

Township coffers benefit from work-safety success

By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave

VILLAS — A safe year for Lower Township employees is putting money in the bank, according to Lower Township Manager Jim Ridgway.

"Thanks to the due diligence of all the department heads in getting the employees to safety seminars and really abiding by good procedures to reduce our liability in a lot of situations, accidents, etc., we received last week a \$123,000 check" from the Joint Insurance Fund (JIF), he said.

The township anticipated its premiums for JIF to increase in 2018. Instead they

will be reduced next year, Ridgway said during a Township Council meeting Dec. 18.

"The team effort has brought considerable savings and a nice rebate back to the township," he said.

Departments will be moving into the renovated Public Safety Building at the county airport. Ridgway said courts will return to the building from Township Hall and rescue and fire safety are expected to move into the building in the next four to six weeks as well as police. He said those sections of the building are 95 percent complete.

Ridgway said grants coordinator Colleen Crippen opened 17 new housing loan

options for residents, which added to the \$1.4 million the township already had available to lend residents to improve their properties.

Last week, the township received a \$100,000 Small Cities Housing Grant that can be used to restore the historic Nathaniel Foster House.

"We had been anticipating going to Open Space right away to repair the roof and get the exterior proper," Ridgway said.

He said he and Councilman Tom Conrad toured the home last week. The Small Cities grant gives the township a year to 18-month head start on the restoration project, Ridgway said.

The township's Finance Department has received its 14th consecutive year of clean audits with no recommendations from the state, according to Ridgway.

The process is under way for the creation of the 2018 township budget. He said the budget would be presented during the first council meeting in February.

Ridgway said the township would attempt to enter the Community Ratings

System (CRS) as a class seven. CRS affords discounts on flood insurance to residents.

"We were initially looking to go in as a (class) nine," he said.

The township is finally in a position to prove its meeting the minimum standards of the National Flood Insurance Program, according to Township Tax Collector Jennifer Dowe. The township had over 150 negative

rated properties, Ridgway said.

"Most of them have gone away with the help of telling people what they had to do, how they can do it and how they can get some funds," he said.

The clerk's office handled 158 marriage licenses, 1,300 dog license renewals and answered more than 200 Open Public Records Act requests last year, Ridgway said.

Design standards

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he liked the intent of the ordinance but did not like all of language contained within.

"With our master plan, we are supposed to be going green and looking how this thing reads, it looks like we can't have windmills, we can't have solar," he said.

Maslow said he could understand not mounting solar panels on a historic building but solar technology may develop to the point where solar tiles are indistinguishable from standard roof shingles. He said the HPC had wide latitude to even stop solar tiles on buildings.

"I really don't see how anybody can do anything green, solar, alternative energy with this type of ordinance," Maslow said.

The ordinance addresses materials used for windows in the historic district, favoring replacement with the original type of window. He questioned if repaired wooden windows would be as energy efficient as replacement windows such as double pane.

King said if homeowners installed vinyl windows, wind turbines and satellite dishes, the "flavor" of the historic district would diminished. He said federal guidelines also affect the proposed local ordinance.

Planning Board member Patricia Hendricks, who is also a city councilwoman, said while the intent of the ordinance was good, it is limiting by its language. King said the ordinance does not prohibit solar panels outside the historic district.

Planning Board member Harley Shuler said the ordinance specifies "replacing like windows with like windows." Hendricks said the first time council saw the ordinance it had a window component.

"It was arbitrarily taken out," she said.

During public comment, resident Christine Miller

said her home contributes to the historic district with a roof facing south and she wants to install solar panels. She asked if federal guidelines indicated Cape May would lose its National Historic Landmark status if solar panels were allowed on historic homes.

King said the more deviations from federal guidelines that occur, such as solar panels on historic homes visible from the street, the more likely the city could eventually lose its designation.

"It counts against you, you kind of lose your credibility a bit and you can lose your designation," he said. "It's a creeping thing."

Miller said according to a Rutgers University professor, if conversion is not made to alternative energy, the ocean could rise from climate change an inch a year while it is currently rising one inch every 10 years. She said wetlands would disappear and Cape May would be in a "bad state or not here."

Miller suggested making Cape May an energy coop and placing solar panels on all non-historic homes. King said the ordinance does allow solar shingles that look like standard roof shingles.

HPC Chairman Warren Coupland said federal historic standards, written in 2016, allow solar panels if they are not visible from the street and do not damage or obscure historic features of a historic home.

He said putting solar panels on a more contemporary house in the historic district would not be appropriate.

Coupland said a number of studies on windows and

energy efficiency showed a properly repaired wood window with a storm window was as energy efficient or more so than a double-pane replacement window.

Coupland said solar roof tiles are "shiny." He said Tesla was supposedly creating a solar tile with a matte finish.

He said he was not aware whether such tiles would cover an entire roof or be spliced into an existing roof.

"Every day we make decisions about what is appropriate from an historic perspective, what it looks like. What we're involved in is making the city of Cape May as close to the original appearance and maintaining the National Historic Landmark," Coupland said.

He said Cape May's visual appearance could be diminished to the point that the city loses its tourist trade before it loses its landmark status.

"I think it's important that we realize that the industry is tourism, if we lose that, we're going to lose our town as we know it," Planning Board member Bob Elwell said.

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