

Freeholder candidate profiles

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House of the week

Real Estate Resource



166th YEAR NO. 41 CAPE MAY, N.J. Serving America's National Historic Landmark City WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 7, 2020 \$1.00

Candidates share their vision for Cape May

Mayor Lear faces challenge from Mullock; Hendricks, Bezaire, DiSanto seek council seat

By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY — Candidates for City Council and mayor participated in a forum Sept. 28 from the ballroom of Congress Hall that was recorded and made available to the public in a YouTube video.

Incumbent Mayor Chuck Lear squared off against challenger Councilman Zack Mullock, while Deputy Mayor Patricia Hendricks faced Mark DiSanto and first-time candidate Chris

Bezaire.

The League of Women Voters moderated the event. The candidates did not wear masks on stage but were socially distanced from each other, as was the audience.

Asked about their vision for preserving Cape May's natural land and historic areas and how they would curtail commercial and multi-family construction in those sensitive locations, Mullock said Cape May's charm and National Historic Landmark status must be preserved but the

city must also see "progress and business."

Lear said over the past four years, City Council has addressed preserving open areas including inventorying its properties. He said areas of the Sewell Tract have been added to the city's recreation and open space inventory to protect it from development.

The candidates were asked if by building separate fire and police stations, they would become obsolete.

Lear said the current facilities

are inadequate and the advisory committee recommended building a single public safety building. He said for decades the city counted on volunteer firefighters but that Cape May's population of year-round residents has been decreasing, making them harder to find and retain.

Mullock concurred that both facilities need replacement, but the proposed public safety building is too large for the site, he said.

There is no parking plan for a new library branch in the

Franklin Street School, Mullock said, adding that a public safety building would become obsolete because there would be no room for expansion.

In Cape May, taxes are paid by standalone businesses and residents who rent out their homes, comprising 50 percent of the city's tax revenue. The mayoral candidates were asked how they would balance the concerns of a reduction in tourism versus placing the tax burden on year-

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Zoning Board OKs upgrade of substation

By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY — The city's Zoning Board unanimously approved upgrades to Atlantic City Electric's power substation at Elmira Street and Venice Avenue.

The upgrades include an 80-foot by 40-foot control building to house power equipment that will be constructed to resemble a residential dwelling.

During a special meeting held via Zoom on Sept. 29, attorney Nicholas Tavacchia, representing Atlantic City Electric, said electromagnetic fields (EMF) are regulated only by the state and are not in the purview of the Zoning Board. At an earlier hearing, neighborhood residents expressed concerns of EMF radiating from power lines leaving the substation.

The application was to upgrade the existing substation to improve the reliability of power delivery to Cape Island and increase capacity of the substation for future growth, Tavacchia said.

"Because this is a public utility use, it is deemed to be an inherently beneficial use," he said.

Under the law, an inherently beneficial use satisfies positive criteria necessary for a grant of a D2 variance, Tavacchia said. He said Atlantic City Electric believes the upgrades would be an improvement over the existing conditions.

In 2001, the Zoning Board granted Atlantic City Electric relief for expansion of the substation, which dates back to 1909, Tavacchia said, making it a pre-existing nonconforming use.

Atlantic City Electric Project Manager Rich Hall said more modern equipment would be added along with a second transformer as a backup for the primary transformer. Last year, the only transformer at the substation failed, causing an outage to 7,100 customers.

The new equipment will be placed at an elevation higher than the 100-year floodplain, Hall said, adding

that Atlantic City Electric worked with the city's Historic Preservation Commission to design a control building that will appear as a residential structure.

Engineer Kathryn Cornforth said a 140-foot-long faux wall that will resemble a residential building will be constructed along Venice Avenue. A 7-foot-tall chain-link high-security fence with 1-foot of barbed wire atop will run along the side yard and Bank Street, she said.

A decorative palisades security fence will run along Elmira Street, Cornforth said. New stone driveways will also be installed. Sidewalks will be installed along Elmira Street and Venice Avenue.

While the substation is being upgraded, a temporary mobile transformer will be set up across the street, Cornforth said.

Tavacchia acknowledged the neighborhood of the substation floods. Cornforth said the substation's current stormwater system drains into Venice Avenue, a depression along Elmira Street that flows into Elmira Street, a portion that drains to Bank Street and a portion that drains into Cape Island Creek.

"In the proposed scenario, the site has been re-graded to eliminate runoff to both Elmira Street and Venice Avenue," she said.

Cornforth said a swale will be created parallel to Venice Avenue that will completely capture the runoff of a 2-year storm event, which is 3 inches of rain in 24 hours.

The rest of the site from the back of the sidewalk proposed for Elmira Street would be re-graded to send runoff into a tributary of Cape Island Creek, she said.

Even though the project is slightly over an acre of disturbance, the design reduces or eliminates runoff to Elmira Street and Venice Avenue, increasing runoff to the Cape Island Creek tributary, according to Cornforth.

The substation is located

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Deborah McGuire/Special to the STAR AND WAVE

Quiet day, clear sailing

Cape May Harbor was calm Oct. 4 with a north-northeast wind and the promise of more days of boating ahead before winter arrives.

Lower rejects MAC tours to Coachman House

By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave

VILLAS — Lower Township's Zoning Board unanimously voted against issuing variances to allow Cape May MAC (Museums+Arts+Culture) to conduct tours on a rural property it owns at 1017-1019 Batts Lane.

MAC received the Owen Coachman House and a neighboring cottage as a gift from David and Christine Clemans, who restored the structures on the property.

During a virtual meeting Oct. 1, attorney for the applicant Frank Corrado said the site contained the Owen Coachman Cottage, a whaler's cottage built in the 1700s that was moved to the Batts Lane location by freed slave Owen Coachman prior to the Civil War. The Church-Matthews Cottage, constructed in the 1840s, is also on the site, he said.

Prior to donating the property to MAC, the Clemans allowed the site to be used as a stop on MAC's Underground Railroad tour for a number of years without any complaints from neighbors, Corrado said. He said MAC was notified by Lower Township code enforcement that a use variance was needed to continue the tours.

"What MAC wants to do is simply continue the tours at the site," Corrado said. "I think there is a lot of misinformation floating around here."

He said no events such as fundraisers, galas or weddings would be held



Jack Fichter/STAR AND WAVE

The Owen Coachman House is located on a rural property in Lower Township. The Zoning Board just rejected use of the property for tours by MAC.

at the site. MAC was proposing an increase in the number of tours to the site to 10 per week, Corrado said.

MAC was not seeking any increased parking at the site, he said, adding that only one vehicle would visit the site to unload visitors and pull to the back of the property.

Corrado said no site improvements were being sought.

Architectural historian Joan Berkey said the Owen Coachman House was one of the oldest heavy-timber-frame houses in the county. She said the house was originally one story and moved to

its current location in the mid-1800s. Its exact earlier location is unknown.

She said it was the type of cottage a whaler would have lived in during the late 1600s and early 1700s. Berkey said Coachman added a second floor to the house and sold it in 1850.

The house is a well-preserved and accurately restored example of First Period, heavy-timber-frame construction as found in Cape May County, she said.

"It is a rare surviving example of a free Black land owner's home erected before the Civil War," Berkey said.

The Church-Matthews Cottage was moved to the site between 1900 and 1905 and was part of a larger house, she said.

Tom Carroll, president of MAC's board of directors, said the plan was for two tours per day five days per week. Other than a MAC trolley or shuttle from Congress Hall, the only other vehicle that would visit the site would be a maintenance vehicle, he said.

Engineer/planner Marc DeBlasio, representing MAC, said the property was in the R-1 residential zone. He said the zoning allows more intensive uses such as rental of the houses or demolition of the cottages and the construction of a single-family home that would produce four times more building coverage than what is currently on the property.

DeBlasio said historic preservation is an inherently beneficial use of the

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To protect yourself the entire flu season, the CDC recommends getting a flu shot during the month of September or October. Patients must be 18 and older.

To schedule an appointment, call your Shore Physicians Group Primary Care Provider Office or visit ShorePhysiciansGroup.com.

