

Improvement plans changed for end of parkway

By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave

VILLAS — Changes were made to plans for improvements to the end of the Garden State Parkway at Exit 0 since the New Jersey Turnpike Authority presented them to the public earlier this year.

At an Aug. 3 Lower Township Council meeting, Councilman Erik Simonsen said he had received a letter from state Sen. Jeff Van Drew warning of the changes to the plans.

“We thought the interchange at Exit 0 was a done deal and it was going to make everybody happy, but that’s usually never the case,” said Simonsen. “We had our final public meeting and they showed us the plans. It looked great, everybody was happy and they have since changed some of those plans,

so we do have some concerns.” He noted Van Drew supported changes suggested by Lower Township to the Turnpike Authority’s plans. Simonsen called for another public meeting from the Turnpike Authority to outline changes to the project.

Township Manager Jim Ridgway said he told Van Drew the township would not sign off on the improvements. Ridgway said the biggest change to the

plan was to 9th Avenue.

“They had changed that from a one-way in to a one-way out, and we feel this is just not acceptable,” he said.

Simonsen said unless someone used a magnifying glass to go over the plans, they wouldn’t notice the change.

Ridgway said Van Drew was in agreement with Lower Township. “He’s spoken to people up

above and we’re waiting on our next move with regards to finalizing that,” he said. “The rest of the project, I think, is great for safety, adding a lane coming into Cape May is needed.”

Loop ramps were to be constructed at the intersection of Ocean Drive and Route 109 southbound beginning in July 2015 and finish construction by Memorial Day 2016, Turnpike Authority Senior Project

Engineer Michael Grant said at a public hearing in May. He said the improvements were designed to decrease accidents and increase traffic capacity. “One of the concerns is with regard to crashes along Route 109 southbound,” said Grant.

Grant said a U-turn now used to allow motorists from Route 109 south to drive north on the parkway would be eliminated and replaced with a jughandle.

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The summer of 2014 was also a strong season for the campgrounds, DelVescio said.

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Tourism strong

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some business reporting an increase of as much as 20 percent.

“People make comments as in, ‘I’ve never seen the boardwalk so crowded,’” Clark said. “I think it was a cold, miserable winter for many people in our typical target areas where our business comes from. I think people have been looking forward to this summer vacation.”

Economic recovery may also mean tourists may “have a little more disposable income in their pockets,” Clark said.

“Anecdotally, people are telling me their (numbers of) customers have been greater, their ticket sales are up,” Clark said. “Some of the lodging facilities are still experiencing midweek vacancies. August tends to be the greatest month of the season, so we’re looking forward to having more full occupancy rates for the rest of the season.”

Sea Isle City also reported an increase in beach tag sales and a strong season for restaurants, according to the report.

Lodging is equal to 2014, “which was a record year,” the report stated.

“This year seems even better (than 2014),” said Katherine Custer, director of the Sea Isle City Department of Community Services. “Events are very well attended. We’ve had a great influx of people who are coming for the first time as well as many repeat visitors. We’ve had lovely weather, which makes for nice beach going.”

As of Aug. 5, beach tag revenue sales were \$1.31 million, compared to \$1.27 million on Aug. 5, 2014.

The only dark spot in the glowing summer tourism report was the Canadian exchange rate.

According to the report, the rate “is the lowest it has been since 2004.”

“The dollar was trading at or near par for the past five years, making travel to the U.S. from Canada favorable and affordable,” the report stated. “Currently, the loonie is at 76 cents against the U.S. dollar, the lowest it has been since March 2009 when it closed at 76.85 cents.

Last week the Bank of Canada reduced its interest rate, which could increase the decline of the loonie to the 75-cent level of 2004.”

Diane Wieland, director of tourism for the Cape May County Department of Tourism, was quoted in the report as saying the exchange rate will impact visitors to Cape May County from Canada.

“For Canadians who spend a week or more vacationing in Cape May County, losing 25 cents on every dollar will force them to make adjustments in their vacation budget. For some it will be a shorter stay, resulting in smaller per-person expenditures, for others it will be reduced spending on non-essential purchases and activities, or cutting their vacation to the United States entirely. While the cost of gas in the U.S. is somewhat of a trade-off, it will not be enough to make a difference,” Wieland said in the report.

Joann DelVescio, executive director of the New Jersey Campground Owners Association (NJCOA), said the poor Canadian exchange rate has affected advanced reservations but has not had a significant effect on the summer season.

“A lot of Canadians were coming into campgrounds without reservations. It was maybe a last-minute decision on their part to come,” DelVescio said. “There was some falloff in advanced reservations. We’ve picked some of that up. What we also found was typically the weeks Canadians were here, this year were not full. This opened it up for people who wanted to get in in years past but couldn’t get in.”

DelVescio said the NJCOA has marketed to the tri-state area and is seeing more international travelers visiting the campgrounds.

Internationally, DelVescio said there has been a lot of interest from Germany, Belgium and South American markets, as well as the Chinese market.

The NJCOA also attends about 15 travel, camping and recreational vehicle (RV) shows an-

nually, from Florida to Canada, DelVescio said.

“We are looking to expand the knowledge for people out there to know about the campgrounds we have here in New Jersey,” DelVescio said.

The NJCOA has members throughout the state. One-third of the NJCOA’s members are in Cape May County.

Cape May County has the largest concentration of campgrounds in New Jersey, DelVes-

cio said.

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Legal bills

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paid \$17,610 in 2014 and \$11,386 in 2015. Ford Flower Hasbrouck and King and Richard King, who formed his own firm, were paid \$13,617 for services related to a planning board case currently in the court system.

Gruccio, Pepper, DeSanto, Ruth were paid \$5,031 for labor negotiations in 2014 and \$23,750 in 2015.

The firm of Barker, Gelfand and James provided legal services related to the city’s police department and the county Prosecutor’s Office totaling \$18,656 so far in 2015.

Capehart Scatchard is providing services in relation to possible flaws in the design of Convention Hall. In 2014, the firm was paid \$57,736 and \$36,309 in 2015. Macleod said the city had an encumbrance on its books for \$266,670 as open purchase order based on cost estimates.

Porzio, Bromberg and Newman, which has providing services in relation to the city’s attempts to change the funding formula of Lower Cape May Regional High School, was paid \$70,13 in 2013, \$47,177 in 2014 and \$28,882 in 2015, for a total of \$146,198.

During public comment, former mayor Jerry Gaffney asked for an explanation of an encumbrance of \$266,670 from Capehart Scatchard, the firm handling Convention Hall design litigation. MacLeod said in order to prepare a budget, the firm was asked for cost estimates both in 2014 and 2015. He said in consultation with the city’s auditor and the law firm, the \$266,670 was encumbered in 2014.

Monzo said Capehart Scatchard’s fees also included costs for a forensic engineering study to make out an affidavit of merit to support a professional liability claim. He said an architectural study was also needed to support a claim against the architect who designed Convention Hall. The claims are the result of a mechanical room in the facility built below flood grade.

Monzo said lawsuits have been filed in federal district court, all the parties have been

served, a scheduling conference has already taken place and now they are in the process of discovery. He said the city has submitted a damage request to all parties.

The city is seeking to recover all of its costs and fees as well as additional insurance premiums and remediation costs, Monzo said.

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