

Energy consultant previews plan for Cape May Pt.

By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY POINT — The borough hired an energy consultant to create a community energy plan.

Ben Parvey of Blue Sky Power presented an overview of the plan, which would include installing solar panels on municipal buildings and buying electric vehicles, to Borough Commission on Dec. 7.

Last year, the borough received a \$25,000 grant from the state Board of Public Utilities (BPU) to

hire an energy consultant to develop the plan. Commissioner Catherine Busch said the borough met weekly with Parvey to discuss the specifics.

Parvey said the final plan will be presented to the borough this week and will be posted on its website.

"It really is an action plan to increase the use of clean energy throughout the borough, but also to make buildings more efficient both for the borough as well as to provide education to residents about en-

ergy efficiency programs within the state from the Board of Public Utilities," he said.

Strategies from the community energy plan the borough has selected under the guidelines provided by Sustainable New Jersey will allow the borough to become more solar and electric vehicle (EV) friendly as well as more climate resilient while reducing greenhouse gas emissions, Parvey said.

A strategy is to reduce energy consumption and emissions from the transportation sector through electric vehicles as well as alternative fuel vehicles including hybrids and hydrogen fuel cell vehicles which may become more common in the future, he said.

"Undoubtedly, folks have electric vehicles already in the borough, but we want to train first responders as well as non-emergency staff on EV safety, what happens with an EV vehicle in the event of a crash," Parvey said.

He said the borough can consider purchasing electric trucks and cars and

install public charging stations which can be a revenue source for a municipality.

Parvey said another strategy is solar panels for municipal buildings to produce clean energy and save money.

"You can produce your own energy on site cheaper than you can buy it from Atlantic City Electric," he said.

The borough can also adopt a supportive zoning and permitting ordinance, so residents know how to get permits for a solar project and contractors understand the process. He said firefighters can be trained to deal with solar equipment on a house on fire.

Parvey said residents should be informed about solar system incentives available through the BPU and how to ensure they are dealing with reputable solar contractors.

Community solar arrays can be constructed and residents purchase electricity from the arrays at a discounted rate.

"Although there is no land within the borough to

do a community solar project, you may participate in another one that's within Atlantic City Electric's territory," he said.

Another strategy is maximizing energy efficiency and conservation by making buildings more efficient with devices such as remote-control thermostats, LED lighting, energy efficient heating and air conditioning systems and reducing peak demand. Parvey said a portion of Atlantic City Electric bills is for peak demand charges.

The borough can encourage and support participation by low- and moderate-income residents, providing access to community solar and energy efficiency improvements to help reduce high electric bills. Residents can be made aware of incentives and rebates to help replace outdated equipment with more energy efficient systems, he said.

The plan encourages using technologies such as using energy from storage batteries for resiliency in municipal buildings rather than using diesel or natural

gas generators in the event of a power failure. The batteries could be charged by solar panels, Parvey said.

Storage batteries can also be installed in homes to deal with outages, he said.

Deputy Mayor Anita van Heeswyk said streetlights were a large energy expense for the borough. Parvey said power companies bill municipalities on a "per streetlight cost," not the cost of energy.

He said those prices were set by the BPU when power companies submit for rate changes. Parvey said solar-powered streetlights are available which use LED bulbs.

"We're going to go back to Atlantic City Electric and we're going to check the regulations and find out if its permissible to acquire and utilize your own streetlights that may not be directly connected the same way that the standard streetlights are," he said. "They seem to be very affordable, and I think you would spend a whole lot less."



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Artificial turf

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cover, perennials, annuals, plants, sculpture art and the use of paving materials.

"Nowhere in our ordinance does it prohibit artificial turf. Now we are starting to see applications that are trying to use this synthetic material as lawn or lawn areas or recreation areas on lots, and I believe that the governing body probably listened to the concerns of the Zoning Board member and have crafted this ordinance to directly prohibit that synthetic turf be used in the city of Cape May," he said.

Chairman Bill Bezaire

argued there are uses for the material, which he said is of much better quality than in the past.

Bezaire said he researched artificial turf and, in some cases, it would be difficult to tell the difference between it and real grass. He said water is conserved if not used on a lawn.

Bezaire said he has areas in his yard under trees where grass will not grow due to a lack of sunlight and suggested an ordinance have an allowance for a certain percentage of use rather than a total ban.

"It just forecloses on any ingenuity at all," he said.

Bezaire said artificial turf is 100 percent permeable, allowing water to drain through instead of running off the lawn.

Hurless said the application that went before the Zoning Board showed artificial turf with infiltration qualities that were amazing. He noted Cape May has a "large commu-

nity of bird and butterfly enthusiasts" and the birds and butterflies know the difference between real grass and synthetic turf.

The application before the Zoning Board requested the use of artificial turf in 3-inch strips between granite tiles on a pool patio, he said.

Mayor Zack Mullock said there are varying qualities of artificial turf available from good to awful. He said the city could limit the amount of lot coverage. Hurless asked if artificial turf could be limited to backyards where it is not visible from the street.

Hurless said he conducted a consistency review of the issue in the master plan and found references in the city's historical preservation element and the conservation element that would cover artificial turf.

"There are environmental concerns that support the banning of artificial turf," he said.

In the city's zoning code in the C-2 and C-5 districts, the city allows miniature golf courses. Hurless said an ordinance banning artificial turf should make an allowance for the courses.

Planning Board solicitor Richard King said West Cape May passed an ordinance prohibiting artificial turf with an exception for miniature golf courses.

King questioned if the city's Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) has an outright ban on artificial turf. HPC standards require period appropriate lights, benches and similar items, Hurless said.

Councilman Mike Yeager said he believes the city could not easily legislate the issue without making every single application reviewable by a committee.

Mullock said City Council is not under the gun to pass a ban and would appoint a committee to further investigate the issue.

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