



Team wrestling tournament ends with loss

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Homelessness rooted in lack of affordability

Affordable options nearly nonexistent throughout county

By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave

Cape May County, with its multimillion-dollar homes, few year-round rentals and no homeless shelters is not haven for those seeking shelter, who often find themselves in long-term crisis situations.

That point was driven home during a forum on affordable housing Feb. 5 held via Zoom by the Cape May County Regular Democratic Organization.

Yvonne Sullivan, director of Family Promise, which serves homeless families with children, said affordable housing in the county is "pretty much non-existent for our young people." She said younger residents finish their education and leave the county. At this time, 13 affordable housing properties exist in the county with six properties exclusively for senior citizens, one for those suffering mental health issues or another disability and the remaining six properties for low- or moderate-income families.

"The problem is that the wait lists are three to five years long, there is nowhere for anybody to go," Sullivan said. "We've had people placed in a low- or moderate-income unit and then they get kicked out because somebody made a little bit of extra overtime and they went over the income limit, and they would become homeless again."

Family Promise screens clients for drug use and requires employment. Normally, shelter is pro-

'A challenge right now is that when you have no overnight homeless shelter, no affordable housing, no adequate transitional housing, people who would be experiencing poverty somewhere else are in crisis here. There is no safety net to fall back on.'

—Tyler Keene, director, The Branches

vided for 90 days but because of rental prices, the stays are being extended.

New Jersey has the seventh-most-expensive rents in the nation, according to the National Low Income Housing Coalition and the Housing and Community Development Network of New Jersey.

"In order for someone to be able to afford a two-bedroom apartment, they have to make a minimum of at least \$33.50 per hour and that requires 95 hours needed at work, so that's over two full-time people that need to work," Sullivan said.

The conversion of year-round rentals to Airbnbs has worsened the long-term rental situation, she said. According to Stockton University, Cape May County had a little fewer than 400 Airbnb rentals before the COVID-19 pandemic from 2020-23 but now has almost 800.

Since Family Promise

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Jack Fichter/CAPE MAY STAR AND WAVE

Making arrangements

Love is in the air as Cape Winds Florist owner Debbie Downes, right, and floral designer Jane Chew prepare flower arrangements for Valentine's Day.

Franklin Street upgrades moving ahead

Work to include sidewalks, curbs, drainage, benches, lighting

By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY — The city's contracted engineer is developing specification drawings for the reconstruction of Franklin Street, with plans for the project ready to be offered for bids in June and construction beginning in late summer or early fall.

"It's really an enhancement program consisting of new curbing, new brick sidewalk, street furniture, new lighting with banners, some out coves for some seating in front of the library and really trying

to identify this particular street as an historic street within the community, especially given all the public buildings that we have," Vince Orlando, of Engineering Design Associates, said Feb. 6 during a City Council meeting.

A circular sitting area will be created in front of the city's new library in the Franklin Street School. A subsequent project will be creating a parking area next to the Allen AME Church after the parsonage is demolished, he said.

Orlando said some drainage improvements may be made to Franklin Street by

running a secondary inlet from the access way between the library and the fire station.

Curbing on Franklin Street will be concrete with brick gutters.

Deputy Mayor Lorraine Baldwin suggested more bicycle racks for the neighborhood.

During public comment, former councilwoman Stacy Sheehan asked if trees were being removed along Franklin Street. Orlando said two dead trees would be removed.

He said the city historically has planted trees within a very tight strip

between the curb and the sidewalk with roots that have pushed up sidewalks. He said the right of way on Franklin Street is very tight and street trees would need at least a 4-foot by 4-foot tree grate with a tree well.

Mayor Zack Mullock said the question of tree removal and plantings would be heard by the city's Shade Tree Commission.

In other business, restrooms for the Promenade and for Kiwanis Park are currently out for bids, Orlando said. He said he has

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Cape May seeks \$750,000 grant for AMA Church restoration

City would have to match the grant from the New Jersey Historic Trust for interior renovations

By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY — City Council approved submitting an application for a \$750,000 grant from the New Jersey Historic Trust to fund interior restoration of the city-owned Allen AME Church.

If the trust awards the \$750,000 to Cape May, the city would have to match the amount.

During public comment at a council meeting Feb. 6, former councilwoman Stacy Sheehan asked why East Lynne Theater Company, which is leasing the building, would not pay for the interior improvements.

"Since we removed the pews, we removed the plaster walls, I'm not sure what we're restoring in there that would be historic," she said.

City Manager Paul Dietrich said the church is essentially a shell stripped down to the studded walls and exterior sheathings.

"Whether we had a current lease with anybody or wanted to open that building as a public use for the city, we have to at least bring it back to a shell of a building that's enclosed," he said.

"At \$1.5 million?" Sheehan asked.

Dietrich said based on current

construction costs and values, that estimate may be correct.

He said that figure was just to replace restrooms in the church, undertake electrical work and installation of HVAC systems.

"That has nothing to do with whether or not the theater company might want to do an addition and renovate it, put up special lighting for lighting the theater area — it has nothing to do with those upgrades," Dietrich said.

Sheehan questioned if historic preservation includes heating and air conditioning that was not previously in the church.

Resident Jules Rauch asked

for clarification that \$750,000 would come from the New Jersey Historic Trust and an additional \$750,000 from city funds to restore the interior of the church.

Dietrich confirmed the cost.

"This council believes \$1.5 million spent on that building is a wise investment?" he asked.

"Absolutely," Mayor Zack Mullock said. "To not go for \$750,000 would be absurd. We need the money; it's going to be an expensive project and we want to get it done."

"If we don't get the grant, then we don't spend that amount of money to restore that church to, what I think I hear from most

people is they want to restore it to the grandeur that it once was, and yes, it's going to take some funding."

Mullock said the city purchased the property, which included two lots, for \$400,000, calling it a "very wise investment." A few years ago, the Allen AME Church was listed on Preservation New Jersey's list of 10 most endangered historic places in the state.

"We have restored that to the point you see it now with a cedar shake roof, restored the beautiful stained-glass windows, painted

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