

Lower police to step up patrols at farm, Lepore's Pit

By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave

ERMA — Residents in the vicinity of Honeysuckle and Idell roads gathered Aug. 21 on an abandoned farm property to meet with Lower Township officials and police regarding what they characterized as drug activity.

During a Lower Township Council meeting Aug. 20, an Erma resident complained the former vineyard had become a campsite for vagrants and drug users. Several streets from Holly Shores Campground to the Waggin' Tail Pet Store, off Route 9, back up to a privately owned farm that connects to a wildlife area known as Lepore's Pits. She said residents were concerned with drug activity taking place on the farm spilling into their neighborhood.

Lower Township Police Lt. Donald Vanaman, Sgt. First Class Kevin Lewis, Township Manager Jim Ridgway, Mayor Erik Simonsen, Building Official Gary Playford and Public Works Superintendent Gary Douglass met with the group of residents on the site. One resident had blocked a dirt access trail into the farm with cinder blocks to keep vehicles off the property. A chain and post had been knocked down a number of times, according to residents.

Resident Dennis Flynn



Jack Fichter/CAPE MAY STAR AND WAVE
Lower Township government and public safety officials meet with neighbors concerned over what they call drug activity at Lepore's Pit and a nearby abandoned farm.

said homeless people were staying near the parkway at Lepore's Pits. He said the woods on the farm is a meeting place for drug deals. An unlocked travel trailer and shed are on the property. A couple of known drug houses are nearby, Flynn said, where transactions take place, with the purchaser going into the woods to use the drugs.

He said some of the drug users wander into backyards and walk around the neighborhood. Vanaman said over the years, the owner of the farm had given permission to people to be on the property, which makes it harder to enforce trespassing violations.

Ridgway urged neighbors to call police whenever they

see someone entering the property. He said a greater police presence would be seen in the neighborhood. Vanaman said the property totals 80 acres and attracts township residents who enjoy the trails and ponds. He said patrols would be increased in the area.

"We have patrols in the area 24/7. The first step would be to deter people and then to react to anything suspicious as well as any community complaints," Vanaman said.

Trespassing on the property includes unauthorized camping, homeless people and drug activity, he said. In addition, locals love the property with its ponds, birds and wildlife, according to Vanaman. He noted



Jack Fichter/CAPE MAY STAR AND WAVE
Authorities investigate an RV parked at an abandoned farm in Lower Township. Neighbors have complained that the area has become a haven for vagrants and drug users.

the property has a number of ways of ingress and egress.

"We're going to work on restricting or limiting most of the access and get the community involved at these access points," Vanaman said. "We'll get people to call and we'll investigate immediately."

The police department has three all-terrain vehicles including a Polaris side-by-side as well as four-wheel-drive SUVs and a Ram pickup, he said.

Murphy vetoes airport tax breaks

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apply for Grow New Jersey tax credits, the bill would generate economic growth in the county and help foster regional synergies on drone technologies with the Federal Aviation Administration's William J. Hughes Technical Center in Egg Harbor Township.

Cape May City Council passed a resolution Aug. 7 urging Murphy to sign the bill, providing incentives to tech development at the airport. County Director of Strategic Business Development Carole Mattessich said the state Senate and Assembly passed bills endorsing the incentives but

the bill sat on the governor's desk awaiting his signature.

"Cape May County has not received any significant economic incentives for incoming businesses for a very lengthy period of time," she said.

Mattessich said the county needs to bend its economy toward industries that would create full-time, full-year, high-paying jobs. She said the bill would have assisted the county in meeting that challenge.

While loss of the incentives will not derail the county's tech village concept for the airport, it would have added to the toolbox to have a financial incentive to businesses, she said.

Economic incentives by way of tax credits typically will help in outreach efforts, Mattessich said, adding that an incentive can make the difference in where a company locates.

"We've been trying to get legislation like this put in to

place over several years," she said. "I hope for the next legislative session, there's going to be a concerted and yearlong effort to really focus on this."

Mattessich said Murphy in the past has expressed some reservations about the viability of tax credits as an economic incentive. She said Murphy has acknowledged that particularly in areas that need growth, they can be very important incentives.

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