



## House of the week

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## Sherlock Holmes radio drama on stage at ELTC

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165th YEAR NO. 11 CAPE MAY, N.J. Serving America's National Historic Landmark City WEDNESDAY, MARCH 13, 2019 \$1.00

## Cape May's chief seeks more paid firefighters

### Volunteer pool aging, many living off island

By JACK FICHTER  
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY — Fire Chief Alex Coulter appealed to City Council on March 5 to include money in the 2019 city budget to hire more firefighters.

Coulter said he was concerned with the number of fire personnel working on each shift. He said the minimum has been set at five persons per shift, which is not sufficient according to the National Fire Protection Association to respond to an incident in a 2,000-square-foot building.

“What we do to try and combat this with the fire personnel we have working is mutual aid,” Coulter said, adding that “mutual aid is not guaranteed.”

He said the fire department responded to 2,289 incidents last year — about half fires and half emergency medical calls. He said an incident in August caused him to change how the department responds to incidents based on crew integrity in the station.

Only two firefighters responded to a house fire where there was almost an entrapped occupant, he said.

“It’s a scary thought for me to send two guys to a fire,” Coulter said.

He said the department relies heavily on the West Cape May Volunteer Fire Company to send a truck, often which was not guaranteed and a lengthy process as far as travel time for their crew. The Coast Guard Fire Department responds but also has staffing issues, Coulter said.

A total of 28 target hazards have been identified in Cape May that require lots of manpower, he said. Balloon-frame house fires are very manpower-intensive and very taxing on personnel, Coulter said.

On a mutual aid plan submitted to the county for a structure fire, three engines should respond, two ladder trucks, ambulances and a Rapid Intervention Team (RIT) with four or five personnel to stand by as needed, he said. A truck from another district is needed to cover the empty firehouse.

Mutual aid can become a 15- to 20-minute response, Coulter said. That is not

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Jack Fichter/CAPE MAY STAR AND WAVE

A large crowd showed up to speak against an application that the Lower Township Zoning Board ultimately approved, allowing for 21 home sites on a 7-acre parcel outside the Cox Hall Creek Wildlife Management Area.

## Homes sites approved

### Owner plans 21 houses outside Cox Hall Creek WMA

By JACK FICHTER  
Cape May Star and Wave

VILLAS — The Lower Township Zoning Board unanimously approved a use variance March 7 to allow 21 home sites at 10 Shawmount Ave. on a forested piece of land at the entrance to Cox Hall Creek Wildlife Management Area, the former Ponderlodge golf course.

Prior to the vote, the board heard 90 minutes of public comment against approving a variance.

Zoning Board member Bruce Waterman said the state should have purchased the 7-acre parcel of land when it purchased Ponderlodge for a nature area.

“They didn’t see it because the township mislabeled the property ‘conservation,’” he said.

Waterman said no one at the meeting mentioned the owner of the property (Susan Adreassi), who had a right to compensation. He noted she received the property in 2002 as payment for debt from the owner of Ponderlodge during bankruptcy proceedings.

He said the board could not make its decision based on environmental impact, which is the job of the state Department of Environmental Protection.

‘The story is a sad story. It does not have a good ending.’

—Zoning Board member  
Bruce Waterman

“The story is a sad story. It does not have a good ending,” Waterman said.

He said the interests of the property owner had to be protected as much as the public’s interests. If the board’s ruling were appealed, the court process would be an expense to taxpayers and the township would lose, Waterman said.

Board Chairman James Hansen said the property was rezoned to a conservation zone as an amendment to the township’s master plan re-examination, with the township incorrectly believing it was owned by the state when in fact it was privately owned.

“By doing so, it stripped most, if not all the property,

‘We don’t need more houses and we certainly don’t need more traffic.’

—Kathy Horn,  
of McKinley Avenue

of its development rights,” he said.

The Zoning Board approved the parcel for the creation of 22 lots in 2012, Hansen said. That approval had a sunset clause. The enabling resolution from 2012 states if the board were to deny the application at that time, it would be considered inverse condemnation and the township would have to purchase the property, he said.

Public comment focused on environmental issues such as the cutting down of old-growth trees and displacing wildlife on the parcel. Attorney Terrence J. Bennett, who was retained by Edna Avenue residents George and Marsha Coleman, suggested the applicant just build one house on a small portion of the property that is zoned R-3.

Edna Avenue resident Joanne Prentice said she feared a storm water basin proposed for the home sites would be a breeding ground for mosquitoes. She said she has seen eagles and hawks in trees on the site. Prentice said when the land was excavated a number of box turtles would be killed that reside on the parcel.

“It’s my understanding

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## Groups plan rally against ocean blasts in Cape May

### Environmental, business groups, surfers to protest

CAPE MAY — A news conference and rally to protest the Trump administration’s promise to issue five permits authorizing offshore blasting to search for oil, which is believed to stun and kill marine life, is scheduled for noon to 2 p.m. March 18 at Convention Hall.

The authorization will allow seismic testing from Cape May to Cape Canaveral, Fla., to begin as soon as April.

The event is sponsored by the Cape May County Chamber of Commerce, Clean Ocean Action, Rockaway Water Alliance and the Surfrider Foundation.

According to the county chamber, the blasting would finalize areas for offshore oil and gas drilling, which could include the Jersey shore.

Seismic airguns are shot in pulses separated by 15 seconds: They can reach 260 decibels, but the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management prefers airguns reach only 160 decibels, which is as loud as a jet taking off, and enough noise to rupture a human eardrum. Boats tow 12 to 48 airguns at a time, and their sonic bangs can be heard 2,500 miles away from the survey vessels.

Seismic airgun blasts are the first step in finding oil and gas beneath the ocean floor. During the impressive process, the airguns are towed behind ships as they shoot acoustic energy pulses into the sea floor from steel cylinders filled with pressurized air. When the compressed air is released into water, it reflects and refracts off the seafloor, enabling engineers to create three-dimensional maps that lead the way to potential reserves.

Impacts from the blasts could scatter fish, causing catch rates to decline 40 percent to 80 percent over hundreds of square miles around a single airgun array.

The blasts can harm or kill marine life from zooplankton to whales. Endangered species are placed at risk. Seismic testing off Israel caused 31 of 45 stranded turtles to die.

Elected officials, business leaders and citizens are invited to take part in the rally to protest a threat to the shore’s environment, economy and way of life. Participants are encouraged to create and bring signs against the seismic testing.

Convention Hall is located at 714 Beach Ave. in Cape May. For more information, call the Cape May County Chamber of Commerce at (609) 465-7181.

## Parking panel recommends reconfiguration of Bank Street lot

By JACK FICHTER  
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY — The city’s Parking Advisory Committee is eyeing the city-owned Bank Street parking lot to help relieve a lack of parking spaces in the center of town by reconfiguring the lot and seeking an easement to offer another exit when the street is flooded.

The committee issued a report last week as a supplement to a study presented to City Council in November. Since that time,

the committee has continued to meet in regular sessions and met with city personnel and engaged in further internal investigation, fact development and discussion among its members.

Members of the committee have made subsequent visits to the Bank Street lot and noticed miscellaneous construction equipment continues to be parked in the lot without authorization, the most recent of which appears to be pieces of equipment owned or used by contractors for the borough of West Cape May.

“The lot appears to be capable of modest expansion (i.e. several dozen cars) by means of (a) clearing space heretofore not dedicated to parking, and/or (b) repositioning stop barriers and delineating parking spaces by marking (without paving),” states the report.

It notes: “flooding from rainwater not being pumped out and tidal overflow stemming from the nearby creek continue to adversely affect both Bank Street and the lot. The portion of Bank Street closest to the creek and the driveway used for egress from the

lot in particular are known to be susceptible to flooding that could interfere with the use of the lot by ordinary vehicles.”

According to the report, lighting fixtures presumably maintained by Atlantic City Electric at city expense are broken or otherwise not functioning, providing poor coverage and posing dangerous conditions to public users of the lot.

The committee offered recommendations for reconfiguration of the lot:

— The lot must be better pro-

ected from unauthorized parking and storage. If necessary, ordinances should be revised to subject unauthorized parking in the lot to fines and towing and such penalties should be more regularly diligently enforced by police department patrols.

— In order to accurately gauge the potential and limitations of the lot, an updated survey should be procured including a description of metes and bounds. Such a delineation would shed light

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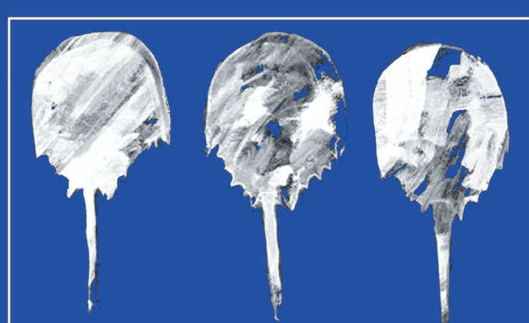
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