



Gardening a great way to exercise

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House of the week

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166th YEAR NO. 22 CAPE MAY, N.J. Serving America's National Historic Landmark City WEDNESDAY, MAY 27, 2020 \$1.00

Most county COVID cases nursing home-based

Health officer updates public, fields questions during virtual town hall meeting

By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY COURT HOUSE — The majority of Cape May County's COVID-19 cases are residents and staff of long-term-care facilities, according to county Public Health Coordinator Kevin Thomas.

The Cape May County Chamber of Commerce hosted a video town hall meeting May 22 on the county's response to the COVID-19 pandemic during which Thomas

and county Freeholder Jeffrey Pierson, who serves as liaison to the Health Department, fielded questions from the public.

After President Donald Trump's March 13 declaration of a national health emergency, Pierson directed the county-owned Crest Haven Nursing Home to close to the public and not accept new residents. He said Crest Haven Nursing Home has had no residents or staff with COVID-19.

Pierson said employees at Crest Haven have been tested every

morning and asked a series of questions. If they felt ill, they stayed home, he said.

"All of our employees work for the county of Cape May, whereas many of the long-term facilities here in the county, those people have two jobs or more," Pierson said. "They work in different industries because of the cost of living, etc. and raising families, so they bring a lot in from the outside community into the (nursing) homes and they were not being tested as they came in every day."

He said Crest Haven has been receiving support and supplies from the county Health Department and Office of Emergency Management.

Thomas said the Health Department tracked all the positive cases in the county and responded through contact tracing with staff nurses. Cape May County has the second fewest number of coronavirus cases in the state, he said. He answered questions submitted by email, chat and phone.

Asked whether wearing masks,

social distancing and hygiene measures enacted by the state and county have had a significant impact on the spread of the virus here, Thomas said it has been effective. As of May 24, the county had 579 cases of COVID-19 with 47 deaths, with 33 percent of the cases in long-term-care facilities.

"All but 10 of the deaths are in long-term care," he said.

Thomas said if you subtracted the number of staff members in

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Bond to finance safety building falls vote short

By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY — As they had promised during previous meetings, City Council members Zack Mullock and Stacy Sheehan voted against a \$14.2 million bond ordinance to finance the construction of a new public safety building, thus killing the project at this time.

During a virtual City Council meeting May 19, Mayor Chuck Lear, Deputy Mayor Patricia Hendricks and Councilman Shaine Meier voted in favor of the bond, which required the vote of four council members to pass.

Mullock asked for the bond ordinance to be amended to finance construction of a \$5 million fire station. He said given the current financial situation, a \$5 million fire sta-

tion would allow the city to look at a new police station soon after and save \$10 million.

The city budget for 2020 predicted increased revenues that he said now are unlikely to materialize, he said. The vote to amend failed, with only Mullock and Sheehan casting positive votes.

Sheehan said she wanted two separate buildings for the fire and police departments. She said both departments made sacrifices to allow the public safety building to fit on the specified land, which is mainly the current location of the firehouse.

Sheehan said one building offered no room for expansion and did not offer enough parking. She said the design ruined the streetscape of Washington

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Short-term rentals to begin on June 1 in Lower Township

By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave

VILLAS — In a special meeting May 21, held via conference call, Lower Township Council reversed an earlier decision to prohibit short-term rentals until the end of June.

On May 14, Mayor Frank Sippel announced the ban on short-term rentals was set to expire May 22. At that time he stated, "even though most, if not all towns, will soon be allowing short-term rentals, Lower Township council has decided to extend our ban until the end of June. This was not an easy decision for members of council, but I do believe it was the correct decision."

During the May 21 meeting, council voted for 4-1 to allow short-term rentals, including at campsites in the township, to begin June 1. Councilman Tom Conrad, who is captain

of the Lower Township Rescue Squad, cast the lone dissenting vote.

Gov. Phil Murphy allowed recreational campgrounds to open for transient, short-term rentals May 22. Township solicitor Robert Belasco said Lower Township could hold off short-term campsite rentals until June 1.

Council's resolution allows the utilization of online marketplaces to offer short-term rentals. Individuals engaged in the business of providing, facilitating or arranging short-term, transient and seasonal rentals must maintain a written plan outlining the procedures they intend to offer to ensure that properties rented to third-party individuals are sanitized in accordance with Centers for Disease Control and Department of Health guidelines

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John Alvarez
Special to the STAR AND WAVE

Somewhat subdued kickoff for summer

The weather was cold and overcast and COVID-19 restrictions prohibiting large gatherings were in effect but crowds still gathered Sunday on the Washington Street Mall in Cape May to help kick off summer on Memorial Day weekend. At right, signs outside FINS Bar & Grille direct customers where to go to get their take-out meals.



City approves outdoor restaurant seating

By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY — City Council has approved outdoor seating at restaurants. Now they just have to wait until the state eases restrictions associated with COVID-19 to begin offering the service.

Council members approved a resolution allowing restaurant owners to utilize the exterior of their property and in some cases, with council approval, parts of the public right of way for outdoor seating.

During a virtual meeting May 19, city solicitor Frank Corrado said the resolution was modeled on one adopted by the Wildwoods. He said the resolution sets up a procedure whereby restaurant owners may submit a seating plan to the city manager that may receive comment from the zoning official, construction official and police and fire chiefs.

But first Gov. Phil Murphy must approve such action statewide. During the COVID-19 pandemic, restaurants may offer only take-out service with cus-

tomers leaving the premises after receiving their food.

"I want to make it clear that this resolution is contingent upon the governor or the state modifying Executive Order 107 to allow outdoor service at restaurants," he said. "It would not mean automatically if the city approves the seating plan the restaurant would be able to have outdoor table service."

He said restaurants could draw up their plans, submit them to the city and "be ready to go the minute the governor relaxes (order)

107." The resolution requires council to approve any incursions into the public right of way, Corrado said.

The permitting of outdoor table service would end Nov. 1 unless extended by council.

The resolution does not permit a restaurant to have more seats than it would when operating normally.

Corrado said the resolution made clear that whatever social distancing requirements the state sets

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