

City withholds mall lighting funds pending HPC OK

By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY — City Council tabled a resolution that would have provided \$15,000 to the Washington Street Mall Business Improvement District (BID) to pay for a portion of the cost to string 3,000 feet of LED lights the length of the mall.

The project has not been approved by the city's Historic Preservation Commission (HPC).

Washington Street Mall merchants stated they believe the mall is too dark at night and an enhancement committee of the BID applied to the HPC on Oct. 18.

At that meeting, the HPC found it had more questions than answers on the project. HPC Chairman Warren Coupland said when plugged in, the proposed system could light up the mall like Times Square or not be bright enough after the BID spent a considerable amount of money.

Pam Smarro, chairwoman of the BID enhancement committee and owner of three retail stores on the mall, said phase one of the project was stringing C-9 commercial-grade LED lights with bulbs spaced 24 inches apart. She said it was the same type of lights Louisa's Restaurant uses for outdoor dining.

The light from the bulbs would be "soft warm with the white yellow leaning more toward the yellow spectrum," Smarro said.

"These are going to be installed crisscross across the Washington Street Mall and down all the walkways, and also the project has been expanded to the west side of Carpenter's Lane where those businesses are also part of our business improvement district," she said.

The lights would not be paid for by the BID but by donations from mall merchants, Smarro said, noting the mall is underlit. Gas lights installed in 2008, following a major renovation of the mall, have not provided enough light to properly illuminate the walkways of the mall and particularly Carpenter's Lane, she said.

Smarro said the new lights would solve an aesthetic and safety issue.

Coupland asked if consideration was given to adding more gaslights to the mall. Smarro said the BID has talked to the city about the issue for a year but a project to add gaslights never moved forward.

She said City Manager Mike Voll gave the BID committee permission to move forward with stringing LED lights on the mall in September. Smarro said she believes installing more gas lights would be much more expensive.

"This is the mall's 50th anniversary; we're trying to get this done so we can use it as part of our celebration on the shoulder season," she said.

Smarro said initially, she was not aware the light-

ing project would require HPC approval. The BID signed a contract and paid a \$26,000 deposit with work to start within three days, she said.

The mall has planter boxes containing illuminated trees that did not require HPC approval, Smarro said.

HPC Commissioner Jim Testa asked the level of brightness of the 3,000 feet of lights. He said no plan was submitted to the HPC to show exactly how the lights would be strung.

Coupland asked the application to be tabled until a specific plan was submitted. HPC Commissioner Bea Pessagno, who is a member of the BID, said the BID has been decorating the mall for years and the new lights would not affect any buildings.

HPC Commissioner Tom Carroll said the lights would be used all year and are not just Christmas lights.

Steve Smarro said donations have been collected, a deposit paid on the lights and the BID had no idea it had to appear before the commission.

HPC Commissioner Pip Campbell questioned why the project came before the commission. HPC solicitor Robert Fineberg said it would not require HPC approval if it were a city project but the application was from a private group.

Pam Smarro said \$88,000 was collected from merchants for the LED light project. Carroll asked if a

plan were available to show where the lights would be connected and hung.

The lights would stretch from one gas light pole to another on a stainless-steel cable in a crisscross pattern, Steve Smarro said.

HPC Commissioner John Boecker said in order for him to feel comfortable in approving the lights, he wanted a survey of the current average footcandle rating on the mall and what it would be with the new lights.

"I'm very concerned it's going to be too bright," he said.

Carroll said the gaslights on the mall are not equally spaced. Pam Smarro said the strings of lights would not be installed on Jackson, Decatur or Ocean streets.

Steve Smarro said everyone in city government was thrilled with the project but now the BID "is left holding the bag." Carroll said the gaslights were installed on the mall to reflect the type of lighting used in Cape May.

Pessagno asked if it would be possible for the HPC to receive the requested information and expedite the approval.

A motion to table the application failed. The HPC agreed to create a committee of three to determine the brightness of the proposed lights and make a decision before the next monthly HPC meeting to expedite the approval process.

Coupland addressed

City Council at its Nov. 3 meeting reporting he offered a meeting on Oct. 19 with the BID committee but was advised the representative of the BID could not attend.

"To date, we have not been advised when the applicant can meet," he said. "It was also said that the city manager has advised the BID to go forward with this project, which would effectively bypass the HPC and violate the provisions of the city's cited zoning ordinance."

The HPC and its special committee cannot review and offer comment on the project without additional information, which the BID itself does not have such as where the lights would be strung, the intensity of the lighting and photos or video of how the mall would look upon completion based on other projects, Coupland said.

He called the proposed lighting a "character-defining change" for the mall. Coupland said he was troubled by hearing the lights across the mall were only the first phase of the project, which may include outlining buildings on the mall with lights.

Coupland said he tried

to get the current project stopped but lights continue to be strung on the mall. He said he wrote to the BID on Oct. 26 noting the HPC works in an advisory role to City Council for projects on city-owned property.

The applicants must submit a complete and comprehensive plan to the HPC, he said.

Voll said he met with a member of the BID and former City Council member Chris Bezaire, who was council's liaison to the BID. Voll said he met with Public Works Superintendent Joe Picard to discuss installation issues.

"I was not aware that they had to go before the HPC or else I would have told them that," Voll said, noting a number of compliments have been received on the new lighting on the mall.

Coupland said when the BID has a complete plan, the HPC subcommittee is available to review it and provide comments to council.

City solicitor Chris Gillin Schwartz said the HPC did not have veto power for the lighting project but functions in an advisory manner to council.

Steger takes over Beach Safety committee

Continued from Page A1

committee on this advisory committee and I'm just wondering if there is any type of conflict of interest," DeSatnick said.

Councilwoman Lorraine Baldwin, council's liaison to the committee, said the Beach Safety Advisory Committee is not a commission and there are no conflicts of interest. She said the committee has two open seats available if members of the public would like to serve.

Baldwin said there is a learning process for new members of the committee.

Committee member Harry Back, chief of Cape May's Beach Patrol, suggested beach safety curriculum be developed for local elementary schools. He said he knew a number of parents who take their children to Wildwood Crest beaches or the cove because they do not feel most of Cape May's beaches are safe.

DeSatnick said the cur-

riculum could be shared with other beach towns. Steger said short videos may be the best medium to use to reach elementary school students.

Lower Cape May Regional High School has a television studio, DeSatnick added.

Dennis DeSatnick, who was seated in the audience, said the Beach Patrol and Chad DeSatnick have educated more than 2,000 students on beach safety.

"I think the problem is the people that are visiting the area, tourists who are uninformed," Dennis DeSatnick said. "What we tried to do before the pandemic was have the beach taggers tell the visitors, when they handed out the booklets, of the danger in the surf zone."

He said he loved the idea of implementing a curriculum for students.

Back suggested the use of social media to reach visitors to Cape May. He said the city is the "poster child for beach replenishment" and the safety

problems it may produce.

The year before the city began receiving beach replenishment in 1991, three lifeguards from Ocean City, Md., came to Cape May and warned of neck and back injuries that could result from replenished beaches and how they dealt with it, Back said.

"Did it not happen that very first year?" Back asked. "We went from zero to 11 just like that."

Baldwin said she emailed U.S. Rep. Jeff Van Drew to ask for help with a permanent solution to the beach slope.

Chad DeSatnick said he spoke with Dr. Andrea McCoy, chief medical officer of Cape Regional Medical Center, who stated the percentage of beach injuries is higher in other communities than Cape May. She said lower extremity injuries are common, although some are head, shoulder and hand injuries.

She said when the data is reviewed to include

surf zone injuries only, Cape May demonstrates a higher percentage of injuries to the head, neck and upper extremities than other municipalities.

When Ocean City receives beach replenishment, it experiences injuries, according to Brian Pasternak of the Ocean City Beach Patrol, Chad DeSatnick said.

Dennis DeSatnick said the previous Beach Safety Advisory Committee met with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the state Department of Environmental Protection and Van Drew and brought the problem back to the city to have a coastal engineer create a demonstration beach project.

"The Army Corps has made recommendations; it's up to you and the city to follow up," he said.

Baldwin said her main reason for reaching out to Van Drew was if the federal government is responsible for the creation of the beach slope, the city needed to be proactive.

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12	2:21	2:38	8:03	8:52
13	3:26	3:39	9:10	9:46
14	4:22	4:33	10:10	10:34
15	5:10	5:20	11:03	11:17
16	5:51	6:03	11:50	11:55
17	6:29	6:43		12:34

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