

Nine years later, city still talking about parking, traffic

By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY — A lack of parking spaces and the possibility of constructing a parking garage have been a part of master plan discussions for decades, as has the concept of making Lafayette and Washington streets one way.

The city's next master plan, slated to be completed in a year, will contain a section dealing with traffic circulation and parking.

During a Planning Board meeting March 27, board engineer Craig Hurless reviewed goals in the city's 2009 master plan update — in part to see what has been accomplished since that date — regarding parking and traffic circulation.

Objectives from 2009 included encouraging alternate circulation modes and networks to minimize and efficiently move traffic in and out of the city, encouraging restoration of railroad traffic and other high-volume transportation modes, minimizing the negative impact of bus traffic on the city's street system, continuing to explore centralized and satellite parking and expanding the number of parking spaces.

Additional objectives included studying the feasibility of converting Lafayette and Washington streets into one-way roads and encouraging use of bicycle and walking as an alternative to driving.

Of the objectives from the 2009 update, Lafayette and Washington streets have not been converted to one-way streets. The objective of shuttle service has been fulfilled with trolley service from the

elementary school parking lot to the mall and motels for several summers. The railroad is no longer operating, Hurless said.

Key issues from 2009 included the city being a dense, compact town with shops, restaurants, recreational areas and historic attractions located in close proximity, which supports walking and bicycle riding. Cape May has a seasonal parking issue with parking occupancy rates at full capacity, according to Hurless. The city lacks a centrally located site for parking, according to the 2009 report.

The ability to provide off-street parking is the primary factor in limiting commercial growth and is particularly prevalent in hotels, motels and guesthouse, according to the report. Hurless said applications before the Planning Board face limits of how many parking spaces can be located on their lot rather than issues with buildings and lot coverage.

The majority of bicycle and pedestrian accidents occurred on five streets: West Perry Street, Sunset Boulevard, Jackson Street, Washington Street, Lafayette Street and Beach Avenue, according to the report. Councilwoman Patricia Hendricks said the city's Bicycle and Pedestrian Safety Committee determined bicycle accidents in 2015-16 were underreported.

"They just pull themselves up and go on," Hendricks said.

Long pedestrian crossing distances are an issue along Beach Avenue, which must be crossed to get to the beach and Promenade, Hurless said.

He said traffic study data for the 2002 master plan re-examination showed 70 percent of traffic on Lafayette Street is incoming, while 70 percent of traffic on Washington Street was outgoing. With Lafayette Street one-way inbound and Washington Street one-way outbound, Sydney Avenue would function as a sort of turnaround, Hurless said.

He said the concept of making the roads one way has been in numerous master plans and discussed by a number of city councils over the years.

"It's a good idea if the city wants to develop pedestrian-friendly routes and linkages," Hurless said. "This offers the opportunity for bike lanes along those routes to make those routes safer."

He noted there were issues with the concept. Board member Jerry Inderwies Jr., the city's former fire chief, said making Lafayette and Washington streets one way would affect emergency services response time from the firehouse on Franklin Street.

"With the size of the apparatus, you'd even be hard pressed to make the left turn on Madison to Lafayette and then come back south again to get to properties, the school on Lafayette ...," he said. "It definitely impacts public safety as far as response of emergency vehicles."

Inderwies said the fire department's ladder truck cannot turn on Jefferson Street or Queen Street. He said Madison Avenue is questionable. To reach the 900 block of Lafayette Street, a firetruck would have to go almost to the

end of Washington Street and loop around, Inderwies said.

"That could cost you minutes, especially if traffic bottlenecks in the summertime trying to get out of town," he said.

Hurless said the board could decide to keep the concept in the master plan re-examination for further study. He said there may be an engineering solution.

The 2009 master plan suggested construction of a parking garage on one of the city-owned parking lots. A parking garage was also suggested for the municipal complex, he said.

Additional parking at Lafayette Street Park was suggested. Hurless said some of the park funding came from the state Green Acres and Blue Acres programs.

"Because the city has utilized those funds for those improvements, it does not necessarily mean you can develop a parking facility only at that site," he said.

Hurless said some parking was permitted but it must be related to the open space and Blue Acres projects being developed on the site.

"I don't know if Lafayette Street Park can be the end all, be all solution to your parking issues, but it certainly can help," he said.

The most recent park plan showed 90 parking spaces, Hurless said.

Planning Board Chairman Bill Bezaire asked if some of the funding could be returned. Hurless said he did not think that was an option.

A 2007 city vision plan recommended enhancement of the train/bus sta-

tion and Welcome Center.

"Obviously the train station is not functioning anymore, so we may want to talk about what the bus depot and visitor center can become. It is not being utilized fully," Hurless said.

Bezaire said the city's Historic Preservation Commission does not permit parking in side yards, which would allow cars to be parked off the street. Hurless said that was a point that should be discussed with the HPC. He said city parking requirements are "a bit outdated," not having been updated with current standards.

Bezaire said he has been a longtime proponent of a parking garage, something that never comes to fruition. He said a possibility exists that some residents or business owners would purchase spaces in a parking garage, helping the city recoup construction

costs.

The useful life of the city's public housing project has passed, Hurless said. He said the property would need to be redeveloped at some point with new units.

"Do you incorporate some type of parking with that?" Hurless asked.

He said units could be built "up" several stories to free ground space.

Board member David Martz asked if a study has ever been undertaken to determine how many parking spaces the city needs to make up its deficit. Hurless said such a detailed study has not been undertaken.

"Looking for parking causes the traffic," Hendricks said. "One causes the other."

Bezaire said visitors come to town, can't find a place to park and keep driving around and around the town.

WCM works to lower flood insurance rates

By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave

WEST CAPE MAY — Reduced flood insurance rates may be on the way for residents as the borough prepares to submit an application to join the Community Ratings System (CRS).

During a Board of Commissioners meeting March 28, tax assessor Lou Belasco said he received information needed from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to complete an application for the CRS.

"We do have some properties that will probably need to be addressed, but I think it's best to get the application in, get the ball rolling," he said.

Assistance will come from FEMA and the state Department of Environmental Protection about how to address properties that do not meet flood standards.

"Some could be as simple as just putting flood vents into a property," Belasco said.

He said the borough had 24 properties with a negative rating, not built in accordance with flood standards and built after the borough's first flood insurance rate map was created.

Belasco said the borough has 61 "submit to rate" properties where the flood risk has not been determined. He said some of those properties could be addressed with as simple a fix as documenting for FEMA the flood risk.

The 24 properties were the main concern because they are not compliant with the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP), he said. Belasco said the

NFIP is meeting minimum standards while the CRS represents best practices within the flood insurance industry put forth by FEMA.

"Before you start to do the best practices, they want to make sure that you're at least hitting the minimum standard," he said.

The borough needs to score 500 points, which would be produced by the borough having a flood ordinance and flood information on its website, Belasco said. The borough is also working on producing an inventory of open space,

he said.

Every 500 points the borough scores with the CRS would give residents living in the Special Flood Hazard Area a 5 percent discount on federal flood insurance, according to Belasco. If the borough receives a Class 9 rating, a 5 percent discount would be offered on all flood insurance.

He said as the borough moves up in classes, each one requiring another 500 points, a further 5 percent

reduction is offered for residents in the Special Flood Hazard Area with those outside that area capped at a 10 percent discount.

FEMA provided the borough with a list of properties that suffer repetitive loss.

"We had four, three of them aren't even in West Cape May," Belasco said.

He said some towns may have a couple of hundred repetitive loss properties, some severe.

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