

Move

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increase voter turnout he would rather see it remain in May.

Glen Fellenbaum said, "To tell you the truth I never know what is going on over there," referring to City Hall. Fellenbaum said all he knows is water and sewer rates "are getting outrageous."

Paul Andrus of Dellas Real Estate said he didn't know Cape May was considering the change.

"I heard about it in Wildwood," he said.

The Wildwood Board of Commissioners was going to change their election day from the spring to the first Tuesday in November, but like Cape May, decided to put it out to a public vote. Andrus said he liked the idea of moving the municipal election day.

"I always thought it was a good idea to be in November because council starts in the middle of the summer," he said. "You don't start messing with things in the summer."

When asked if she knew what the ballot question was, Bonnie Mullock, owner of Bathtime, said, "It must be about parking."

Mullock said she had not had time to read newspapers or watch TV news all summer, so she was out of the loop.

Jay Schatz of the Abbey also

had to be reminded of the question, and when done so he said, "Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah."

Schatz said he thought the problem with moving the election to November was there would be fewer people in town to vote in November. He said the idea did have some merit, though.

"It would save money and maybe increase turnout. I don't think it would be partisan. Anything we can do to build voter turnout the better," he said.

Jim Wyatt said he did not remember what question would be on the ballot, but when reminded was familiar with the issue.

"A lot people I spoke to were in support of it because it would save the city money. I think it's better if we merged and had one election," he said. "I think people are smart enough to understand a multitude of questions on there (the ballot)."

But there was some confusion over what steps city council had to take if the voters approve the move. A sample ballot question provided by the city clerk indicated city council had already approved an ordinance. A corrected sample question provided by the clerk indicates city council asks voters if they would like city council to pass an ordinance changing the election day. It reads:

BALLOT QUESTION: Shall the Cape May City Council adopt an Ordinance Changing Regular Municipal Elections to day of General Election, the Tuesday after first Monday of November, commencing with the Regular Municipal Election scheduled for May 8, 2012?

A "yes" vote "would require the City Council to adopt the Ordinance which will require that the City of Cape May, which will continue to be governed by the provisions of the "Uniform Nonpartisan Elections Law", N.J.S.A. 40:45-5 et seq., hold its Regular Municipal Elections on the same day as the General Election, which is the Tuesday after first

Monday of November. As a result, the change would commence with the Regular Municipal Election presently scheduled for May 8, 2012, which would then take place on November 8, 2012. The Ordinance will also change the day of the City's Reorganization Meeting to January 1 rather than July 1 of each year commencing on January 1, 2013, and would also extend the terms of the presently elected members of City Council for an additional six months."

A "no" vote "would not require the City Council to adopt such Ordinance and, as a result, the City will continue to hold its Regular Municipal

Elections on the second Tuesday of May, and would therefore not change the day of the City's Reorganization Meeting and would not extend the terms of the presently elected members of City Council."

Wichterman said he asked for the change for two reasons.

"It saves the city money. We have too darn many elections in this city already – the primary, school board, one thing after another," he said. "Number two, I think we will get a better turnout in November than in May."

"I just think we will get better participation in a general election and we'll save money," he said.

Mayor Ed Mahaney said he takes a different view than Wichterman.

"My position on that particular issue has been very consistent since it originally emerged. While I understand that changing the municipal election in a nonpartisan municipality to the general election date to November from the May date would result in cost savings, a number of negative factors must be considered," he said.

Mahaney said if a town changes the election day to coincide with the general election, the municipal election very often gets lost in the array of other county state and federal elections on that

same ballot.

"It would be the same for any municipal question on a ballot," he said.

Mahaney also feels the municipal elections would gradually become partisan elections.

Political parties would get involved in selecting candidates and also funding them. It would make it difficult for an independent person of reasonable means to get in office," he said. "Candidates would then owe allegiance to the money funneled to them."

Mahaney said currently voters can decide who their elected officials are by based on the door-to-door campaign of the candidate and candidates' night. He said moving the elections would save money at the expense of an independent election, and some towns have turned down the idea for that reason.

"The rush to save on municipal elections is very shortsighted based on the history of a town like Cape May, which has always embraced its history of independence. And by maintaining our non-partisan status we have had an excellent relationship working with partisan elements in state and local government. That is important to maintain," Mahaney said. "That's my position."

Councilwoman Deanna Fiocca said she supported moving the election because

of the cost savings.

"I think it's a good idea because it will save the taxpayers about \$30,000. Some say it is a bad thing because the November elections are partisan and the city is nonpartisan and could be confusing, but I don't think it will be that big of a deal. If it passes I think it's a good idea," she said.

Murray said his personal thought was it is very expensive to have elections at \$25,000 to \$30,000 each.

"\$25,000 is not insignificant when everyone is hurting," he said. "Secondly, in off-peak elections you don't get the same turnout you do in the general elections. It's important for as many people as possible to express their views."

Councilwoman Terri Swain tended to agree more with the mayor.

"I understand where the recommendation came from. I think the intent was cost savings, but I think it's a mixed bag," she said. "To take a town that isn't really political and align yourself with a party? I think that's a detriment for candidates who might want to run for council but don't want to declare what party they are."

Swain said considering the economy over the past several years she understands the importance of saving money, but doesn't feel the election is

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Bilotta.

"There will be geothermal energy used, but to what extent is unknown right now," Bilotta said.

The commission has been encouraging the use of renewable energy sources in Cape May in recent years, not only because of environmental reasons but also since it is cost efficient according to Todd, who has been a member of the group for 30 years. The public works and life-guard headquarters received solar panels last year and there could be more solar energy to come.

"We want to let people know that solar energy is a benefit-

cial option for everyone," she said, "it's a win-win."

On Tuesday, Todd said the possible enactment of the "Municipal Land Use Law" (P.L.1975, c.291) of New Jersey Senators Bob Smith and Christopher Bateman. This bill introduced in May will prohibit municipal zoning ordinances from barring solar panels under certain circumstances, if pushed through by the senate and general assembly of the state.

Todd said that solar energy is also a key element in the planning board's master plan goal. The Cape May Nature Center, which was highly promoted by the environmental

commission in the 1980s has had solar panels for five years.

"We are a conservation driven group," Todd said. "We want to protect our natural resources in the community."

Working regionally and locally with other environmental commissions, Todd said they are able to find out what other communities are doing when it comes to energy usage and other issues as well.

Wind turbines were also a good source of energy being encouraged by the commission according to Todd. She said she was thrilled after the

approval of the Coast Guard's recent wind turbine project that will help the base conserve more energy, especially after it was found the turbines would have minimal effect on wildlife, such as the bird and bat population.

"This is an area with peak migration routes, and it's very important they be protected," Todd said.

The commission has advised city council on how much energy wind can provide and its benefits. In 2008, the city discussed using wind turbines in certain areas of Cape May. City Manager Bruce MacLeod said the using wind turbines to power

the city's desalination plant and wells could save \$225,000 per year or more.

"We as a group understand that overnight projects are rare, and many times can take years to be accomplished," Todd said.

Environmental Commission Members (as posted on the city website): Charlotte Todd, Susan Laudeman, Jessie Weeks, Sandra Maloney, Rachael Palermo, Ray Maher, John Bilotta; Heather Bruno, Alternate I. Alternate II – Vacant.

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