

Lower Township Year in Review

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few ordinance, it is in effect," he said. "The chief put out a directive to the police department for his officers, he gave them some marching orders on how we are going to handle this."

Police Chief Kevin Lewis said the curfew ordinance is still on the books and such a curfew is legal statewide. He said the legalization of marijuana and the state Ju-

venile Justice Reform Act "took a lot of tools out of our toolbox."

— Delaware River and Bay Authority (DRBA) commissioners adopted the agency's 2023 Capital Improvement Program (CIP) along with an authority wide five-year strategic plan for the agency's airports and crossing facilities.

The 2023 CIP of \$208 million is comprised of \$174.7 million in authority re-

sources and \$33.3 million in federal, state and local grant funds. The five-year strategic plan, which contains nearly 100 major capital projects at the Delaware Memorial Bridge (DMB), Cape May-Lewes Ferry (CMLF) and the agency's five regional airport facilities, serves as a planning tool for directing resources to address the increasing demands associated with that infrastructure. The plan

is expected to cost about \$604.5 million in authority and grant funds. Authority funds consist entirely of tolls and other user fees; no tax dollars are used.

— In January, residents of Shawcrest Mobile Home Park approached Township Council stating they were unhappy with significant increases in their monthly lot rental fees and requesting the township enact a rent control ordinance. The township is maintaining a hands-off policy, not wishing to become involved in a landlord/tenant dispute, Township Manager Mike Laffey said Feb. 6 during a Township Council meeting.

He said township officials had received emails and phone calls from residents of the park that also mentioned code violations such as trash and recycling collection issues. Laffey said he responded to the phone calls and emails and had code enforcement visit the site to help the park meet township codes.

— In his annual State of the Township Address, Lower Township Mayor Frank Sippel highlighted a successful year regarding finances and infrastructure replacement. He noted in 2022, council approved a \$30.6 million budget without a tax increase. Sippel said Clem Mulligan Sports Complex in Villas opened last year, a \$2.9 million project for which the township received \$1.2 million from the county Open Space Program and \$400,000 from the state hospital.

Lower received more than \$500,000 in infrastructure

grants from the state. Sippel said a large project was drainage improvements on Cloverdale, Evergreen and Spruce avenues. "That part of that Villas neighborhood has been flooding for over 20 years, up to people's doorsteps," he said. The township spent about \$2.5 million for reconstruction and paving of about 4.5 miles of roads, the mayor said.

— Four state-of-the-art ferry vessels are expected to join the Delaware River and Bay Authority fleet in 2026. The DRBA is seeking to replace its aging vessels on the Cape May-Lewes route with smaller boats able to accommodate just 75 vehicles at an estimated cost of \$320 million.

The DRBA held an informational meeting Feb. 23 via Zoom to show off early conceptual plans for the vessels. Director of Ferry Operations Heath Gehrke said the current vessels are "quite old" and it's time to look at new boats. He said the project is moving into the design phase.

— Homeowners in Diamond Beach will be getting some more shore protection for their properties, but some are wary of the consequences. Township Council approved an agreement with the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) for construction of a sand dune through Diamond Beach as part of a project stretching from Hereford Inlet to Cape May Inlet. But Robert S. Baranowski, representing the Grand Condominium Homeowners Association, said none of the residents' concerns were addressed.

"I have to say we're very disappointed in the current situation, very disappointed in the DEP commissioner's take-it-or-leave-it position. We don't feel it's a very good faith negotiation with Lower. They haven't spoken to the private property owners or made any of the changes that we've been seeking," he said.

The recommended plan, part of the New Jersey Hurricane and Storm Damage Reduction Project, includes a berm and dune system along the oceanfront in Lower Township, Wildwood, North Wildwood and Wildwood Crest.

MARCH


— The Delaware River and Bay Authority (DRBA) Commissioners awarded a contract to Arther J. Ogren Inc. of Vineland to construct a new terminal building on Hornet Road at the Cape May County Airport. The contractor was expected to begin construction on or about March 13. The total cost of the project is estimated to be \$7.4 million, and Cape May County is providing about \$250,000 directly in support of the terminal, with additional funds committed to roadway and parking enhancements in the immediate vicinity.

"The existing terminal building's layout and condition are not suitable for future terminal needs and functions," said Stephen D. Williams, deputy executive director for the DRBA. "The old terminal is located


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