

Lower Twp. Taxpayers Assoc. does the math on city budget

By CHRISTOPHER SOUTH
Cape May Star and Wave

LOWER TOWNSHIP – The Lower Township Taxpayers Association gave Lower Township Council a comparison of what Lower spends on salaries and wages and what Middle Township spends on comparable positions.

Janet Pitts, president of the LTТА, told council the taxpayers association had some concerns about the 2008 budget. She also said she was disappointed Lower Township Council did not take some of the taxpayers' recommendations from last year, which included not filling vacant job positions. Additionally, Pitts said whereas the taxpayers association hoped the township could hold or cut spending, the township was actually

increasing in certain areas.

"If someone was getting \$10 last year, don't give them \$20 this year," she said.

In their comparison, the LTТА noted that Lower Township was increasing 7.4-percent in 2008 to \$23.3 million, whereas Middle Township's 2008 budget was going up 4.5-percent to \$21 million. The comparison showed Lower Township is spending \$65,000 more in salaries and wages in the township clerk's office, \$173,000 more in the department of revenue and finance, \$37,500 more in tax collection, and \$227,000 in the construction office.

Lower is also spending \$171,000 more in the area of parks and recreation, and over \$1.6 million more on Public Works. Lower also spends \$268,348 more for 911 police dispatchers.

The LTТА indicated

Lower is spending \$2,811,079 more than its neighbor to the north just in the seven areas identified above.

Pitts provided Lower Township Council with a letter saying, "Our members feel Lower Township's \$23.5 million budget should be more in line with Middle Township's 2008 budget, which is \$21 million. The two townships are comparable."

Pitts said the LTТА would like to see the departments expenses reduced to what was actually spent in 2007. Pitts said the LTТА is requesting a hiring freeze, other than replacing police officers, and cross training employees where possible.

Pitts said the LTТА would like to have a response to its recommendations at the public hearing on the budget April 7.

Fence regulations, fees

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All fences are temporary and must be removed within 14 days of the expiration of the patio permit.

Marilyn Lee from Stumpo's restaurant spoke during the public hearing asking the city how the standards were developed.

"No one from Stumpo's was asked," she said. "Not all the merchants are members of

the Mall Merchants Association."

Corea said a four-member committee, all owners of mall properties, was formed to establish the guidelines. Corea said the committee looked at various options and decided on the styles of fencing and furniture. Corea said the permit owners are free to select their own vendor, but the decision was made to allow only black fencing and the furniture out-

lined in the ordinance.

Hilary Pritchard asked the city to consider other businesses when awarding patio permits. She said she would not like to see a store "sandwiched between two patios."

Dennis Crowley said the ordinance did not address the temporary use of public space on the mall, including sidewalk sales. He said merchants should be charged any time they use public space.

Ordinance changes

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approved on second reading would allow the HPC to require an escrow fee from \$0 to \$2,500 for demolition permits, and up to \$3,500 for demolition permits on key and contributing structures.

City council introduced Ordinance 145-2008 establishing new fire zones in the shopping area at Lafayette and Ocean and on Cape May Housing Authority. The ordinance, if passed on second reading, would also establish handicapped parking on

Housing Authority property. The ordinance would allow the police to cite anyone illegally parking in handicapped spaces on Housing Authority property.

Ordinance 146 amends Section 324-6D of the city code to establish a new fee scale for patio permits on the Washington Street Mall. The fees established in the ordinance would include a \$5 per square foot charge for establishments serving alcohol, \$4 per square foot for businesses with outside food service, and \$2 per square foot for busi-

ness with no table service. Applicants for the permits would be able to pay for the number of months they would like to maintain an outside patio between March 1 and Nov. 30. The ordinance would only require half the fee amount be paid in 2008 and 2009, with the full fee being required in 2010.

Ordinance 147 established a new 50-year lease agreement for the Physick Estate.

Second reading on the above ordinances is scheduled for April 14.

Mahaney running for mayor

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May City Council from July 1, 1995 to June 30, 2003. He was part of a governing body that changed from the council/manager form (which Cape May has now) to a council form with a strong mayor, who served as the chief executive and administrative officer.

Mahaney ran for reelection three times in eight years due to changes in government, serving two years as mayor and one year as council president. Each time he was elected, he said, he was the top vote getter.

Mahaney decided not to run again in 2003, believing the city had made major

progress, and feeling there should be limits on how long an elected official serves in office.

"I wanted to leave with the same level of respect as when I came on, and I thought eight years was enough. I encouraged the voters to elect people with fresh ideas," he said.

So why come back in 2008?

"The public has been asking me to return ever since I left in 2003," Mahaney said. "I consider that a compliment."

Mahaney said he asked people to try and find other candidates, but no one has stepped forward.

Accepting the challenge to run again, Mahaney said he is concerned that Cape May government does not include

the voting public in the planning or decision making regarding the future of the town.

"The town is totally in control of a small, special interest group, who is determining the future of the town," he said.

While not identifying the group, Mahaney said they are a group of people who are seeking their own financial objectives – to the detriment of the community. He said capital projects are being advanced without regard to the master plan, and without the input and consent of the public, who must pay for these projects.

"My intent as mayor would be to make an inclusive gov-

ernment, where people living and working in town have the opportunity to help formulate a direction for the town, through the planning process, and funding process, to insure we have the type of town and scope of services that meet the needs of our residents and visitors," Mahaney said.

This council, Mahaney said, is simply reacting to ideas coming from a special interest group with projects that are expensive and limit the city's ability to respond to emergencies and make needed improvements.

Mahaney said the mall, for example, needed an upgrade, but mall property owners should have borne some of

the cost, and grants should have been acquired. He added that the mall renovation is not the answer to a declining tourism market.

Mahaney, 62, has a doctorate in special education administration, and is an administrator at the Woodbine Developmental Center, where he has worked for 20 years. He has worked in the field for 40 years. He has owned property in Cape May for 38 years, and has been a full time resident since 1985.

"I'm not a native, but I'm told I'm the closest thing. There aren't many natives around anymore, and that's a shame," he said.

Mahaney said he is proud of

his record as an elected official in Cape May. He counts among his major accomplishments the coordination for, funding and construction of Cape May desalination plant, which is still Cape May's largest capital improvement project.

"Without that plan we would not have the potable water supply for the next 20 years that we have now," he said.

Mahaney said when the project began he was told there was no grant money, but he was able to bring in \$1.25 million for the \$5 million project, with the rest coming in low interest loans.

He said the project was accomplished with the cooperation of the city council, the employees, and residents, who were kept informed about the project, which he said was completed without any controversy, delays, or cost overruns.

His other proudest accomplishment was the grant and loan applications for East Cape May.

"I put together a consortium to buy that parcel, and was able to acquire grants and low interest loans. It shows what we can accomplish if we work as team," he said.



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