

City taxpayers group wants action on beach slope

CAPE MAY — The Taxpayers Association of Cape May issued a statement on the city's beach slope and safety. It was read into the record at City Council's meeting March 2 by member Bill Murray, a former councilman.

To City Council and the City Manager:

We are less than 90 days away from the beach season. In late December, taxpayers learned that mechanical intervention seasonally, or during the season to make it safer, has joined beach replenishment and back bay dredging as normal, expensive, periodic activities. Expensive is the best word to use here.

The beach is a fun-filled tourist attraction that is interwoven into the attraction and economy of Cape May. No doubt about it. It has been for over 100 years. It fact, it was the number one attraction based on the Temple survey five years ago. What has changed?

We have transitioned over time to a significant rental town occupied by families who are renting here for that Jersey shore vacation. They

are here for the beach. Each one of these family rentals holds the hopes of a great vacation and the promise of sun and fun on the beach. Sadly, these vacations can be spoiled by a beach injury, some very serious.

What can we do as a community to help spread the word about potential beach injury? You have set up a committee. Yet, no action has been taken. This "inaction" is a disservice to all residents and to the thousands of tourists expected this summer. We all know that this issue is vital and we see no end in sight. Your priorities need to be readjusted.

We must inform and alert each and every person who sets foot on the beach of the inherent dangers of the water. We believe it is imperative to educate the beach going public about these safety issues — and do it now. The current method — changing the color of the flags on beach conditions — needs additional support. Not all beach goers look at the flag color, or even know what the color means.

Taxpayers support the

committee that was formed and we would like to bring a few suggestions to the table to improve the beach safety program for this 2016 season.

— Create signs at each one of the 28 beach entrances with the simple short message alert about beach safety. This goal is clearly stated in the recent MPAP or waterway access plan — "Provide and maintain clear informative signage for access locations."

— Create a training program to make it a part of all beach support personnel — lifeguards, junior lifeguards, beach taggers and beach tag sales to inform the public of beach safety. Make it part of their job to join in this effort to reduce beach injury.

— Informed and alert beach taggers who are stationed at the entrance to the beach are a critical component of this process. They interact with each beachgoer as they come on to the beach. They can ask the question "Are you aware about our beach safety program?"

— Add stronger emphasis on beach safety to the existing pamphlet regarding the shore break:

Avoid diving under the waves in shallow water.

Avoid standing with your back to the waves.

Avoid bodysurfing or body boarding straight into the beach or "over the falls." Instead, ride the shoulder of the wave parallel to the shoreline

— Distribute. Ask Realtors, business owners, tour guides, all personnel engaged in Cape May's tourist economy to make it part of their daily routine to educate the public. New people are arriving in town every rental changeover, every one or two weeks — about 40,000 a season — at last estimate.

— Measure. Begin reporting on current beach incidents and post it on the Beach Patrol website to evaluate and tweak the program. I am sure we capture these statistics. An example is the reporting conducted by the Rehoboth, Del., Beach Patrol. They are:

1. Lost Children
2. Rescues (Assists/Major)
3. *Medical*(Medical) - cuts, splinters, eye car, jelly fish stings
4. Spinals (Neck)
5. Beach Evacuations (storms, lightning)

6. Junior Lifeguard program

Taxpayers should not be responsible for a problem that is caused by natural seawater ebb and flow. It is foolish to think that we can put the finger in the dike and hold back the water — we need the replenishment.

If any local tax dollars are needed to fix the problem, direct users of the beach should pay for it through the beach tag cost with funds dispersed through the beach

utility. We have a lot more beach issues headed our way — Gov. Chris Christie and the dunes, access to the beach plans through the MPAP and future storms.

In closing, we urge this council to direct the City Manager not to delay any longer in the interest of public safety. If it saves one family from injury, it is worth the investment of time and effort.

Members of the board for the Taxpayers Association of Cape May

City Council appoints Belasco as tax assessor

By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY — City Council appointed Louis M. Belasco on March 2 as the city's new tax assessor. He replaces Mike Jones, who retired late last year after 13 years in that position.

Mayor Edward Mahaney

said the city conducted a search for a new tax assessor with help from county Tax Administrator Ray Brown.

Belasco will fill out a term that ends June 30 and continue into a four-year term beginning July 1 and ending in 2020.

Mahaney said Belasco is a native of Wildwood and

a graduate of Drexel University. He said Belasco has a strong background in governmental service, in appraising and tax assessment and has worked with planning and zoning boards.

Belasco served as tax assessor and business administrator of North Wildwood. Councilman Shaine Meier

said during Belasco's interview with council, he stated he would focus on customer service.

"It's a great honor for us to appoint someone of your quality and talent," Mahaney said.

Belasco said he was very impressed with the way Cape May is run.

Meier wants ramp at post office

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raise the funds needed.

"Basically they said it was grandfathered and we're not required to do it because there is another post office in the 08204 area," said Meier, referring to a North Cape May branch.

He said he wrote a letter to the chairman of buildings and grounds of the U.S. Postal Service.

"I have received little to nothing in support," Meier said. "It's a civil rights issue. People with special needs, including senior citizens, have a right to be self-sufficient."

He said a ramp would benefit the post office, noting ADA regulations have been in effect since 1990.

"I have personally seen on numerous times people walking up those marble steps with a walker, backward," Meier said.

He noted the post office could face lawsuits if someone fell entering the building. Meier said he was seeking the support of City Council, the mayor, city manager and the public. He asked City Solicitor Tony Monzo if there was some way to put pressure on the post office to install a ramp. He said there is a question that even if the Cape May Post Office has been grandfathered, is it not required to be ADA compliant?

"It is federal property under federal jurisdiction and we don't have any enforcement authority over the post office, but council can possibly consider a resolution asking them to look into it and try and make some changes," Monzo said.

Meier said the post office has not done any exterior renovations since 1990 and as such is not required to update any access points.

Mayor Edward Mahaney said the building predated World War II and federal law allows them a status where they do not have to make any improvements.

"Should they start to make some improvements in any area, then they have to come in full compliance," said the mayor.

He said neither he nor Meier was aware of what other areas would have to be brought into compliance. He noted a ramp was present on the back of the building.

Mahaney suggested setting up a meeting with Clifford to include himself, Meier, City Manager Bruce MacLeod and Monzo to discuss what can be done.

"That's not a decision those employees will make," Mahaney said. "That decision is coming out of headquarters."

He said there has been a movement for the last 20 years to move the centralized resort post offices off the islands and put them on the mainland in one central post office. Mahaney said there was a move 10 years

ago to close the Cape May Post Office and move it to Rio Grande.

"In my opinion, the post office is similar to your schools and your churches, it's a key part of your community," he said.

The mayor suggested handling the ramp request diplomatically so that a move is not started again to relocate the post office out of town.

Meier said a ramp behind the post office building is not ADA compliant. He noted

the public cannot access the back of the post office, which is displaying a "no trespassing" sign.

Mahaney suggested the existing ramp in the rear of the building be altered along with signage.



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