

Cape May board rejects Hotel Icona parking plan

By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY — A year ago, Icona Resorts purchased its third hotel in Cape May County, the Palace Hotel of Cape May, with plans for a complete renovation. It was renamed Icona Cape May.

During a Planning Board meeting Jan. 24, Eustace Mita and Palavest LLC received preliminary and final site plan approval for the installation of a swimming pool and landscaping but was denied approval of a parking plan that would have created 26 back-out spaces on Philadelphia Avenue.

The board voted 7-2 against the parking plan, citing the safety of pedestrians and loss of 11 public parking spaces.

Planning Board engineer Craig Hurlless said the existing number of units and bedrooms in the three-story hotel had come into question. He said he was more concerned with the number of sleeping units because the city's parking regulations are derived from the number of sleeping units. In 1984, 31 units were approved for the hotel, he said.

"I don't know how we got to 56. I don't know that we need to and I'll rely on our attorney's input with regards to that," Hurlless said. "It is my opinion in considering this application, we're considering for what is shown on the plans, 56 units."

He said 50 one-bedroom units and six two-bedroom units were proposed, creat-

ing 62 sleeping units for the purpose of parking calculations.

Attorney Stephen Nehmad represented Mita. He said the number of rooms has not been changed since Mita purchased the hotel. He said 25 units have an entry vestibule about 8 feet by 5 feet with a door on two sides entering two sleeping units. He said those 25 units are two rental units, "25 times two equals 50."

At the end of the building facing Beach Avenue, there are six units that are suites. Those six suites, two on each floor, each has two sleeping units. He said the 50 one-bedroom units at one time were considered as one two-bedroom unit, which would have been 25 plus six, somebody looking at the older resolutions thought it was 31. Nehmad said Mita looked at the hotel by the number of keys that were utilized for rental units. He said there have always been 56 keys. The 56 keys equate to 62 sleeping units under a city ordinance because the two-bedroom units require a parking space for each unit, he said. Nehmad said the parking requirement would be 62 spaces plus 10 spaces for employees.

Mita said the building was constructed as a 56-unit hotel. Nehmad said the parking lot has 30 spaces and that Mita proposed expanding it to 60 spaces. Planning Board attorney Richard King said parking regulations are tied only to sleeping rooms. On a 2008 application, there were 47 sleeping units, he said. King noted the hotel's 2016

mercantile license application listed 31 rental units.

Hurlless said the applicant was proposing to construct a 195-square-foot addition to the hotel to house pool equipment and a bathroom, a swimming pool, a deck, concrete paver walkways and structural support piling. Some parking spaces would be removed and relocated along with widening of the driveway and the addition of four new parking spaces along New Jersey Avenue.

The application requested elimination of 11 on-street parking spaces and creation of 26 back-out parking spaces located partially within the Philadelphia Avenue right of way. Those spaces required variances for parking within the building setback, parking within the clear site triangle, undersize parking and curb cut length.

"From my observations, back-out parking has been frowned upon in Cape May due to potential conflicts with both vehicles, bicyclists and pedestrians alike," Hurlless said.

He added that the board has historically required existing properties to eliminate back-out parking wherever possible and "traditionally not allowed new back-out parking to be permitted."

Back-out parking across the street at the Grand Hotel could produce a potential conflict, he said. Hurlless said pedestrian traffic is heavy past the hotel to the beach.

Nehmad said employees could park at Icona Diamond Beach and use a



Jack Fichter/CAPE MAY STAR AND WAVE

The Cape May Planning Board denied the application for variances for back-out parking on Philadelphia Avenue sought by the Hotel Icona's owner, Eustace Mita.

shuttle bus to the Cape May hotel.

Hurlless said the minimal parking space size in Cape May is nine feet by 18 feet while the applicant proposed parking stalls of 9 feet by 14 feet. The applicant proposed a curb cut to extend the full length of the 26 parking spaces located along Philadelphia Avenue, which is discouraged by ordinance in Cape May, he said.

Rules require pools to be at least 10 feet from any property line and may not be in the required front yard setback area. Hurlless said the pool and patio would be within 10 feet of the property line.

Mita said the pool was only 350 square feet, smaller

than most residential pools, and that the Icona is the only hotel on Beach Avenue without a pool.

During public comment, Tom Martenstein said he has lived across the street from the hotel for 24 years.

Martenstein said the back-out spaces on Philadelphia Avenue would cause pedestrians to walk in the street. Elimination of 11 metered spaces would push those cars into the neighborhood, he said.

"I'd also remind the board Philadelphia Avenue is the principle access to beachfront for all of the beaches east of Madison Avenue," he said.

Bill Bezaire, longtime chairman of the Planning Board, recused himself from

the application due to owning property in the neighborhood. He said originally the hotel had 31 suites that included living and dining areas and the parking was configured for such. Bezaire said the Planning Board never approved 62 units.

John Allison, general manager of the neighboring Grand Hotel, said minimum-stay requirements at the hotel decrease the amount of movement of cars from the Grand Hotel's back-out spaces on Philadelphia Avenue.

New York Avenue resident Tim Walsh said it was not safe to walk on the Grand Hotel side of Philadelphia Avenue due to back-out parking. He said he did not believe there was any location in Cape May with back-out parking on both sides of the street.

Nehmad said back-out parking has worked successfully along the Beach Avenue right of way and would work safely on a street with much less traffic. He said the applicant would landscape the property, abating a lack of storm water management on site, and construct more on-site parking.

Nehmad asked if the board would vote on the storm water system, trash enclosure and landscaping granted without back-out parking.

After about three and a half hours, Mita said he was very disappointed on the denial of back-out parking. He said he would create a very nice landscape because he loves Cape May.

Szczur hosts fundraiser for bone marrow testing

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three-hour procedure in 2010, he donated his bone

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Split PG-13 11:20, 2:00, 4:40, 7:20, 9:55
La La Land PG-13 11:50, 3:20, 6:50, 9:35
****A Dog's Purpose PG** 11:30, 1:50, 4:20, 7:00, 9:25
Hidden Figures PG 11:55, 3:40, 6:30, 9:20
Sing PG 11:00, 1:30, 4:10, 6:40, 9:10
****Resident Evil: The Final Chapter PG-13** 11:15, 2:20, (5:00, 7:40, 10:00)
****Fifty Shades Darker** (Thursday Premiere) R [7:00, 9:40]
Monster Trucks PG 11:10, 1:50, (4:30)
XXX: Return of Xander Cage PG-13 (7:10, 9:45)
****The Lego Batman Movie** (Thursday Premiere) PG [5:00, 7:25, 9:45]
****No Passes (Fri-Wed) [Thursday]**

marrow, which he would later learn saved the life of a 4-year-old from Ukraine named Anastasia. The match, which was considered a 1-in-80,000 long shot, was perfect.

The Friday night benefit was designed to raise money to support the non-profit organization that pays the cost of testing and ultimately bone marrow donations. Per the foundation website, bone marrow

donation registration can cost \$100 per person. With 10,000 new registrants each year, registration costs close to \$1 million.

At \$80 a ticket, attendees enjoyed a gourmet dinner buffet, open bar and hors d'oeuvres. The after-dinner program featured a video presentation on Szczur's involvement with the bone marrow program.

Produced by ESPN, the video documents the 2011 skype meeting between Szczur and Anastasia's family. Anastasia, with

blond hair and glasses, told Szczur she loved him. She blew him a kiss. Ivan and Marina, her parents, called him family and expressed their gratitude over and over again. There were few dry eyes in the room at that point.

Other fundraising activities included a live and silent auction featuring autographed memorabilia such as baseball bats and jerseys used and worn by Szczur. Guests had the opportunity to purchase a flute of champagne from a table full of glasses. One of the glasses picked randomly contained a \$3,000 diamond.

Cape May Brewing Co. hosted a Szczur-the-Pint event to raise awareness for the Andy Talley Bone Marrow Foundation earlier in the week. First it created a special beer to commemorate the 175th anniversary of Villano-



John Cooke/Special to the STAR AND WAVE
Lower Township resident Matt Szczur donated signed jerseys from his days playing at Villanova University to a fundraiser for the Andy Talley Bone Marrow Foundation.

va University. The Cubs outfielder then helped create a one-off special Demisemiseptcentennial Ale, conditioned with orange, pineapple and coconut. The brewery sold out

of the special beer. Last year's event raised nearly \$80,000. This year, organizers hoped the 2nd annual Szczur-the-Day dinner would exceed that amount.

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DATE	HIGH		LOW	
	A.M.	P.M.	A.M.	P.M.
1	10:46	11:17	4:25	4:57
2	11:36		5:20	5:46
3	12:13	12:34	6:22	6:42
4	1:16	1:40	7:30	7:43
5	2:25	2:53	8:42	8:47
6	3:34	4:03	9:50	9:52
7	4:38	5:08	10:53	10:52
8	5:36	6:05	11:50	11:49

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