

# Historic homes being demolished in Lower Twp.

By JACK FICHTER  
Cape May Star and Wave

VILLAS — While Lower Township has a Historic Preservation Commission (HPC), historic homes have been demolished on short notice.

At a Nov. 6 Township Council meeting, Pary Tell, a member of the township HPC, said under the ordinance that created the commission, the HPC is to be notified of demolition permit applications. She said the HPC has 30 days to respond to the applications, noting only three applications have been forwarded to the commission.

"I have sent a letter each of those three times," Tell said. "The first two times, the houses came down anyway, but this last time, the application came in for 716 Jonathan Hoffman Road, the house was on the market for \$675,000, it was a fourth-quarter, 19th century, Italianate, Victorian farmhouse."

She said a real estate ad suggested the house was probably a teardown but

could be restored. Tell said the house just needs to be updated.

The house sold in 30 days. Tell said one week after it was sold, she received a copy of the application for its demolition. She sent a letter on behalf of the HPC four days later but three days after that demolition equipment was on the site.

"I know the construction official said, 'Go ahead and arrange for the equipment and I have to wait until I get the letter, but as soon as I get the letter, I'll give you the go ahead,'" Tell said. "There's no other way that equipment could have been there that quickly."

Demolition permits come up and no one is aware of them except her, she said, noting Wildwood Crest holds public meetings for demolition applications but that is not the case in Lower Township.

"The public here doesn't know the place is coming down until the demo equipment shows up and they start to tear the place apart," Tell said.

She provided council with a photo of 716 Jonathan Hoffman Road taken before the house was demolished six weeks ago. The property is now an empty lot backing onto the Cape May Canal.

"There's not a tree, a shrub or a blade of grass left on that piece of property," she said. "Every time it rains, that dirt is washing into the canal and it is now on the market for \$1.575 million."

Tell said it is likely the township will receive a request for a variance to construct at least two homes on the property.

"Destroying all these little farmhouses is destroying the rural culture that is what makes Lower Township what it is," she said. "I don't want us to turn into condo city like Sea Isle or Wildwood, and that's what's happening."

Tell said she did not know what to do about the construction office and the "secret, behind-closed-doors demo permits."

"I'm not going to turn the letters in within a day any-

more, I'm going to take the 30 days and let people in the neighborhood know the place is coming down," she said.

Mayor Frank Sippel said nothing was being done behind closed doors. Township Manager Mike Laffey said he would look into demolitions taking place.

In other business, Tell said the HPC compiled a list of work that needed to be undertaken in the interior of the historic Foster House. She said she sent the list to architectural historian Joan Berkey, who approved the work list.

Tell said HPC member Lewis Thomas, a restoration carpenter, told the commission interior woodwork needed to be sanded in the Foster House and they were fairly certain lead-based paint was present.

"He felt that if we had appropriate masks, since we were only lightly sanding, it would be OK," she said. "The more concerning one is the plaster in the ceiling in the kitchen. We don't know when it was added. It's not

original because the beams and floorboards underneath it are actually painted."

Tell said if the plaster is from a remodeling done in 1830 or if its plaster from the 1940s or 1950s, it is safe, but if the work was done between those periods, there is a chance it may contain asbestos, which would require environmental remediation.

She said HPC members are anxious to start on interior work in the Foster House.

Laffey said he met with the township's grants coordinator.

"We have to hire an architect again for the inside

of that building, especially what you just discussed about the possible lead paint and asbestos, so we're going to have an architect tell us what to do and we also have to fix the outbuildings that are there as well," he said.

The township has some funding in its economic development line item to pay an architect. Laffey said he met with Triad Consultants to discuss the possibility of obtaining grant funding that is not historic, open space money.

He said interior work must wait until an architect weighs in on the project.

## LTPD promotes Vanaman to deputy chief

VILLAS — Donald Vanaman has been promoted to deputy chief of the Lower Township Police Department, the first person in the history of the department to hold that rank.

As deputy chief, he will oversee numerous departmental tasks, some of which include Internal Affairs/Early Warning, Accreditation, Public Information Officer, Traffic/DWI Grants, Patrol Division, Detective Bureau, Support Operations/Training, Records Bureau and Police Licensing, effective January 2024.

Vanaman was promoted to deputy chief during a swearing-in ceremony Nov. 6 in which his fiancée, Jessica Fritzinger, was holding the Bible and his daughter Liberty and his son-in-law, Lower Township Police Officer Billy Kocis, pinned his badge.

He was also accompanied by his three other children: Marshal, Avery and Jack, as well as his grandson, Dominic.

He is in his 28th year of law enforcement and has worked for the department for more than two decades, beginning as a patrol officer and moving up through the ranks to captain.

Vanaman was on the Lower Township SWAT team and the county Regional SWAT and sniper teams as well.

Vanaman served on active duty as a U.S. Army military police officer then sergeant for five years before transitioning to the U.S. Army Reserves in which he serves as a special agent with the U.S. Army Criminal Investigation Division holding the rank of chief warrant officer 4. He has served in Iraq, Afghanistan, Kosovo, Macedonia, Korea and Ireland.

Vanaman has also served in Alabama, North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia, Washington D.C., Hawaii and New Jersey.

He is a graduate of the Gloucester County Police Academy, New Jersey Department of Corrections Academy, New Jersey State Association of Chiefs of Police's Command and Leader-



Jack Fichter/CAPE MAY STAR AND WAVE

Donald Vanaman is sworn in as the first deputy chief of the Lower Township Police Department on Nov. 6.

ship Course, Front Line Supervision, Police Executive Institute (18th Session), Accreditation Manager and the Foundation for Executive Leadership courses.

He has also completed the Infrastructure Protection Certification, Command Level Resiliency, Command Level Evidence & Property Management Course, OPRA & Records Management Course, Police Risk Management, Critical Incident Planning, Disaster Management, Proactive Police Supervision, ICS 100 - 800, Holtz Police Supervision, SWAT, Sniper, and the Drug Recognition Expert certification.

He is a recipient of the New Jersey VFW Law Enforcement Officer of the Year Award, a Lower Township Police Department Distinguished Service Award, the NJDOC Academy Professionalism Award, the Sergeant Audie Murphy Award, Commandant's List in WOCS; U.S. Army Bronze Star, 5 Army Commendations Medals, 7 Army Achievement Medals, Kosovo Campaign Medal,

Iraqi Campaign Medal, Korean Defense Service Medal, Parachutist's Badge, Cana-

dian Parachutist's Badge, and numerous other medals and ribbons.

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DATE	HIGH		LOW	
	A.M.	P.M.	A.M.	P.M.
15	8:46	9:06	2:05	3:06
16	9:30	9:54	2:48	3:55
17	10:19	10:49	3:36	4:48
18	11:15	11:54	4:32	5:47
19		12:19	5:37	6:48
20	1:06	1:27	6:50	7:50
21	2:18	2:34	8:04	8:48
22	3:22	3:38	9:13	9:42

**MOON PHASES**  
First quarter, Nov. 20 • full moon, Nov. 27

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