

Taxpayers group wants more info on Cape May website

By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY — More information, please.

That was the request Taxpayers Association of Cape May President Kate Wyatt made to City Council on July 1 regarding the city's website.

Wyatt read a statement from the board of directors of the association thanking the city for live streaming its meetings on the Web, but then said the city's website needs more supporting documentation relating to items on meeting agendas.

"The Taxpayers Association of Cape May encourages the City Council and administrative staff to find a solution to the problem of inadequate information available to the public before relevant meetings," she stated. "Supporting

documentation informs the local and out-of-town taxpayers on items that are pending approval by the council."

Wyatt cited the Middletown Township website as a good example of an informative municipal website. She quoted a 2011 Monmouth University Poll noting "municipal websites are the first place New Jerseyans go for information about their hometowns. ... Nearly 6 in 10 say they have looked up information about their town on the Internet — about the same number who say they have paid a visit to town hall."

She said residents are more likely to visit a municipal website than to call or write a city official.

"Anyone who is involved with an organization that owns and maintains a website knows it is a struggle to keep informa-

tion fresh and on message," Wyatt read from a statement. "The city has the complex task of keeping all taxpayers — primary and secondary home taxpayers — informed."

If a resident can walk in to the City Clerk's Office for information and the City Clerk can print a file and hand it to the person, that same file can be converted to a PDF format and attached to the online agenda for an upcoming council meeting, she said.

"There is minimal additional time or effort required, no new web page, no extra cost," Wyatt read from a statement.

She said the most recent council meeting minutes available on the city's website are from April 15, which she called unacceptable.

Wyatt said an agenda should not disappear from the website after a meeting is held.

City Manager Bruce MacLeod said meeting minutes must be finalized and signed by council before they can be posted online. He said while it may sound as if a task like scanning a document to create a PDF file takes only a minute, other work taking place in the City Clerk's Office must be taken into account.

Councilman Bill Murray suggested documents be placed online after a council meeting.

Mayor Edward Mahaney said the bar is continually being raised for public access, transparency and openness in government. He said when he returned to council in 2008, the city did not have a functioning website but now has two sites.

Mahaney said he proposed more money be appropriated for information technology but he has not received support

from council on the matter. He said a tremendous volume of people visit the City Clerk's Office.

The staff drops what they are doing and fills their requests, some of which can be complex and time-consuming, he said. In addition, the clerk receives requests for information via email and phone, the mayor said.

"In the next year, we're going to have to take one position, a significantly large salary, and have that person handling this kind of information gathering and distribution not just electronically but for OPRA requests. It's become a very expensive process," Mahaney said.

He said the city has been examining how it could add pages to its website.

Deputy Mayor Jack Wichterman noted a position is

unfilled in the City Clerk's Office, putting more demand on the office staff.

MacLeod said a search function needs to be added to the city's website. He said creating a PDF file of a document was one thing, but posting it to a website was another process.

The July 1 meeting agenda with minutes and resolutions would occupy 50 pages of information, said MacLeod, noting it was a short agenda.

"If I'm required to scan and post every ordinance prior to every meeting, I probably need one other person in my office, City Clerk Louise Cummiskey said.

She said she sometimes works until 7 p.m. on a Friday prior to a council meeting.

Cummiskey said another page would be required on the city's website to post additional documents.

Single-stream recycling helps boost collection, rebate check from MUA

Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY — Single-stream recycling has encouraged residents and visitors here to pitch in and recycle bottles, cans and paper in larger amounts than last year.

According to Mayor Edward Mahaney, the city received a check for \$27,806 from the county Municipal Utilities Authority, an increase of \$10,000 from last year's rebate.

The city followed the county's directive to begin single-stream recycling in April 2013. The mayor said by allowing the public to put all recyclables in one container, the city's rate of recycling increased.

Paper recyclables include newspapers

with inserts, office paper, junk mail, shredded paper in a clear plastic bag, magazines, phone books, paperback books, clean pizza boxes, gift, shoe and cereal boxes with liners removed and powdered-detergent boxes.

Glass food and beverage containers for recycling include clear, green, brown bottles, jars and jugs. Aluminum, tin and steel cans of five gallons or less may be recycled.

Plastic bottles numbered 1 through 7 are recyclable, including margarine tubs, microwave trays and yogurt containers, health, beauty and cleaning product containers including buckets and landscape pots of five gallons or less.

Timeline uncertain for cleanup at dog park on Lafayette Street

By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY — The city's dog park will close for as long as two years when Jersey Central Power and Light begins remediation of contaminated soil on the site, but just when that will begin is still in question.

The dog park on Lafayette Street is part of the site of a former coal gasification plant that left widespread contamination underground. From 1853 to 1937, the plant provided Cape May with gas for heating, cooking and lighting.

In the process, Benzene, Naphthalene and other chemicals were left underground.

Through a number of mergers, JCP&L inherited the site that included the former Vance's Bar property, the city's dog park and property on the corner of St. Johns and Lafayette streets. JCP&L has been designing a remediation plan that requires the approval of the state Department of Environmental Protection (DEP).

City Manager Bruce MacLeod said the city has been working with JCP&L, which has allowed a dog park on the lot.

"The site needs further remediation through the cooperative effort with JCP&L, NJDEP and the city of Cape May to resolve brown site

conditions at the property that exist because it was an old coal gasification property going back many years ago," he said.

MacLeod said a cycle of remediation was scheduled to start last September but the work did not begin and the dog park has remained open.

The city is waiting to hear whether JCP&L intends to commence the remediation this fall, he said. If not, the remediation could begin in 2015.

When the remediation begins, it will be from September to May, he said.

At the request of a user, MacLeod agreed to have the city place fresh mulch in the dog park.

FEMA map

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mitigation projects.

In a few weeks, a meeting will be held for local officials with FEMA and the state Department of Environmental Protection to discuss the flood study, Mahaney said. He said a public meeting would be held on a Saturday morning after Labor Day at Convention Hall.

The city held a similar meeting in June 2013 that attracted more than 400 participants. After a presentation of preliminary work maps, homeowners met with FEMA officials on a one-on-one basis.

Mahaney said there would be an appeal period for 90 days that will run from about Oct. 1

to the end of December. All appeals will be heard before the timeline starts for the adoption of the Flood Insurance Rate Maps (FIRM.)

The earliest the FIRM maps would be approved is July 2015, Mahaney said.

"They will be the final maps on which construction permits will be issued upon, on which your flood insurance policies will be based, and they will be in existence for at least five years," he said.

City officials initially found the preliminary maps were virtually the same as the preliminary work maps that were issued last August other than FEMA making a few adjustments the administration requested, Mahaney said.

He said the adjustments relieve a couple of unfair situations that were not based on

accurate information.

"Obviously, the preliminary work maps and these new preliminary maps are much more realistic and scientifically based and much more favorable to the property owners in Cape May than the advisory flood maps (ABFE) that were put out immediately after Hurricane Sandy," Mahaney said.

He said property owners that have overall concerns about the mapping and flood impact study may forward those concerns to the city administration, which would in turn forward them to FEMA.

"There's no doubt in my mind, with the community input we've had over the last two years, that we're going to be in very good shape in terms of prevention, mitigation and flood insurance premium rates for our residents," Mahaney said.

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