



West Cape delays vote on expanding historic district

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House of the week

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167th YEAR NO. 44 CAPE MAY, N.J. Serving America's National Historic Landmark City WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 3, 2021 \$1.00

Bezaire resigns council seat, asks for privacy

Following guilty plea in stalking former girlfriend, he says family top priority

By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY — City Councilman Chris Bezaire submitted a letter of resignation Nov. 1 to City Clerk Erin Burke effective immediately.

More than a dozen members of the public held up signs with one word on them — “resign” — while four members of City Council called for his resignation during a meeting Oct. 19.

Bezaire pleaded guilty Sept. 17 in Superior Court to two charges of contempt and stalking in the

fourth degree in a deal with the state, which is recommending a term of probation of three to five years with a condition of 30 to 60 days in the county jail at the discretion of Judge Bernard DeLury. Sentencing is scheduled for Jan. 21.

Bezaire was arrested by the county Prosecutor's Office on June 16 on charges of invasion of privacy, cyber harassment, stalking and contempt of court, and was released from the county correctional center on



BEZAIRE

June 28 following 13 days of incarceration.

His resignation letter states: “The last several months have taken an emotional, mental and physical toll on my family, friends, and people I love, especially my children. I have told people close to me I would continue in my position unless it directly affects my children, and it has now gotten to the point that. As a father, my number one priority is, and always will be the well-being of my children.

“At this time, I need to devote my full time and energy into my family, as they need me, and my family will always come first. I have made it clear on numerous occasions, actions have consequences, and it is best for me to not only attend to my children's needs, but to set an example for them when handling adversity by doing the right thing. This experience allows me to provide to them important life lessons; in humility, accountability, sobriety, and most of all allows me to display my unconditional love for them.

“As I transition back into private life, I ask for privacy so that I can focus all of my energy on my family and their needs. To those of you who voted for me and put your trust in me, I offer my most sincere thanks and apologies for letting you down. For those who have wanted to see me step down and have called me unfit for my position, I hope this announcement can bring you closure. For those who have stood by my side through all of this and continue to offer their support, I offer my eternal gratitude.”

Firefighters seek salary parity with Cape May police

Union says department would remain lowest-paid in county

By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY — Firefighter/EMT Tim Durstewitz, vice president of the city's firefighters union, Local 3495, said Cape May's firefighters had gone 292 days without a contract.

At an Oct. 19 meeting, he told City Council that during the 292 days, firefighters have seen no pay increase while the inflation rate has risen 5 percent.

“That affects us at supermarkets, the gas pump, rental payments, mortgages,” Durstewitz said.

He said during the last contract negotiation, it was made explicitly clear to the union that retention of personnel is not an issue at the Cape May Fire Department.

“I'm telling you that we have lost 20 percent of our workforce in the past four years, and they went to different departments like North Wildwood, Baltimore, Delaware. That never happens and it's happening right now,” Durstewitz said.

He asked council members if they believe there is a problem with the personnel turnover rate at the Fire Department.

City solicitor Chris Gillin-

Schwartz said he believed “a lot of the parties were on the same page.”

“We want to retain good firefighters, we value public safety, but the parties have to have a discussion in the context of negotiations, not at this table,” he said. “That's going to get that done.”

Durstewitz said at recent contract negotiations, labor counsel told the firefighters union that it was not a problem that the department had lost 20 percent of its workforce. He said he wanted council to be aware of labor counsel's statement.

“There is a major problem at the fire department, and it is not being fixed, it is not being addressed,” Durstewitz said.

Local 3495 President Bill Szemcsak said when a clear solution was presented to the city's labor attorney, his answer was “that's absurd.”

The fire department has been seeking parity in salaries with the city's police department.

“Absurd is police salary parity would still give us the lowest-paid fire department in the county,” Szemcsak said.

He said the fire personnel

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Photo illustration by Werner Tedesco/Special to the STAR AND WAVE

Mall marks milestone

The Washington Street Mall was all lit up to celebrate its 50th anniversary on a cool autumn evening last week.

Wetlands restoration to begin at Pond Creek

By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave

VILLAS — A state Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) project for Pond Creek and the Higbee Beach Wildlife Management Area will result in more than 400 hundred acres of restored and enhanced wetland and upland maritime habitat.

The acreage falls within the known ranges of resi-

dent bird species and will be particularly important to annual spring/fall bird migrations.

The Pond Creek wetlands will undergo a massive restoration that will allow saltwater to enter from the bay.

Lower Township Councilman Roland Roy said he, Mayor Frank Sippel and Township Manager Mike Laffey met with David Golden of the state

Department of Environmental Protection's Division of Fish and Wildlife.

Roy said the restoration project covers a 428-acre site fully encompassed by the Higbee Beach Wildlife Management Area and borough of West Cape May. The project includes the former magnesite factory site and associated landfill, Davies Lake and the majority of the Pond Creek marsh, he said.

The principal project goals are to re-establish tidal inundation to a large portion of the Pond Creek marsh without increasing the flood risk to the upper watershed or inundating the eastern freshwater marsh area, and allowing for habitat management of the northern marsh area.

It will require modification of the inlet channel

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Sisters agree to sell St. Mary retreat house

Nonprofit plans a science center in Cape May Pt.

By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY POINT — The Sisters of Saint Joseph of Chestnut Hill, Philadelphia, announced Monday they would sell Saint Mary by-the-Sea Retreat House, previously slated for demolition, to a new nonprofit organization, Cape May Point Science Center Inc.

In 2016, the Sisters of St. Joseph announced the building would be demolished after 2021 with the property returning to na-

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Provided

The Sisters of St. Joseph announced Monday that they would sell St. Mary by-the-Sea Retreat House in Cape May Point to Cape May Point Science Center Inc., which plans to use the property to showcase the local environment.

Eliminating three-day beach tag on hold for further discussion

By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY — City Council tabled introducing an ordinance that would eliminate three-day beach tags, wanting more time to consult with the beach tag staff.

Councilman Chris Bezaire said he spoke with a number of persons after Beach Tag Supervisor Ed Rotz suggested eliminating the three-day tag because the tag costs the city money.

“What seemed like a real-

ly easy, simple idea turned into a little bit more of a logistical question, pertaining to weekend visitors in the summer, because the thought was we'd do away with the three-day tag,” he said. “If they want three days or more, they'd buy the weekly tag.”

For a visitor in town for a Friday, Saturday and Sunday, the weekly tags run Saturday to Saturday, so they lose that Friday, they lose that Friday,

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