

Cape May Point weekenders unsure what to do with trash

By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY POINT — Residents in a dither over garbage collection offered much trash talk at Borough Commissioner's April 26 meeting.

The borough may be facing at least a 50 percent hike in trash costs beginning in 2024 due to consolidation and increased costs in the industry.

Many residents stay in their second homes for the weekend and return home Sunday afternoon, which leaves them with the dilemma of what to do with their trash since collection day is Monday.

The borough was collecting trash at the public works yard through weekends but ended it as a cost-cutting measure when its municipal budget reached the state

spending cap.

Commissioner Catherine Busch said she had multiple conversations on the closing with Borough Administrator Ed Grant and other staff.

During public comment, Jim Fraatz questioned why 10 dumpsters were disposed of from the public works yard. Busch said the dumpsters were not on the borough's fixed asset list since they were worth less than \$5,000 and had a life less than five years.

She said the dumpsters were taken to Raff's Metal Recycling and the borough was paid \$450. Busch said the dumpsters were 10 years old and had been repaired multiple times.

"On a number of them, the bottom fell off as they were lifted to be removed," she said. "Corners were leaking, which we can't have."

Dan Simmler, president of the Cape May Point Taxpayers Association, said when Borough Commission approved the 2022 municipal budget last month, an amendment was made to add money.

At that meeting, \$7,000 was added to public works employee salaries to reopen the trash and recycling drop-off location. In addition, Simmler said the taxpayer's association was willing to contribute \$4,000 to replace four dumpsters.

Busch said there were no further discussions with Grant on reopening the yard since he had been on vacation. Simmler questioned why reopening the yard wasn't on the meeting agenda.

He said Busch stated in an email to residents who queried her on the yard that

it was not a budget issue but the inability of public works to staff the yard, quell disturbances and handle illegal dumping at the site.

Grant confirmed there were other issues in addition to the budget shortfall. He said public works has five employees with the line item for the department in the budget totaling \$150,000.

"It seems pretty rudimentary that a stand-by list of some variety to man the yard through the five borough employees could be created just in case someone didn't show up," Simmler said.

Busch said the borough could not require its full-time employees to be available to work on the weekends. She said when public works employees are called in for an emergency, they are paid time and a half.

Most of the public works employees have second jobs and other responsibilities and are not available on a stand-by basis, Busch said.

Resident Peg Fraatz said she believes Busch is dismissing the public and does not have an interest in the concerns of residents and felt entitled to make unilateral decisions.

Oak Avenue resident Sue

Leming expressed gratitude to Borough Commission for the decision to close the yard.

"The impact negatively on our quality of life while trying to sit on our porch weekends with trash bags getting thrown in, recycling getting smashed and conversations in and out," she said.

Leming said odors, noise and animals at the yard were not beneficial to Cape May Point.

Resident Hope Luken said some towns do not offer trash collection leaving it up to homeowners to individually contract with haulers.

"You have a trash service now that for the majority of your community doesn't really work well," she said.

Busch said the borough has a five-year trash and recycling removal contract with Gold Medal Environmental that runs through the end of 2023. She said a bid package will be assembled next year to accept bids for the next five years.

Cape May requires every property owner to hire their own trash collector, Busch said. She said Stone Harbor had to suspend twice a week trash collection because they could not hire enough employees to maintain that

schedule.

"They are currently considering whether or not to suspend the service of picking up the cans by someone's house and putting them back which they have done in Stone Harbor for some time," Busch said.

She said Avalon just renegotiated its contract with Gold Medal Environmental and suspended the return of cans to houses.

"It was estimated that it added 40 percent to the labor costs for Avalon to have that as part of their contract," Busch said.

She said there are problems with trash collection around the state with some municipalities receiving no bids when seeking a trash collection contract.

"The solid waste industry is consolidating," Busch said. "At this point, we have one, maybe two vendors that even serve our county, we may be forced to collect it ourselves which is not something we would want to do because it is difficult to hire people for that, there are a lot of workman's comp claims and injuries involved with trash collection."

Purchasing trucks would be expensive, she said.

Busch said when the borough goes out to bid for a new trash collection contract, the costs will increase by a minimum of 50 percent.

"We'll be faced with figuring out how we're going to pay for that unless we plan ahead and raise our taxes to meet that challenge," she said.

Lukens asked if the borough would consider no trash contract and let property owners seek individual contracts with haulers. She noted trash collection is not needed year-round.

Busch said the borough would like to keep weekly trash and recycle collection. She said the borough could seek the "concierge" service of the hauler picking up and returning the cans to the house, get a quote and determine if taxpayers were willing to pay for such a service.

"Right now, I could tell you we don't have the money for that," Busch said.

Lukens said the cost for an individual contract for trash pick-up for a homeowner from Gold Medal Environmental was \$52 per month for a 96-gallon tote.

Resident Sandy Allison said she supported closing the yard.

"Take your trash home with you if you're down here just for the weekend," she said. "I think everybody should be responsible for their own trash just like you are when you go to the beach, you carry it in, and you carry it out."

Allison said weekenders should ask if they could put their trash in with a neighbor's trash for the Monday pick-up. She said residents and renters abused the privilege of using the yard.

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2. Wednesday, May 11: North of Mall: Perry to Jefferson
3. Thursday & Friday, May 12 & 13: South of Mall, Perry to Jefferson
4. Monday & Tuesday, May 16 & 17: Jefferson to Madison
5. Wednesday & Thursday, May 18 & 19: North of Michigan, Indiana & Massachusetts Aves.
6. Friday & Monday, May 20 & 23: North of Cape May Avenue
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