Cape Regional Medical Center in Middle Township has 242 beds and would pay \$220,825 annually under the legislation. Shore Medical Center in Somers Point has 290 beds and would pay \$264,625 annually.

Cape Regional Medical Center's Chief Financial Officer Mark Gill said the bill presents a "fair compromise."

"I think that the hospital provides a lot of community benefit," Gill said. "We provide over \$10 million of community benefit on an annual basis, yet at the same time we recognize the municipality that hosts us — Middle Township — has fire, police, rescue efforts that are probably over and above because of the hospital being here. We feel it's a fair compromise that we keep our not-for-profit status because of all of the charitable work that we're doing, yet at the same time this regulation would give some money back to the township to recognize that hosting us as an institution and some of the dollars they may expend because we're here."

Cape Regional Health System, the Cape May Court House-based parent company and owner of Cape Regional Medical Center, has always paid taxes on its properties in Lower and Middle townships, Gill said.

"Most of that is owned by the health system, which is the parent company, or one of our other entities," Gill said. "Anything else that the health system owns, we pay regular property taxes on."

Gill said the Morristown ruling should not apply to Cape Regional Medical Center because the Morristown hospital's circumstances are different. According to Gill, Morristown hospital had independent physicians running their offices on the hospital campus.

According to published reports about the Morristown case, 24 percent of the campus was dedicated to physicians working as "for-profit entities" at Morristown Medical Center.

"That's absolutely not the case here. We're running a not-for-profit medical center on this campus only. There's no private physician offices here," Gill said. "That's a major difference. I think a lot of hospitals throughout the state would say the same type of thing."

Gill said the legislation presents a "fair compromise" for municipalities that host hospitals. Cape Regional Medical Center would pay its contribution from operating expenses.

"They'll just treat it like any other cost of doing business," Gill said. "I don't think it will have a significant impact on our overall operations. We wouldn't have to change it much to be able to pay that. We could absorb that and there would be no change to our operations in any way, shape or form."

Gill said the hospital provides benefits to the community annually.

"We recognize the municipality that hosts us that has fire, police and rescue efforts. We feel that it's a fair compromise," Gill said. "This regula-

tion gives some money back to the township."

Shore Medical Center Chief Financial Officer David Hughes said the hospital pays real estate taxes on its for-profit entities. The hospital also makes an in-lieu-of-taxes payment on the medical center, its exempt property.

Hughes said Shore Medical Center contributes more in taxes than the minimum amount the legislation would require.

The hospital regularly donates money to local schools and supports events such as Bayfest and community concerts, Hughes said.

"We're a big contributor in the community. We do the right thing, so we didn't need the legislation to do it. This was designed for a person that didn't do the right thing, and some organizations don't contribute the way we contribute," Hughes said, noting the hospital supports the legislation. "I think everybody should be for it. It's good for the town, it's good for the state and it's good for the hospitals."

According to Hughes, between donations, taxes and lieu of payments, Shore Medical Center gives a total of \$838,000 to Atlantic County.

Hughes said Shore Medical Center pays \$234,000 in taxes from the hospital directly and \$70,000 from doctor's offices

as part of Shore Physicians Group. In addition, they pay \$100,000 in lieu of taxes to Somers Point, \$204,000 to supplement Somers Point's ambulance service, plus \$200,000 in community donations.

"If you're doing the right thing, you should be for this bill," Hughes said.

The New Jersey Hospital Association (NJHA), a Princeton-based nonprofit organization delivering support to the state's hospitals and health care providers, also supports the legislation.

"The proposal provides an equitable statewide solution. Without it, the tax court ruling is likely to lead to a flurry of lawsuits involving lengthy and expensive litigation throughout the state," according to NJHA President and CEO Elizabeth Ryan. "This bill represents an extension of our hospitals' longstanding commitments to the communities they service, while providing certainty and predictability during one of the most dynamic periods of change ever experienced in our nation's health care sector."

Not-for-profit hospitals do not have shareholders and are led by a board of community volunteers, according to the NJHA. Money from the hospital's operations is reinvested back to the hospital to serve its health care mission.

Lower MUA ends outsourced billing

By BETTY WUND
Special to the Star and Wave

VILLAS — Ratepayers' sewer bills now are to be paid to the Lower Township Municipal Utilities Authority (MUA) offices at 2900 Bayshore Road in Villas. This change was made with the 2016 billing.

In the executive director's report at the Jan. 6 MUA commission meeting, Mike Chapman said the office staff has increased by one person and the MUA is advertising a second position. Contacted after the meeting, Chapman said the contract for billing services with Environmental Technical Services was not renewed.

"It was not a matter of cost. We are hiring staff (to handle collections and ratepayer calls) because we want direct control over customer service issues," he said.

Chapman's report included details of the progress of the Exit O project to lay a sleeve under the intersection of the Garden State Parkway and Route 109. The sleeve will allow for the future replacement of pipes for the Schellengers Landing sewer project. Bidding is still an option but the contract may be given to South State if the cost is cheaper than

the bidding price, he said.

Chapman stated that restaurants are often lax about their attention to grease traps. There has been little enforcement by the MUA. This will change in the future as it affects the condition of the pipes, he said.

Commission Chairman Brian O'Connor and Commissioner Pete Bitting reported on their inspection of a vacuum pump system in place in two small towns in Salem County. They said the efficiency and lower cost of installation impressed them. The pluses of the system are that the pipes are installed only three feet below the ground and maintenance does not require a special crew as does the traditional gravity fed system. Because the vacuum pumps are sealed ground water cannot seep into the system.

"I've been looking at sewer flow on all the islands, especially in Ocean City. In summer when sewer flow doubles, heavy rains cause water to flow into the manholes," O'Connor said.

Both O'Connor and Chapman offered positive recommendations for the use of a vacuum pump system in future MUA sewer projects.

The county airport and sur-

rounding subdivisions of some 800 houses use septic tanks, according to Chapman. Many of the systems are failing and would benefit from this new type of system that is more efficient and costs less to install, he said. The system could also be used in future sewer projects in Erma, Chapman said.

"Our goal is to expand the area (of sewer service) without affecting the rates," he said.

Commission Engineer Marc DeBlasio, of Remington Vernick and Walberg, said he expects bidding for the East Villas Water Project Phase 1 and the Wissahickon project to happen in February. Information on the East Villas Water Project Phase 1 is on line at ltmua.org. The web pages list the streets to be included and financial obligations and arrangements available for the homeowner. It also outlines the estimated cost to the homeowner for hooking up to the township water system.

Board Solicitor William Kaufman reported that he is streamlining the wording of a professional services contract along the lines of recommended forms. He also stated that a legal newspaper is not needed as publication of legal notices on the MUA web site satisfies legal requirements.

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Help maintain the quality of recyclables sold as secondary raw material. Place for recycling collection only the items listed under "Do Recycle."
Do Not Recycle
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WE DO NOT PICK UP BRANCHES. TAKE BRANCHES TO RECYCLE YARD.
Yard Open Mon.-Fri. 7:30am - 3:15 & Sat. 8am-noon- closed Wed.
We are closed Holidays - pick up will be the following day for each holiday.
Picking up trees Starting 12/26
Please Remember ...
All Cape May City properties are entitled to a once a week curbside pickup of recycling.
This includes: Bottles, Cans, Plastic and Glass Jars, Newspapers, Corrugated Cardboard, Office Paper, Junk Mail and Magazines
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• Recycling will NOT be picked up if it contains any type of contaminant
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