

PRESIDENT'S Q & A TO CITY COUNCIL—Jim Tweed Cont'd

CAPITAL BUDGET ANSWERS

The \$9m in the 2016 capital plan represents a placeholder for funding that was inserted before a true cost estimate was available. The city will continue to look for the most cost-effective solution and for complete public feedback before committing to a project of this magnitude. As we have said, we will hold a town hall meeting to present concepts to the public and solicit input and feedback. It would be irresponsible for us to estimate segments of the project. We plan to go out to bid on the project and we hope to have competitive bid numbers that are beneficial to the taxpayers. Bids will be encompassing the entire project and not broken down as you did in the questions. Plans are still being developed and may change pending feedback at the town hall meeting.

FLOODING ANSWERS

1. The town hall meeting of 3-30-16 was videotaped and is available to the public on line at www.ocnj.us/capital-projects-roads-and-drainage. It's hard to imagine what "Promise" you are talking about. The mayor has spoken repeatedly about the importance of communicating closely with the property owners who are stakeholders in any public project. Neighborhood meetings were a vital part of the Merion Park drainage project. Three different town hall meetings were held for the most recent drainage project, including an opportunity for property owners to meeting personally with engineers who could share specific street-level information on the design. Baker engineering interacted directly with many owners who had specific questions about their properties.
2. The neighborhoods in Ocean City that flood are well-known and we're working with the best outside engineering consultants to fix the problems. Residents in the area of the north end pumping station will be included in similar meetings and communications.
3. Weekly updates on street access and parking will be available at www.ocnj.us/projectupdate.
4. City road construction work is permitted 7:00 A.M.-5:00 P.M., Monday thru Friday and 8:00 A.M.-5:00 P.M. Saturdays and legal holidays. The current project plans to work only Monday thru Friday; however, it is possible that Saturdays may be included later in the project.
5. The contractor will be responsible for cleaning up all public rights-of-way.
6. Yes, landscaping will be part of the project.
7. The August presentation by Baker Engineering showed a plant palette. The slide show is on the city website, slide #24. (Above)
8. No substantial changes to the plan that was presented in August 2016.
9. N/A
10. Actual construction work, if uninterrupted, was anticipated to last about four months but will now extend into the fall as the city minimizes summer road work in the neighborhood for the benefit of our residents and guests. A general schedule has been made available at www.ocnj.us/projectupdate.
11. This information has been available on the city website since the last presentation. Most alleys in the project area will be graded and paved. No changes from designs shared in August 2016. Storm water in the area from 26th-34th Streets between West-Bay Avenues all flow to the same set of outfall pipes on the bay, and four new pumping stations are designed to greatly increase the rate of drainage from that entire basin. *Thought of another way: A raindrop that falls on 27th-24th Street will flow through the same network of pipes that will be powered by the pump stations. Not all streets in the project area, however, will be repaved on this go-around.* That will happen when new rounds of funding become available.

CATCHING FLIES WITH HONEY - David Hayes

Proverbs 2:15—"Through patience, a ruler can be persuaded and a gentle tongue can break a bone."

One of the priorities that Fairness In Taxes (FIT) President, Jim Tweed stressed upon taking the reigns of FIT was to establish a more civil relationship with the city government. In dealing with difficult issues, FIT members have never been afraid to bring up shortcomings in the government and trumpet their recommended improvements.

In addition to being a watchdog of the city, under Jim Tweed, FIT has tried hard to remember the old adage, "You can catch more flies with honey than vinegar." FIT has tried hard to become part of the community landscape. We manned a table at the Spring and Fall block parties and met the public with a table at Welcome Night. Our speakers included Pim Von Hemmen from the American Littoral Society, who spoke on coastal issues, and Dr. Claire Abernathy who spoke on the importance of Transparency in Local Government. We were fortunate to have one of our city councilmen attend the latest presentation by George Kosimos, a passionate and nationally known advocate for Flood Insurance reform. After the presentation, he shared that it was good to have FIT present speakers who were so very helpful to the community instead of always finding fault with the city. Could it be our message is getting through?

REVENUE & EXPENSES REPORT—Michael Hinchman

Purchase of the property at 50 Tennessee Avenue, Ocean City

Ocean City is contemplating the purchase of the above named property for \$700,000.00. This is a 7,000 sq. ft., two-story building with the northern lengthwise side contiguous to the parking area of the city-owned public boat ramp parking lot. The south side lengthwise is contiguous to the community pool for Ocean Reef Condominium. Between the building and the bay, about 50', are bike racks for bike and kayak storage, presumably for Ocean Reef condo owners. It would seem this building was originally built as a storage facility for Ocean Reef. The second floor is office space and the first floor is storage. It was built in the 60's but appears to be in good condition outside (roof and exterior). The building is now empty with the longtime tenant having vacated.

There are a variety of questions I posed to council upon the introduction of permission to sell bonds for the purchase. The city solicitor indicated the city has two appraisals which is how the price was determined. They are as follows:

1. Who is the seller?
2. Is it a fee-simple sale or sale of a condo interest?
3. What is the intended use of the building?
4. Does the building have a parking easement? *If the building does have a parking easement, then the appraisals may be flawed. Parking for a building of this sort normally require 17-18 spaces.*
5. What is the Elevation?
6. The city is in its due diligence phase. Due diligence doesn't include interior fix-up costs, if any. This would drive up the ultimate cost. Does the city have a handle on this?
7. Why pay more than the assessed value?

All council members expressed support of the purchase. I believe that support is premature. Depending on the answer to the questions posed above, this may be an overpriced, bad or perhaps good purchase. In any event, it is symptomatic of an overriding weakness in city government—not having a sophisticated person in capital planning, analysis, purchasing and execution. Two appraisals (flawed or not) and a real-estate lawyer are not satisfactory resources. We all know how to play baseball, but given the size and number of projects, the city needs major leaguers. This purchase may parallel the 8th & Boardwalk parking lot purchase in 2011. In that case the city paid \$2.1m—the higher amount of two appraisals, the other coming in at \$1.5m which was the assessed amount. The higher appraisal was flawed as it used, in part comparable listings and comparable sales. More importantly, the seller's newly approved usage by the Planning Board for the site was stuck on appeal. The seller was unable to develop the site and city bailed the seller out and overpaid in the process.

Upon obtaining the appraisals and other information on 50 Tennessee Avenue I will report again,

Update-North End Pump Station

The initial recommendation by project consultant PSS for an \$8.7m plan cost the city \$432,000.00 in consulting fees (per OPRA request) only to find, 3 years later, the cost would be \$27m. The city essentially wasted \$432,000.00 and lost 3 years.

Fire Ladder Truck

Council President Madden revealed to me it wasn't the "right time to inform the public" a second ladder truck like the one purchased two weeks ago" would reduce all property owners property insurance. Thanks for the lack of transparency, Administration and Council.

TREASURER'S REPORT - Bill Hartranft

As we approach the end of the year dues from our members drop off in volume. Currently 339 members of more than 800 have paid their dues. Our current membership stands at 850+. As of now O.C. Flooding, a sub-committee of FIT stands at 1400+. We need your support if O.C. Flooding is to continue in its phenomenal efforts for all homeowners. Please forward your dues to Fairness In Taxes, Box 565, Ocean City, NJ 08226. Thank you for your continued support.

O.C. FLOOD COMMITTEE—Suzanne Hornick

Our committee has been busy as ever this summer. The flooding island-wide continues to get worse, but thankfully the 4th Ward flooding remediation projects have been re-started. The city says the project is scheduled to be completed by the end of 2017. Any hurricanes could delay this schedule.

We post updates compiled from the city's web site onto our Facebook page as we receive them. This is our primary source of communication.

There are still many who are skeptical of the 28th-33rd Street project, since the city is raising the crest of some roads and the four pump stations shut down when flooding occurs above the current level of the outfalls. We still have some "No Wake" signs free of charge. If you would like one, e-mail us at www.ocflooding@gmail.com. Many people are now accessing our Facebook page to check on theirs and their neighbors homes. I've been told that many had no idea their homes were so much and so often flooded in the off-season until they began to see it on our page.

We have been forging partnerships with some larger groups that we hope will help us learn more about flooding and what we can do to address it. They are as follows:

- ⇒ Harriet Festing, Flood Forum USA, www.floodforum.org. This focuses on the needs of flood victims across the country and connects them with organizations that can help. She facilitated an interview with myself at the Huffington Post.
- ⇒ American Geophysical Union (AGU), <https://sites.agu.org>. We are in hopes they will provide us with a geophysicist or other scientist, pro-bono to help us identify problems, risks and potential solutions. If this relationship is established, we will facilitate a meeting for any who would like to attend regarding the specific issues they face.
- ⇒ Thriving Earth Exchange, <http://thrivingearthexchange.org>. They have facilitated our connection to AGU. We were able to have a cyber meeting with myself and the above mentioned where we explained our needs and desires as a flood group. Some things we requested are pro-bono legal advice, scientific support and opportunities to share information.
- ⇒ George Kasimos, www.stopfemanow.com. He is the founder of Stop FEMA Now and provided us with a wealth of information on flood insurance. He was our guest speaker at the September FIT meeting. He provided a great deal of information to a packed house on the issues surrounding flooding and flood insurance across the country. He regularly posts information on their web site.

We are still trying to find an attorney who can guide us in acquiring an escrow account for homeowners to place their property taxes if they choose until their flooding issues have been remediated. We are also learning more about "rain gardens" as a means of further reducing flooding. We hope to approach the city with a comprehensive plan for both public and private property to incorporate rain gardens throughout the city.

We strongly encourage everyone to join FIT to help the OC Flooding Committee continue its efforts. The cost is just \$15.00 annually per household. Please contact wldhartranft1@comcast.net to join. He will email you an application to fill out and mail with your check to Fairness in Taxes Box 565, Ocean City NJ 08226.

EDUCATION—Vic Staniec

The trial for ex-Ocean City Athletic Director and Vice-principal, Dr. Christine Lentz began on September 25. She was accused and arrested for tapping into the e-mail server of Ocean City School Superintendent, Dr. Kathleen Taylor. It is believed that Dr. Lentz was attempting to gain information on upcoming contract negotiations between the Ocean City School Board and the Ocean City Administrators union. Dr. Lentz was allowed to resign from her positions, where she was earning \$132,000.00 per year. If she is convicted, it is possible that she may have to forfeit her future pension. Dr. Lentz is 54 years of age.

Jury selection was completed on September 26 and because of the many motions that were filed in court, Judge John Porto predicted that the trial might not be completed before December. Mikenzie Helphenstine, who was a curriculum supervisor at the time of the incident, but has since returned to teaching in the primary school, requested immunity in return for her testimony. This request was rejected by the Cape May County prosecutor, who stated that there is a possibility of obstruction of justice.

In the upcoming November election, there are three current school board members whose 3-year terms will expire. They are: Board President, Joseph Clark, and board members Cecilia Gallelli-Keys and Michael James. Since no one else filed petitions to run, these three current members, who have all chosen to run again, will be re-elected for 3-year terms.

The 2017-18 school budget calls for a small tax increase which will average out at about \$5.00 for the average Ocean/ City home owner. The state recently revised its school funding program and after all the budget were approved, Ocean City was one of only two school districts in Cape May County to receive an increase in its allocation. The increase amounts to \$17,000.00, which technically should be returned to the tax payers since we had a tax increase. As it will cost \$16,200.00 to rewrite and re-file the budget, it was agreed that the extra \$17,000.00 will be deposited in a surplus account to be used in next year's budget.

The city has agreed to waive the rental fee for allowing the Ocean City High School swim teams to use the pool at the Aquatic and Fitness Center.

The intermediate school has received a \$4,000.00 state grant to start an after-school yoga program for interested students

SPEAKERS—Marie Hayes

At our meeting of September 6th our guest speaker was George Kasimos, founder and director of Stop FEMA Now resulting from the fact that his flood insurance increased from \$1,000.00 to \$30,000.00 per year. He discussed flood insurance problems and how they affect property values, ways to lower flood insurance premiums, and how those increases will affect our local and national economy. He constantly goes to Washington, DC to lobby senators and congressmen.

George was an engaging and powerful speaker, answering many questions from the audience, even taking phone numbers to contact them to offer help. Some people in attendance brought their elevation certificates, with which he assisted them. Dave Hayes did a head count and we had 80+ in attendance, including 1st Ward Councilman, Mike DeVleiger. An invitation was extended to local media. Erik Avidessian from the Ocean City Sentinel attended and did a full-page article which appeared the following week. I continue to arrange for speakers, and please don't hesitate to contact me if you have any suggestions on future guest speakers.

Ocean City Sentinel's Fall Edition magazine came out on October 16th. On page 24 there is an article on Ocean City's annual Welcome Night and FIT was one of the few specific groups mentioned as having been at Welcome Night last year. Myself, Dave Hayes, Sheila & Bill Hartranft, and Jim Tweed manned the FIT table and found it to be great public relations exposure. Many attendees stopped to offer their appreciation for our efforts and we even acquired new members. We will once again attend Welcome Night which is scheduled this year for Wednesday, October 25th from 6:00-9:00 P.M. We hope to see you there.

FIT GOES TO FALL FEST—Sheila Hartranft, Secretary

Once again, thousands turned out for Ocean City's Fall Fest on Saturday, October 7th. Once again, FIT took this opportunity to get out with the crowd, see old friends and neighbors and meet lots of new ones. Everyone enjoyed a perfect Indian Summer day. It was gratifying that so many of our property owners stopped to thank us for the work we do on their behalf and those new property owners we met seemed very pleased to "discover" FIT, and were gratified that the organization is there representing and working for them. They helped themselves to all our materials, some signing up on the spot and, hopefully, we'll soon be hearing from them and seeing new faces at our monthly meetings.

Pairs of our board members and spouses each spent two or more hours at our table and provided all our printed materials along with giveaways; our own FIT lip balms, and, of course "No Wake" signs free of charge for those most interested in the flooding issues effecting our island.

FIT MEETINGS

Fairness In Taxes meetings are held on the first Wednesday of each month as follows:

Time 7:00 P.M.
Place: Ocean City Library
17th Street & Haven Avenue
Chris Maloney Lecture Hall
Room #110

Our Speakers Committee chair, Marie Hayes is working hard to arrange for speakers for future meetings, and we'll keep you updated via our web site, www.fairnessintaxes.com, the media and our newsletters as they are scheduled.
We hope you'll join us!

FAIRNESS IN TAXES

P.O. Box 565

Ocean City, NJ 08226-0565

FAIRNESS IN TAXES

Is organized for the purpose of serving the taxpayers and residents of Ocean City, NJ as an advisory and fact finding group in areas such as city budget, school board budget, taxes and other related civic activity in the interests of owners of real estate in Ocean City. Keep in touch via E-mail to our web site or to individual board members listed on the site.

Email Address

.ocfairnessintaxes@gmail.com

Please notify us of any address or e-mail changes.

FAIRNESS IN TAXES WEBSITE

www.fairnessintaxes.com

CHECK FOR UPDATED INFORMATION!!

A list of phone numbers of Council Members and the Mayor is as follows: (area code 609)

Mayor	Jay Gillian	616 Wayne Avenue	525-9333	jgillian@ocnj.us
At-Large	Peter V. Madden	47 Bay Road	513-4781	pmadden@ocmj.us
At-Large	Karen Bergman	39 Bayview Place	703-7817	kbergman@ocnj.us
At-Large	Keith Hartzell	720 Asbury Avenue	399-5324	khartzell@ocnj.us
1st Ward	Mike DeVlieger	861 Asbury Avenue	231-8987	mdevlieger@ocnj.us
2nd Ward	Antwan McClellan	448 West Avenue	545-7660	amcclellan@ocnj.us
3rd Ward	Tony Wilson	23 W. 15th Street	363-8669	awilson@ocnj.us
4th Ward	Robert Barr	118 Roosevelt Blvd.	703-0750	rbarr@ocnj.us

Regular council meetings are held the 2nd & 4th Thursday of every month @ 7PM in Council Chambers @ City Hall.