

# City proposes changing beach panel focus, duties

## DeSatnick family questions motivation; chairman threatens to resign

By JACK FICHTER  
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY — City Council tabled a resolution to confirm the Beach Safety Advisory Committee and its “policy mission” after questioning from its long-time chairman Dennis DeSatnick.

The committee has not met this year. At a Sept. 21 council meeting, Councilman Shaine Meier said the resolution needed revision. He said he would like to concentrate on the successes of the committee including bulldozing the scarps when the sharp drop-offs develop on the beach following storms.

He noted the committee existed from previous administrations and asked to remove term limits for members of the committee from the resolution.

Councilwoman Lorraine Baldwin, who serves as liaison to the committee, said she wanted to include ocean water quality and accessibility to the beach. She said the committee needed to meet and define the area on which it wanted to focus.

The resolution stated it was in council’s best interest to confirm the committee’s mission.

Mayor Zack Mullock said water quality is a beach safety concern. He said council is seeking recommendations from the committee.

The resolution stated the committee had the “task of maintaining the city’s beaches and ensuring the safety of all responsible swimmers, surfers and other beach users.”

According to the resolution, the committee’s mission will include continuing and expanding public education regarding safe beach practices, evaluating issues relating to the beach slope and any modifications that may improve safety and reduce instance of injury, reviewing resources such as the city and county engineers and the state Department of Environmental Protection and federal government regarding the feasibility of a demonstration beach project regarding the impact of beach replenishment, evaluating issues relating to water quality, reviewing accessibility issues and undertaking any other studies or actions that may assist the city in improving beach management and safety.

The resolution named as committee members Todd DeSatnick, Steven Steger, Harry Back, Alex Coulter, Joe Picard and Sarah Werner. Named as consultants were Chad DeSatnick, Dennis DeSatnick, Jack Wichter, Baldwin, Cape Regional Medical Center, Cape May Urgent Care, AtlantiCare Trauma Center and Cooper Hospital. All member’s terms would expire at the end of the year, according to the resolution.

It noted by majority vote, the committee would designate a chairperson.

Dennis DeSatnick, who has served as the Beach Safety Advisory Committee’s chairman since its inception, asked the city clerk to read the resolution aloud to

the public since it was not posted on the city’s website last week.

“There are major changes in this compared to what the Beach Safety Committee has been designated to do since 2016,” he said. “Why, I don’t know.”

Anita DeSatnick said the tasks named in the resolution were different from the mission of the original resolution that created the committee in 2017. She said the resolution had the committee moving away from its original purpose, which was to address the injuries that occurred “because of the dangerous slope and surf zone due to beach replenishment.”

“By assuming that the newly appointed committee members will address issues such as beach replenishment, maintaining the beaches, checking water quality, evaluating the work of professional engineers and federal agencies, these are not addressing the surf zone,” Anita DeSatnick said.

She said her family has been passionate about the surf zone since her son Chad’s spinal cord injury in 2001. Since then, there have been many serious injuries in Cape May due to the dangers in the surf zone, swimmers becoming paralyzed, suffering neck injuries, spinal cord injuries and broken bones, Anita DeSatnick said.

Dennis DeSatnick said when he became aware of the proposed resolution, he reviewed all the work of the Beach Safety Advisory Committee. He said no one asked for his input into the resolution.

The previous city administration, of which three current council members were part of, gave the committee the opportunity to choose members from the community, the school, city department heads and citizens who had a background in beach safety, Dennis DeSatnick said.

“I ask you the question, ‘What have you done to im-

plement any-thing in the surf zone during your administration to date?’” he asked.

Baldwin said she met with Dennis DeSatnick and worked on scheduling a meeting of the committee for Sept. 27.

No other advisory committee has a policy mission, Dennis DeSatnick said.

He said all the city departments have done an excellent job working with the Beach Safety Advisory Committee. Dennis DeSatnick said the mission statement in the resolution did not address the surf zone where the injuries occur.

Mullock said the mission statement notes the committee would evaluate any and all issues relating to the beach slope and any modifications and improvements that may improve safety and reduce incidents of injury.

The city no longer has the services of a coastal engineer since it dismissed the firm of Mott MacDonald as the city engineer, Dennis DeSatnick said. He said the county Health Department was responsible for the ocean water quality, not the Beach Safety Advisory Committee.

“No one asked me if I was going to continue with this committee,” he said.

Under his leadership, the committee expanded the city’s beach education program including new beach signage and an upgraded beach public address system. Dennis DeSatnick prompted the city to appeal to the state to be permitted to smooth out weather-related scarps on the beach.

Data from the Beach Patrol and Fire Department on surf zone injuries is incomplete, Dennis DeSatnick said.

“So, if the direction you’re going is with this, I’ll be back at the podium and I’ll be resigning from your committee,” he said.

Chad DeSatnick said he suffered his spinal cord injury 20 years ago at Poverty Beach. He said Archer Senft

became a quadriplegic after suffering a spinal cord injury in the surf zone in Cape May eight years ago.

“What happened last month in August, that is absolutely, without a doubt, related to the surf zone,” Chad DeSatnick said, referring to the death of lifeguard Norman Inferrera III.

He said Mullock has been a huge proponent of Life Rolls On and the DeSatnick Foundation.

“My request is to do something, just don’t sit back,” Chad DeSatnick said, questioning why no meetings of the Beach Safety Advisory Committee were held before this year’s tourist season.

Mullock said he wanted to be careful about committees dictating their mission to City Council.

Meier said the committee has focused on surf-related injuries in the past.

“They’re the ones doing the work,” he said. “We need to hear a little bit more what they need from us.”

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30	3:38	3:53	9:02	10:25
1	4:39	4:51	10:05	11:14
2	5:31	5:43	11:03	11:58
3	6:18	6:29	11:55	
4	7:01	7:13	12:39	12:44
5	7:43	7:57	1:19	1:32
6	8:25	8:40	1:59	2:20

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