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The grid contains 72 small thumbnail images, each representing a news article from the Bayside Gazette. The thumbnails are arranged in a 6x12 grid. Each thumbnail shows a different scene, including community events, local businesses, and news coverage. The thumbnails are set against a blue background with a starburst pattern. The text "Goodbye 2019, Welcome 2020" and "We Wish You Health, Wealth and Joy!" is overlaid on the top of the grid.



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Berlin's NYE comes in two editions

Children, adult ball-drops to take place on Tuesday night throughout downtown

By Rachel Ravina
Staff Writer

(Dec. 26, 2019) Thousands of residents and visitors can ring in the new year, and the new decade, next Tuesday in downtown Berlin with two ball drops.

Ivy Wells, Berlin's economic and community development director, said the festivities started about seven years ago. It's since developed into a popular town event.

"It started small, and it was also for locals who didn't want to drive on New Year's Eve, but wanted to come down and celebrate with their neighbors, and their friends, and then now

it's [grown] into such a large event," Wells said.

There are two opportunities to partake in the holiday's free festivities: the kids' and adult ball drops.

When asked why people should attend Berlin's holiday celebrations, she simply said "because it's the most fun you'll have on New Year's Eve."

The kids' ball drop will take place at 6 p.m. at the intersection of Main and Pitts streets, Wells said, adding that Pitts Street will close during the children's event.

Wells said many of the downtown restaurants will be open, along with food trucks, and music will be provided by Ocean 98.1. The Seaside Dance Academy will also have hot chocolate available for purchase.

Wells said that the children's event

is "fun for families who want to enjoy the ball drop but don't want to wait up until midnight or stay up until midnight."

As for the adults, the ball drop will take place at midnight on Main Street across from the Atlantic Hotel, Wells said. The adult bash will begin at 10 p.m. and Main Street will close until 1 a.m. on New Year's Day.

The stage will be set up across from the hotel on Main Street.

She added that there will be food trucks, the hotel will have an outdoor bar and Burley Oak Brewing Company will have a "special New Year's Eve" beer.

Wells said the adult ball drop is complete with music, dancing and a light show.

"It's like Times Square comes to Berlin," Wells said.

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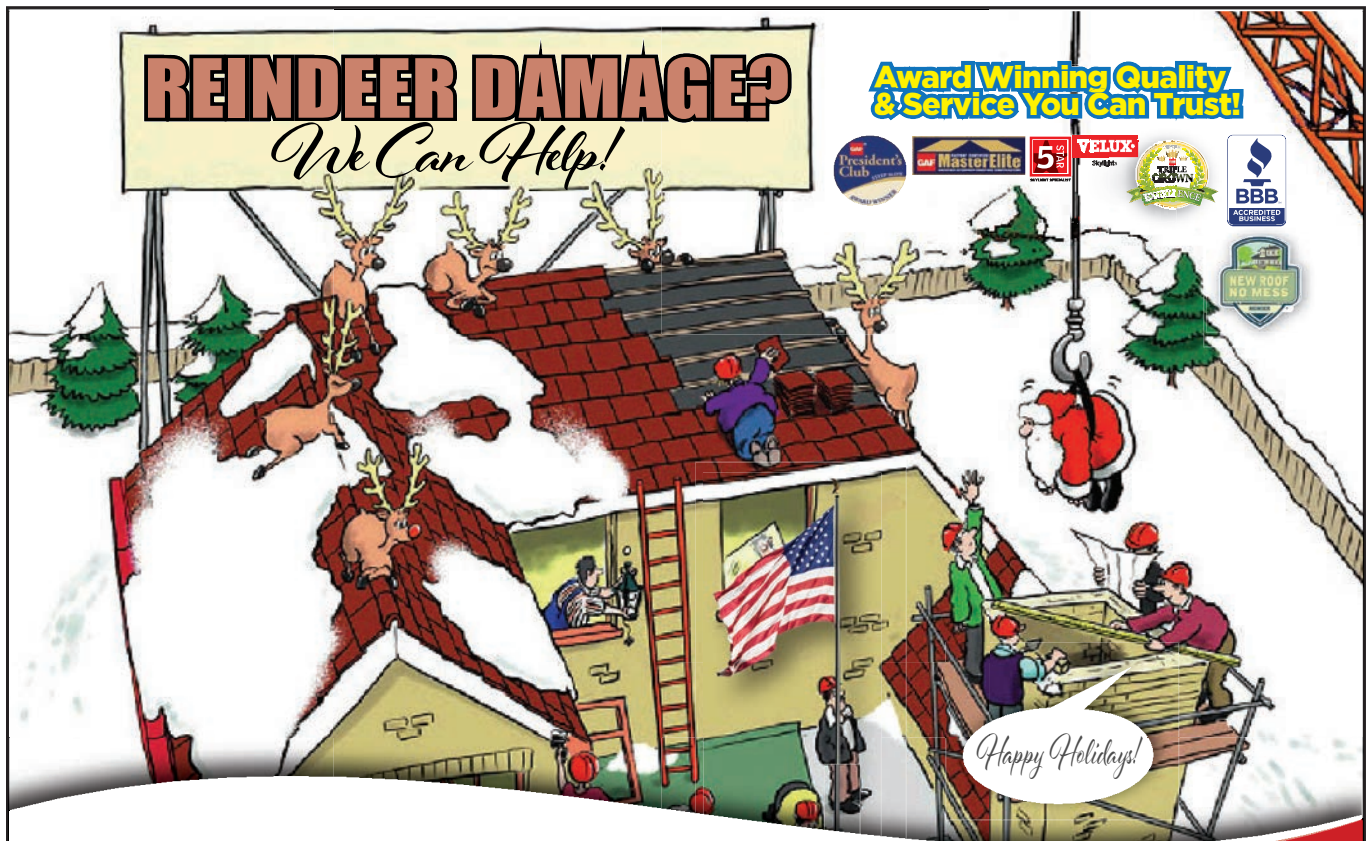
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ACT's 40th New Year's Day beach walk set

By Morgan Pilz
Staff Writer

(Dec. 27, 2019) Celebrate the start of 2020 with a scenic nature stroll during Assateague Coastal Trust's 40th annual Ilia Fehrer/Judy Johnson New Year's Day Beach Walk at Assateague State Park.

Assateague Coastal Trust Communications Manager Billy Weiland will be leading participants up the beach to scenic and pristine views, with Ocean City's strip in the distance, beginning at 1 p.m. on Wednesday.

"Anytime we can get outside, I think it does everyone's attitude well and what

better way to start off the new year," Weiland said. "It's [also] a great incentive for those trying to be healthier as part of their new year's resolution.

The walk is about an hour long and less than one mile, Weiland said.

"We start from the concession area at the state park and we walk folks up to the northern part of the state park, which is only about a mile before it crosses into the National Seashore," he said. "That gives us the opportunity to talk about the island and its history and Assateague Coastal Trust and what we do to keep it from being developed."

The theme for this year's walk once again will be inspired by Assateague Coastal Trust's online journal, "The Marsh," which Weiland created.

"The Marsh' resides as the philosophical voice of our organization, which is that to care about the environment, we have to first immerse ourselves in, and experience our environment to better understand it on a scientific and personal level," Weiland said.

Anywhere from 50 to, at the highest, 300 people come out every year. The numbers fluctuate depending on the weather, Weiland said.

In 2019, thanks to the warmer than usual weather, around 60 people attended the walk.

In the early 1970s, Judy Johnson formed the Committee to Preserve Assateague Island to draw attention to its beauty.

Around the same time, Ilia Fehrer of Snow Hill, visited Assateague on New Year's Day wanting to reconnect with the wilderness. She was an avid voice in preserving the wetlands and shorelines on Assateague Island. Her family continued to join every year, even coming down

See FREE Page 5

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YEAR IN REVIEW 2019

Tom Viola takes over as GM after Bailey bobbles budget

By Greg Ellison
Staff Writer

(Dec. 26, 2019) After raising community ire in January by proposing increasing annual assessment fees more than \$100, Ocean Pines Association General Manager John Bailey was replaced by OPA Treasurer John Viola, who, beginning in March, quelled fiscal concerns sufficiently to warrant a contract extension to December.

The dissension with Bailey was on display during budget discussions in mid-January, when several members of the OPA Board of Director expressed skepticism with his fiscal projections.

In reaction, several board members requested a five-year outlook for potential spending to address drainage issues, bulkhead repairs and road maintenance.

Bailey reported bulkhead reserves would begin the start of the upcoming fiscal year on May 1 at \$1,598,000, while estimating a fiscal 2019/2020 contribution at \$22,500 and planned spending of \$1.6 million would essentially empty the fund with just over \$1,400 remaining to close the budget year.

Those dire reserve fund estimates

were coupled with a proposal from Bailey, seemingly following earlier suggestions from the OPA Budget and Finance Committee, to drop both the annual \$19 contribution paid by association members and the \$453 annual fee paid by bulkhead owners for the upcoming fiscal year.

“Then, going into the following year, the \$19 would be back in as well as the assessment for bulkhead property owners,” he said.

Bailey referenced a study on reserve funding that set future spending on bulkheads at \$1.1 million per year, while noting the association was averaging roughly \$800,000 annually.

Director Ted Moroney characterized Bailey’s fiscal projections as “overly aggressive,” claiming the balance for bulkhead reserves would likely be in the area of \$400,000 to close the next fiscal year on April 30, 2020

Viola echoed the sentiment expressed by Moroney, while noting the bulkhead work planned for the closing months of fiscal 2019 was significantly greater than what had already been completed.

See ASSOCIATION Page 5

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**PUBLIC UTILITY LAW JUDGE'S NOTICE OF
PRE-HEARING CONFERENCE**

On December 5, 2019, Delmarva Power & Light Company (“Delmarva” or “the Company”) filed an application with the Public Service Commission of Maryland (“the Commission”) for authority to increase its operating revenues by \$18,523,166. The Company’s application included supporting testimony and exhibits, and requested an effective date of January 4, 2020 for its proposed rates and charges. On December 6, 2019, by Order No. 89384, the Commission suspended the proposed rates and charges for a period of 150 days from January 4, 2020, and delegated this matter to the Public Utility Law Judge Division.

A pre-hearing conference in the above-entitled matter is hereby set for Monday, January 6, 2020, at 10:00 a.m., in the Commission’s 19th floor hearing room, William Donald Schaefer Tower, 6 St. Paul Street, Baltimore, Maryland, to establish a procedural schedule and consider any petitions to intervene, as well as any other preliminary matters.

Delmarva is hereby directed to publish a notice of the pre-hearing conference, including the caption, case number, the time, date, place of the conference, and the purpose of the conference, as a display advertisement in newspapers in general circulation throughout the Company’s service area at least two times before January 6, 2020. The notice shall also advise persons who seek to intervene in this proceeding that petitions to intervene should be filed with the Commission’s Executive Secretary, Andrew Johnston, William Donald Schaefer Tower, 6 St. Paul Street, Baltimore, Maryland 21202-6806, on or before January 3, 2020. The Company is directed to file certificates of publication with the Commission on or before the date of the pre-hearing conference.

Jennifer J. Grace
Public Utility Law Judge
Public Service Commission of Maryland

Reasonable accommodations will be made at Public Service Commission proceedings for qualified persons with disabilities, if requested 5 days in advance of the proceeding. (Dial 410-767-8000 or 1-800-492-0474 or access the prior numbers through the Maryland Relay Service at 1-800-735-2258.)

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YEAR IN REVIEW 2019

Association swaps out leadership

Continued from Page 4

“This is the GM, this is your budget, this is your plan and, even sitting here, I’m not completely sure that you are convinced yourself that you are going to get this work done,” he said.

Viola also questioned suspending annual bulkhead fees collections and draining the reserve fund.

Moroney said if the figures provided by Bailey proved correct, it could jack up collections by 30 percent from bulkhead owners.

In early February, a throng of property owners attended the OPA board meeting after a budget draft released by Bailey on Jan. 25 included the assessment increase.

Bailey noted the range of “comments, concerns and frustrations,” received about the proposed assessment increase of \$127, which would be the second largest instituted by the association.

“There is one thing I know we all can agree on – I certainly got your attention,” he said.

Bailey reported the association had been profitable for the last five months of calendar year 2018.

“If we’re doing well in the budget this year, why do we need such a large increase for next year?” Bailey asked. “Ul-



In April, then-interim Ocean Pines Association General Manager John Viola, left, with Association Vice President Steve Tuttle and President Doug Parks stage an emergency meeting to hash out revamped operational frameworks in the wake of General Manager John Bailey’s departure.

FILE PHOTO/BAYSIDE GAZETTE

timately, that depends on what we ... really want to accomplish.”

Among the fiscal objectives highlighted by Bailey were addressing previous deficit issues and accruing capital for deferred maintenance general replacement needs.

Bailey estimated that about \$1 million remained of the \$1.6 million deficit incurred over the prior two fiscal years, while proposing budgeting to pay off the balance over the next three years.

Bailey also proposed increasing spending on drainage to more than \$900,000, compared to the roughly \$116,00 spent in fiscal 2019.

Among a dozen projects included as being budgeted from replacement reserves was \$800,000 to expand the police and administration building.

The contentious budget process proved the end for Bailey, who departed his post prior to the board meeting set

See GM Page 6

Free walk, park offers hot cocoa

Continued from Page 3 from Baltimore.

The invite went out to Assateague Coastal Trust, formally the Committee to Preserve Assateague Island, to join. It grew larger every year.

The first beach walk was organized by Fehrer and Johnson on Jan. 1, 1980, the same year former President Jimmy Carter declared “Year of the Coast.”

The New Year’s Day tradition has since been named in their honor.

“We care about the environment and we want people to experience it on that personal level and people are generally more inclined to take care of it and learn more about it,” Weiland said.

Entry into the park is free for the walk, and hot chocolate and cookies will be offered at the end. Assateague Coastal Trust encourages walkers to bring personal mugs to reduce waste caused by disposable cups.

Meet Assateague Coastal Trust staff and Weiland at the Assateague State Park concession stand at 1 p.m. on Wednesday, Jan. 1 to join the walk. Dress accordingly.

In order to get to Assateague Island, driving from Route 50, follow Route 611 south across the Verrazano Bridge, then drive to the end of the road and turn right into the State Park’s parking lot.

For more information, call Assateague Coastal Trust at 410-629-1538 or visit ACTforBays.org.

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YEAR IN REVIEW 2019

Viola handed GM reins after Bailey departs

Continued from Page 5 for Feb. 16 to vote on the budget.

That same week, the board announced that Bailey had left his position on amicable terms and the process of scouting a replacement had begun.

Bailey took over as general manager in September 2017, following a yearlong applicant search to replace Brett Hill, who took the reins on an interim basis after Bob Thompson was relieved of duty in August 2016.

In March, when the process of hiring a new general manager was under discussion, Moroney suggested the complexity of overseeing OPA operations might require a revised approach.

"I am against repeating the process of simply looking for a qualified HOA

manager," he said.

Moroney said the interim operational team put in place after Bailey departed was showing positive early results.

"As one director commented, we have untapped abilities and resources that are just now showing their abilities," he said.

During an emergency meeting on March 30, the board voted 4-0 to appoint Viola as an unpaid general manager on a volunteer basis.

Viola had previously served as budget and finance committee chairman before becoming association treasurer in June 2018.

OPA Vice President Steve Tuttle stressed the temporary nature of the ap-

pointment.

"John will be supported in this role by the Transition Management Team and the OPA staff, especially Michelle Bennett, Colby Phillips and Stephen Phillips," he said.

OPA President Doug Parks said the stopgap measure would not preclude sending out a request for proposal for outsourced management.

Board member Dr. Colette Horn said search firms would also be contacted to investigate hiring another general manager with a motion set for April 6.

The board subsequently voted to table the motion to research executive hiring firms at the early April meeting.

At that point, board members continued debating the merits of filling the position through the previous method of hiring an individual candidate, outsourcing to a management firm or some combination.

The board voted to table the decision for one month to review resumes already beginning to trickle since after Bailey left.

By the end of April, Viola announced the transition management team put in place after Bailey left was being disbanded.

"Because there was no general man-

ager in place, the board put this temporary management team into place to work with the department heads to help Ocean Pines," Viola said. "When they filled the position with me on the temporary basis, we decided to leave the temporary management team in place until I could evaluate further on what was needed."

In his first month of taking the reins, Viola oversaw the roster of advisory committees and named Colby Phillips OPA Operations Director, while Finance Director Steve Phillips maintained watch over business matters.

Viola said the combination of talents appeared capable to abandon the transition management team.

By late May, the board noted excessive costs as one reason to abandon the proposal to contract with an outside management firm, while still pursuing hiring an individual candidate as general manager.

Of the 49 firms OPA requested to submit proposals for outsourcing management services, only a handful responded, Viola said.

By early June the board agreed to extend Viola as interim general manager until December while it continued to

See OP Page 7

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YEAR IN REVIEW 2019

OP budget dissension leads general manager to resign

Continued from Page 6
 search for a permanent replacement.
 “One of the things we wanted to do was continue the continuity that we’ve started,” Parks said. “We’ve seen a lot of success based on when we first didn’t have a GM and when we put a transition management team in place.”

Looking to reverse the scales after suffering significant financial losses in 2017 and 2018, Viola’s initial move as general manager was to form multiple workgroups that paired elected officials with staff and association members to examine dredging and drainage, building construction, a new compensation study and contracts for food and beverage.

“The biggest thing I saw ... and what I really believed that we needed to do as an association, was to empower our team [and] empower individuals,” he said. “We have a lot on our plate and that’s fine ... [but] the only way to get it done is by utilizing the team.”

Viola also noted past board members, such as Tom Terry, Marty Clarke and Jeff Knepper, have been instrumental in the turnaround.

“Utilizing those teams, that expertise,

is definitely helping us,” he said.

During the annual homeowners’ meeting in August, Viola reported the fiscal 2019 budget ended in the black, with revenues outpacing expenses by about \$116,000.

“We were favorable this year \$116,000 to the budget, [which] is a big difference from the last two years where I stood up here and had to inform you of losses of around \$350,000 and \$1.4 million,” he said. “We’re definitely moving in the right direction.”

Viola noted during his first month as general manager that department staff was directed to analyze budget dollars to locate potential cost cuts.

Viola said to help reduce the debt that weighed down the operating budget, annual assessments were raised in 2019, with \$71 of that charge dedicated to paying down operating fund deficits.

Viola said the recent assessment increase has helped trim about \$600,000 off the operating fund deficit, which ended fiscal 2019 at about \$895,000.

“We went from the \$1.3 million negative ... to a positive \$115,000 and that’s the way we will track,” he said.

Berlin administrator leaves, Fleetwood takes over post

By Rachel Ravina
 Staff Writer

(Dec. 26, 2019) The Town of Berlin saw a major personnel change in 2019, when former Town Administrator Laura Allen was relieved of her duties in September.

Allen was fired following a unanimous decision by the Town Council on Sept. 16, according to Mayor Gee Williams.

“It was unfortunate that this came about, but we’re all committed to trying to do what’s in the best long-term interest of the town,” Williams said in a September interview with the Bayside Gazette.

Because the dismissal was a personnel matter, no cause for Allen’s departure was revealed. But Williams did confirm that the handling of the chemical spill at Heron Park was a factor.

“As town administrator, I served at the will of the mayor and council. It’s their right to make changes as they see fit,” Allen said of the decision.

Allen was hired on Sept. 3, 2013 and served for six years. Among her responsibilities this past year was work to mitigate the chemical spill at Heron Park and the fiscal year 2020 budget cycle, which involved restructuring the property tax, water and sewer rates.

See ALLEN Page 8

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YEAR IN REVIEW 2019

Route 50 annexation in Berlin gets pushback

By Rachel Ravina
Staff Writer

(Dec. 26, 2019) The annexation of a proposed gas station and convenience store on Route 50 experienced some pushback earlier this summer.

The agreement incorporated roughly six acres of land on Route 818 across from Berlin Main Place near its intersection with Route 50. Now called Athena Plaza, the parcel was previously zoned as C-2 Commercial in the county, but in Berlin, it was categorized as B-2 Shopping District.

The annexation involved several provisions, including receiving police and

fire services, having the property owners take responsibility for trash pickup and paying for equivalent dwelling units and water usage.

The Berlin Planning Commission issued a favorable recommendation during a March 13 meeting.

During the May Town Council meeting, Councilman Zack Tyndall expressed his concerns with the traffic safety associated with the intersection as well as two possible entrance and exit lanes.

Attorney Regan Smith, who represented the interests of property owners Spiro and Mary Anne Buas, said they proposed having a right turn-only en-

trance and a main exit and entrance to match up with the nearby Berlin Main Place property. However, he told Tyndall the decision isn't up to them.

"... That's our intent but that's going to depend on what state highway directs us to do," Smith said.

The annexation passed on May 28 with a 4-1 vote by the Town Council. Tyndall dissented.

In the days following the vote, Berlin resident Jeff Smith circulated a petition calling for a referendum on the mayor and Town Council's approval of the annexation agreement for the proposed gas station and convenience store off Route 50

The petition needed signatures from 20 percent of the town's registered voters to force the referendum, which comes out to 681 signatures of Berlin's 3,407 registered voters. The petition was due within 45 days of the annexation approval.

Smith turned in the petition with 709 signatures on July 12 to officials at Town Hall.

"This really was a townwide effort," Smith said. "... I made a very concerted effort of trying to hit at least in some part every neighborhood in town."

Then-Town Administrator Laura Allen said that staff would then work to verify the submitted signatures against voter records from the Worcester County Board of Elections. That vetting found that 72 signatures did not pass muster, leaving the petition 43 signatures short of what its sponsors needed.

Nevertheless, Smith said he was pleased with his and others' efforts.

"The point of the referendum, the point of the petition, was to start a conversation, and get that conversation out into the public eye and get people a chance ... to start thinking about it and start talking about it," Smith said. "And in that prospect, it's been an overwhelming success."

Allen departs, Fleetwood takes over

Continued from Page 7

Following Allen's departure, Managing Director Jeff Fleetwood assumed the role of acting town administrator. That lasted about six weeks, before the "acting" part of his title was dropped, and he was promoted to town administrator.

"I'm embarking on a new role in the Town of Berlin, and my commitment to you, and my commitment to these folks

... is to give 100 percent," Fleetwood said during an Oct. 28 Town Council meeting.

Williams said that the Town Council unanimously agreed to the personnel decision one week earlier.

Before Fleetwood was promoted to the top management post, he served as the managing director for about two years and was responsible for working

on special projects and with department heads, as well as meeting with businesses and citizens.

He was hired by the town in 2010 as the human resources director.

Mary Bohlen, former administrative services director, was appointed deputy town administrator. It's unclear when Fleetwood's former position will be filled.



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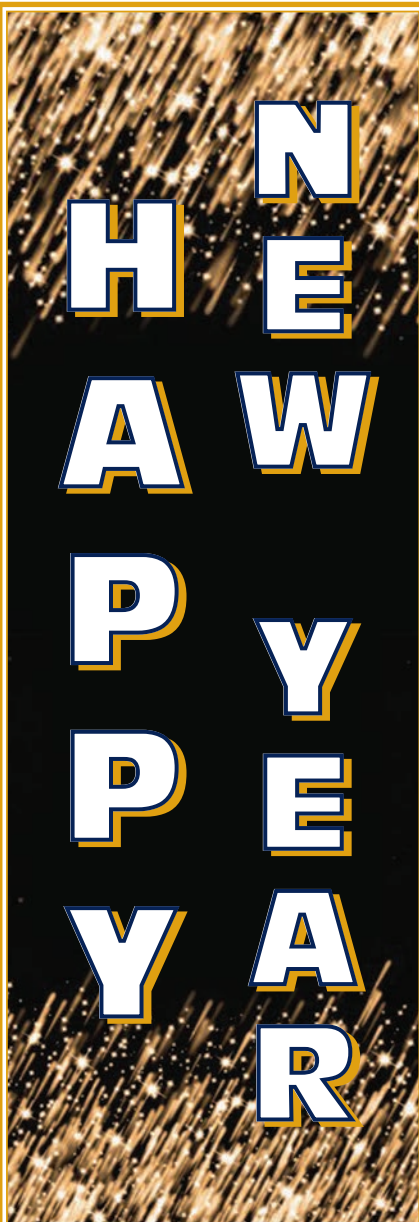
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YEAR IN REVIEW 2019

Toy Town debacle ends in Snow Hill

By Rachel Ravina
Staff Writer

(Dec. 26, 2019) Despite a tumultuous year, Toy Town's Snow Hill location is open for business. But getting to that point was one big mess.

In 2016, the Town of Snow Hill offered Richard and Debbie Seaton the deed to the former Outten building at the intersection of Market and Washington streets for their Toy Town store, providing they met certain standards.

The 6,800-square-foot building, which sat vacant for nearly three decades, needed renovations, so the deal was that the Seatons would pay for improvements and utilities within a five-year period. The arrangement was recorded in a 2016 memorandum of understanding between the business owners, three members of the town council and former mayor Charlie Dorman.

The renovations also included repairing the façade, and having the work verified by a code enforcement officer designated by the town.

Richard Seaton said that Snow Hill Code Enforcement Officer Jon Hill came to the shop on Feb. 27 with a sheriff's deputy and "gave me a civil citation for not having an occupancy (permit), and said that my court date would be sent to me."

The store had been operating for more than two years, according to Seaton. Town officials implemented an accelerated timeline, citing safety concerns, despite the fact that both parties signed a five-year agreement.

"Well, we've not had [a certificate of occupancy] for two years, because [Hill]

promised me one and never gave me the damned thing," Seaton said. "I've been open for two and a half years. In other words, can you tell they're trying to play a little bit of hardball here?"

Following the closure officials cordoned off the Snow Hill store with caution tape and cones

"Several immediate safety concerns with the building currently occupied by Toy Town Antiques were identified by reputable and licensed third-party engineers. The Town of Snow Hill has made several attempts to work with Toy Town Antiques to address these safety concerns in a timely manner, but unfortunately have not been able to reach a solution. The Town of Snow Hill has a duty to ensure the safety of the public. Therefore, it could not allow the dangerous conditions to go unremedied any longer. The matter is now before the court, and, as such, no further comment will be forthcoming," town officials said in a Feb. 27 statement.

The Seatons sued the town to recoup the roughly \$150,000 to \$200,000 they've already put into restoring the building. The case of State of Maryland vs. Richard Seaton Jr. at the District Court for Worcester County in Snow Hill took place in April.

"I am not welcome in this town anymore. They're doing everything they can do to get me out of here," Seaton said.

For several days, a sign "CLOSED BY TOWN HALL until further notice" was on the shop's façade.

"We're going to go over and meet with [Snow Hill's] attorney at the build-

ing and we'll have a discussion there," said Attorney Randy Coates. "Based on that discussion, we may or may not be able to open."

In the meantime, the Seatons decided to open a secondary location in Berlin. They held a soft opening on March 18 at the new shop on 8 Pitts St.

"I love Toy Town," said Ivy Wells, Berlin's economic and community development director. "When I saw that they were having some difficulties, I knew that we would welcome them back."

The new location had several types of products, including vintage toys, dolls, toy cars, trains, and comic books.

Prior to opening the Snow Hill satellite store, the couple operated Toy Town in a 4,800-square-foot space on Main Street in Berlin.

Following the lawsuit, the Seatons reopened Toy Town's Washington Street location on Aug. 2.

Code Facilitator Kevin Brown gave the Seatons the all-clear after they met the repair requirements.

Seaton also said several officials previously involved with the closure were no longer in their respective positions.

"I've felt like the officials there did not want us there," Seaton said. "They're all gone. We have new people in charge now."

Seaton also said he appreciated the efforts of Gary Weber, the new mayor of Snow Hill, who was sworn into office in June, in working to get the store reopened.

"It looks like he's a great mayor," Seaton said.

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YEAR IN REVIEW 2019

Janasek, Perrone, Rogers win board seats

By Greg Ellison
Staff Writer

(Dec. 26, 2019) Of seven candidates vying for a trio of open seats during the Ocean Pine Association Board of Directors 2019 election, the top vote totals were compiled by Tom Janasek, Larry Perrone and Camilla Rogers, who joined the board in August.

Garnering the top total to serve a three-year term was Janasek at 2,160, closely trailed by Perrone at 2,131, while Rogers earned the third board opening with 1,753 votes. Falling short of the mark were candidates Paula Gray (1,407), Greg Turner (478), Shawn Kotwica (235) and Edward Solum (191).

The results of the 2019 election followed a number of board resignations earlier in the year.

The changeover started in late March when director Ted Moroney resigned his seat on the board. Moroney had been appointed to his position in September 2017 in the aftermath of Director Brett Hill resigning. He was elected to a one-year term in August 2018.

Moroney cited family matters as his reason for stepping down.

"I have watched board members serve out a term and basically go through the motions," he said. "That is not my style nor in my mind acceptable. There-

fore, I am submitting my resignation effective immediately."

In short order, former board member Jeff Knepper was tapped to fill the vacancy left by Moroney, receiving a 6-0 vote in early April to assume the vacancy.

Knepper had filled in before, having been named the replacement for Dan Stachurski following his resignation in 2014.

Knepper also had served on the both the budget and finance, as well as the by-laws and resolutions advisory committees.

"I enjoy the meetings," he said. "I understand a lot of it ... [and] I have a pretty good working knowledge of the bylaws."

Existing chips continued to fall when director Slobodan Trendic resigned effective April 10, after months of contentious budget discussions about capital expenditures, which he argued should be decided by association via referendum.

Elected in 2016, Trendic was finishing the last year of a three-year term that was set to expire in August.

Again dipping back into its pool of community resources, the board in May nominated Tom Piatti to fill the vacancy left by Trendic.

Piatti has resided, at least part time, in Ocean Pines since 2002 and previously served on a HOA board in the

Parke neighborhood, as well as being a member of the OPA Search Committee in 2017-18.

While introducing Piatti as the most recent unanticipated board addition, OPA Vice President Steve Tuttle noted his wealth of community and professional qualifications.

"Mr. Piatti has significant experience with The Parke HOA, and will benefit this board as it moves forward," Tuttle said. "He also brings specific expertise in the areas of new capital enforcement, preparation and restrictions."

With the last day to file for candidacy scheduled for May 10, the contender picture started to come into focus, with Paula Gray tossing her hat in the ring by early that month.

In the 2018 board election, Gray fell two-dozen votes shy of topping Esther Diller for an open seat by a tally of 1,526 to 1,549.

As the remaining candidates announced their intentions leading up to the filing deadline, Diller resigned from her board seat. Elected for a one-year term in 2018, Diller said health issues were behind the decision.

"I would like to take this time to say I think our board did a lot of great things," Diller said in a press release. "The right decisions are usually the hardest and after several years of 'kicking it down the road,' this board made those difficult decisions."

The candidates gathered for a pair of
See THREE Page 12



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YIR 2019

Three new OPA board members

Continued from Page 11
 election forums in June to discuss their campaign positions. Ballots were mailed in early July ahead of an Aug. 7 deadline.

Ballot counts were completed two days later, with results announced during the annual homeowners meeting on Aug. 10.

While originally slated to be confirmed during the homeowners meeting, finalizing the results was delayed as the gathering failed to garner the required quorum of 100 lot owners, with the technicality completed during a specially convened meeting the following Wednesday.

In late August, newly elected board members Janasek, Perrone and Rogers were vetted on homeowner association guidelines and OPA-specific governing documents during an hours-long informational session.

After spending his entire adult life living in Ocean Pines since moving to the area in 1984, Janasek immersed himself in advisory committee work following an unsuccessful board bid in 2016.

"I realized I didn't know enough about the ins and outs of the board and the mini government that we have within the Pines," Janasek said. "So, I have involved myself in a lot more of the politics and a lot more stuff going on behind the scenes."

During that time, Janasek took part in reinvigorating the golf committee and later served on the natural assets committee, eventually rising to chairman.

"What I realize is that you need to know somebody on the board of Ocean Pines in order to get stuff done," Janasek said. "I want to get back on it and help people get stuff done."

Although elected for his first board term, Perrone is no stranger to Ocean Pines or the association inner workings.

Besides spending more than half his life in the area after relocating to the pines 36 years ago, in recent years Perrone has served on the OPA Budget and Finance Committee, including a stint as chairman.

During his campaign, Perrone highlighted financial expertise he had gained, while also espousing support for several

See THREE Page 14

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YIR 2019

Little Leaguers celebrate great tourney results

By Morgan Pilz
Staff Writer

(Dec. 27, 2019) Berlin's Little League All-Star teams were quite successful this season, with several winning district, state and/or regional titles. One squad even advanced to the World Series.

Junior League:

The Junior Berlin Little League All-Star team played in Taylor, Michigan for the World Series in August and finished the season ranked fourth out of 1,500 U.S. Junior Little League squads and eighth internationally.

Berlin – district, state and regional champions – lost its first game to the South East Regional championship team from Florida, 15-2.

Berlin's next game was against the South West Regional championship team from Oklahoma. Berlin won 19-3 in four innings.

"That game was Berlin baseball at its finest," Coach Kris Mandley said. "We made a statement with that win."

The Berlin squad played a team from Michigan next, and lost, 5-1, ending its World Series tournament run.

"It was a tough loss," Mandley said.



The Junior Berlin Little League All-Star team's World Series tournament run in Taylor, Michigan, ended on Wednesday, Aug. 14, after losing to a representative from Michigan, 5-1.

ELAINE BRADY/BAYSIDE GAZETTE

"We hit the ball but Michigan played us well ... a couple of errors on our part is what gave them the momentum to pull out the win."

The team returned home from the World Series on Aug. 19 in style with a police procession and escort by the Maryland Red Knights Motorcycle Club.

Several local officials including Berlin Mayor Gee Williams, Worcester County Commissioner Bud Church and

See ALL-STARS Page 14

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YEAR IN REVIEW 2019

All-Stars make mark in tourneys

Continued from Page 13

Worcester County Sheriff Matt Crisafulli as well as the parents and family members of the Berlin Little League All Stars came out to the Worcester County Athletic Complex in Berlin to congratulate the team on making it all the way to the World Series.

“What an amazing journey this has been ... I loved coaching all these boys and would do it all over again if I was given the chance ... but wouldn't change a thing about this ride,” Mandley said.

8-10 League:

The 8-10 Berlin All-Star team got off to a rough start in its regional tournament held in Cranston, New Jersey, as the boys fell to a team from New Jersey, 2-0, then 14-4 to Pennsylvania's representative and 13-0 to a squad from New York, in August.

The Berlin squad – district and state champions – finished the tournament with a win over the regional representative from Delaware, 5-2.

“It was a good way to go out of the tournament,” Coach Ron Calloway said. “We probably played one of the best games, if not the best game at the end of the season there. Delaware is one of the stronger teams in the tournament.”

During the regional tournament,

each team was guaranteed four games. After losing three games, the Berlin squad was out of the running for the championship, but the boys didn't give up.

“I can't say enough from the three-to four-day-a-week practices all summer, just the dedication that they put in for 9- to 10-year-olds is just a lot to be said about how much they love the game of baseball,” Calloway said.

Intermediate:

The Berlin Intermediate team played a squad from New Jersey twice in August, during the regional tournament in Dix Hills, New York.

Berlin won the first match, 4-1, but lost the second, which was for the regional title, 13-3.

The Berlin squad kicked off the tournament with a 14-6 victory over New Hampshire. The group then topped a team from Pennsylvania, 11-8.

The Berlin team suffered its first loss falling to New Jersey, 6-3. However, the boys bounced back with a victory trouncing their New York opponent, 24-6, to advance to the championship competition against the team from New Jersey.

“It was a great season and a lot of memories were made,” Coach Barb Kohut said. “The team worked their

hearts out all season and that showed.”

The squad won a district and state title this season.

It takes a lot of dedication, talent and commitment to win a district and state title,” Kohut said. “The fact that they are second in the eastern region is something to applaud, not put their heads down.”

Major Softball:

The Major Softball League district and state championship team fought valiantly, but fell out of the running for a regional title after losing to New Jersey in Bristol, Connecticut, 11-4, in July.

“We were happy to come out and win one,” Coach Katie Griffin said. “It was a phenomenal experience. It was nothing they ever experienced before and it was just a lot of fun and bonding.”

The squad lost to New York in the first round of the regional tournament, 12-2. The girls rallied back with a 6-1 win over their opponent from Maine.

Despite the season-ending loss, the team was not disappointed.

“I had someone come up to me and say this was the best Maryland team he's seen in a long time,” Griffin said. “We took it as every game is a bonus round. We're not bummed.”

YIR 2019

Three members elected to board

Continued from Page 12

proposed capital projects and noting the importance of providing quality amenities to bolster profit and loss statements.

“If you're going to run for the board, you need to understand the finances here, because this is a \$14 million operation on a yearly basis,” Perrone said. “You need to understand where the money goes and how it's being spent.”

While still a relatively fresh face after moving to Ocean Pines in 2018, Rogers brought a solid resume to the race.

After charting a professional path as a registered nurse, and later earning a masters from the University of Maryland followed by a Nurse Practitioner's certification, upon reaching the half century mark Rogers shifted gears and entered law school.

Rogers campaigned on the importance of transparency for board and association leadership.

“This community has a lot going for it and I think it's very important for the board to maintain a transparent relationship with the people that are here,” Rogers said. “This is their forever homes, and ... if we had more forums [where] we had some involvement, it ... would help people understand what the board is trying to achieve.”



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YEAR IN REVIEW 2019

Trendic resigns, launches petitions and sues

By Greg Ellison
Staff Writer

(Dec. 26, 2019) After voting against capital project spending during budget approval in April, Board of Directors member Slobodan Trendic resigned his post, and subsequently conducted twin petition drives. One sought a referendum on spending and the other called for the halt of a construction project.

Both petitions were disqualified by the OPA in August, with one rejection resulting in a lawsuit.

Trendic, who was elected in 2016, was finishing the last third of a three-year term, before submitting a resignation letter on April 11.

During an OPA Clubs Committee meeting last December, the group discussed proposed renovations at the Golf Club after requests for proposals had been received for second-floor renovations.

Trendic, the committee liaison to the board, told the group if "simple renovation" were pursued, work could kick off on Jan. 1 and be completed in short order, while larger undertakings, including razing the structure and building a new one, would alter time frames significantly.

"What I'm hoping to see, as an in-



Slobodan Trendic

dividual director, is that by the time the board meets to hold a budget working session ... that we would have some kind of a discussion related to the numbers for the clubhouse."

In early February, Trendic failed to gain traction on a handful of fiscal 2020 budget-related motions that were voted down by the board.

While the vote totals to defeat the motions varied, the nearest to passage, rejected 4-3, sought to reduce the proposed budget by 2.5 percent.

OPA President Doug Parks and board member Frank Daly concurred with the suggestion but preferred a "targeted," rather than mandated, percentage.

Trendic raised issue with the roughly \$1 million deficit and proposed advertising expenditures of roughly \$100,000 by the PR and marketing department.

"I wonder if we even should be entertaining the idea of approving the budget this year" he said.

The board voted 6-1 to defeat other Trendic motions that would have required the yacht club to show a profit

and establish employee health insurance rate splits at 86/14 for single coverage and 78/22 for family coverage.

Also a motion to adjust golf operations to show a positive budget variance failed to gain a second, while another to change the bulkhead differential charge to \$200 was withdrawn.

At the end of February, Trendic cast the sole dissenting vote for budget approval, continuing a trend from the two earlier cycles.

In 2018, Trendic joined former board member Tom Herrick in opposing budget approval, while in 2017 he joined Parks to the same end.

"The issue I have basically goes to how we, as an association, are dealing with the \$1.6 million deficit that was generated during fiscal years 2017 and 2018," he said.

Trendic opposed increasing assessment rates by \$40 per homeowner to drop the deficit by an additional \$340,000, which would follow the \$71 boost to assessment fees in fiscal 2019 that trimmed \$600,000 off the then \$1.6 million total.

"I just don't subscribe to that kind of board approach to dealing with the deficit," he said. "Is it necessary to do all this ... so quickly? I don't think so."

After Trendic offered a slide pres-

entation that outlined alternative cost-cutting suggestions,

OPA Vice President Steve Tuttle said the information was being presented too last-minute.

"You said you have a slide you want to show the board now - but why haven't we seen that last week or the week before?" he said.

Tuttle said based on the presentation from Finance Director Steve Phillips earlier in that meeting it appeared evident numerous departments had made diligent efforts to cut their respective budget totals.

Trendic responded that the board was essentially "moving money around from one [department] to another."

"It's playing around with money, and I just don't want to be a part of that," he said.

Trendic said the board was having property owners foot the cost for prior fiscal mismanagement.

"If this \$40 this year passes, we will have collected \$950,000 from the homeowners, yet we haven't really done much on the other side of the equation," Trendic said.

During a town hall meeting at end of March, the board confirmed an in-

See PETITION Page 17

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YEAR IN REVIEW 2019

Petition drive invalidated by OP Association

Continued from Page 16

clination to build a new clubhouse at the golf course with Tuttle noting a firm decision was not yet made.

"We're looking at this as economically as we can [and] as community-centric as we can, to make sure that we're providing ... for the whole community," Tuttle said. "In my perspective, having that facility there ... is a benefit to our values of our properties in the community."

In early April the board voted to spend more than \$3 million for three capital improvement projects, which included, besides rebuilding the country club, expanding the police/administration building and replacing the golf cart barn.

All three projects were awarded to Whyland Construction from Laurel, Delaware, which caused Trendic to take issue with the procurement process.

"As much as I would like to see these projects go forward, there's just so much ... wrong with the way this procurement process has been handled," he said. "I am just really worried that we will rush through something and later on it's going to cost us a lot more money that is not shown in the numbers."

Tuttle touted the "guaranteed maximum price contract" language included for the trio of projects.

"Unfortunately, we only did get one bid on this. I think it's a very reputable company. We've gotten incredible references," Tuttle continued. "I think we're working with a really good contractor. I think we've got a great opportunity to move forward, and a great opportunity to improve the reputation of Ocean Pines."

After abstaining from voting for the police building, Trendic opposed the country club and golf cart barn contracts, with the remaining half dozen board members in agreement on the entirety.

Trendic submitted his resignation less than a week later on April 11, which highlighted the board rejecting his motion to require the golf course upgrades to pass a referendum vote.

"Your unwillingness to second my motion for discussion and your rejection of my proposed referendum leads me to make this difficult decision," he wrote.

Trendic said the ramifications of the financial investment are long term.

"How [do] any of these projects improve the community as a whole?" he

said. "It really comes down to the question of investing and prioritizing."

Shortly after stepping down from his post, Trendic held a town hall meeting at the Ocean Pines Library.

Promising to present plans to "jumpstart interest in the community," Trendic said the intent was to garner more community involvement with association management.

"My hope is ... to build a momentum that will create a grassroots effort to bring people together," Trendic said.

After the town hall meeting, Trendic formed the advocacy group, START, which stands for strategic planning, transparency, accountability, respect and trust.

The group circulated a pair of petitions seeking referendums on the more than \$3 million proposed expenditure.

The first petition was to reduce board spending authority to \$1 million, and the second called for a homeowners' vote on whether to approve a clubhouse project.

Trendic submitted the petitions, with the first including 880 signatures, during the OPA homeowners annual meeting in August

"START and the team worked very

hard on these two petition drives," he said. "The petitions were designed not to favor one or the other, but really to ask the board to conduct a referendum on those two questions as yes or no answers."

After the petition drive was started in April, the 10 percent total of association membership was estimated at roughly 845 individuals.

Trendic said vaguely worded language in the bylaws leave to question what constitutes the 10 percent of maximum voters required to trigger a referendum vote.

Trendic said clarity is needed to ascertain if the 10 percent tally is calculated based on the overall number of households in the community or the total number of eligible voters.

"This is ... a tough situation for the association legal counsel, the board, the management and for us as the homeowners that are involved in supporting this petition effort," he said.

OPA attorney Jeremy Tucker issued a legal opinion stating the language in the first did not meet the association governing guidelines, while the second failed to reach qualification thresholds.

Regardless of how the 10 percent

See TRENDIC Page 19

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Opinion

Please send all letters and other editorial submissions to editor@baysidegazette.com by 5 p.m. Monday.

Happy 2020

Here's to a prosperous new year from all of us



YEAR IN REVIEW 2019

OP sees major financial turnaround

By Greg Ellison
Staff Writer

(Dec. 26, 2019) After Ocean Pines Association members started the year with a proposed increase to annual assessment charges from soon-to-be-departed General Manager John Bailey, the subsequent leadership upheaval handed the reins to current General Manager John Viola, who employed expertise from existing personnel to produce profitable budget figures while continuing to erase prior fiscal deficits.

In January, community dissension peaked after Bailey pitched an assessment increase of \$127 for the pending fiscal 2019/2020 budget.

Countering the proposal, and arguably undercutting the importance of enacting what would represent the second largest assessment escalation instituted by the OPA, Bailey reported the association had been profitable for the last five months of calendar year 2018.

To continue paying down the roughly \$1 million OPA deficit, Bailey had also proposed a four-year payment schedule, earmarking

\$100,000 in 2020, \$250,000 in 2021 and \$325,000 in both 2022 and 2023.

During a budget presentation in January, Bailey referenced a compensation study that highlighted nearly three-dozen positions requiring wage adjustments totaling \$128,000. Including both 2 percent merit increases and about a 10 percent rise in medical costs, Bailey forecast payroll costs to increase 8.4 percent to more than \$7.6 million.

Other significant figures in the draft budget included tapping more than \$3.4 million from reserve funds, including approximately \$1.6 million to finance the golf course club house renovations and roughly \$800,000 to renovate the police/administration building.

Bailey reported bulkhead reserves would begin the start of the upcoming fiscal year on May 1 at \$1,598,000, while estimating a fiscal 2019/2020 contribution at \$22,500 and planned spending of \$1.6 million would essentially empty the fund with just over \$1,400 remaining to close the budget

year. The questionable budgeting led to Bailey's departure and the installation of Treasurer John Viola as the association's top executive.

Operating under Viola's oversight, numerous department heads strived to scrub expenses in preparation for approval of the fiscal 2019/2020 budget that began May 1.

Instrumental in the emergency changeover was Colby Phillips, shortly to be promoted to operations director, and Finance Director Steve Phillips.

Colby Phillips, working in tandem with Public Works Director Eddie Wells, quickly managed to significantly reduce the \$620,000 Bailey had budgeted for drainage pipe repairs.

For example, after Wells directed crews to dig up the road near Mumford's Landing, it was discovered a proposed pipe replacement, which had been addressed seven years earlier, could be repaired instead for a savings of more than \$240,000.

See OPA Page 23

BAYSIDE GAZETTE

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YEAR IN REVIEW 2019



Berlin Fire Company unveils new Station 3 on Route 50

By Rachel Ravina
Staff Writer

(Dec. 26, 2019) The Berlin Fire Company opened another station this year so it could provide better service to people in its fire service area, which extends far out of town.

The new station is on a two-acre piece of property on Ocean Gateway, about a mile outside town. It was unveiled on Sunday, Oct. 13.

The process to bring this station to fruition took years and was not without its drama.

The Town of Berlin and the Berlin Fire Company were frequently at odds over funding, with town officials concerned about using Berlin tax dollars to help pay for an out-of-town facility.

The fire company assured them that was not the case.

Over the course of several public financial discussions between the agency and the Town of Berlin during last year's budget session, Councilman Troy Purnell questioned how the fire company planned to pay for the Station 3 because there was no balance sheet readily available. He then pointed to Berlin Fire

Company's cashflow statement from the prior year.

"I see \$1.4 [million] in unrestricted cash and you've got \$660,000 in restricted cash ... it shows you've got \$2,072,000 in the bank," Purnell said earlier this year.

Fitzgerald clarified that they raised a portion of the funds with the help of several large donations. The agency borrowed "up to \$800,000" to cover the remaining cost.

Fitzgerald expressed his gratitude to the Worcester County Commissioners, state elected officials, volunteers, and donors as commemorative plaques were unveiled during the ceremony in October.

"We can't be a volunteer fire service without community support," Fitzgerald said.

Although the new fire station is outside of town, Fitzgerald stressed that the volunteers work to serve and protect the entire community. Local dignitaries, like State Del. Wayne Hartman (R-38C), agreed.

"People's lives are counting on all of you so I want to thank all of you for your work," Hartman said.

Trendic lawsuit hangs in limbo

Continued from Page 17
mandate is calculated, with ongoing debate over the precise number of association members qualified to vote, Trendic said the community sentiment is undeniable.

"The fact that 880 members signed the petition, I think, speaks volumes," he said.

From his purview, Trendic said the larger issue now is protecting the means for membership to influence how the association is managed, through both elections and petition.

Trendic said if majority sentiment sides with reducing board spending authority, that is what should transpire.

Trendic filed suit in Worcester County Circuit Court on Nov. 15 in response to the OPA Board of Directors' petition rejection and is seeking up to \$75,000 in compensatory damages for legal fees.

resenting Trendic, has filed suit seeking declaratory and injunctive relief based on what are being characterized as legally dubious assertions made by Tucker.

Tucker's opinion was issued on Aug. 20, and the next day the board opted to invalidate the latter petition, which contained 743 signatures and failed to meet the required 10 percent of eligible voters at 9.69 percent.

While not contesting that conclusion, Trendic filed suit over the spending limit issue, noting the 808 signatures collected for that drive did, by Tucker's admission, meet the 10 percent threshold.

Trendic's suit takes exception with Tucker's grounds for refusing to recognize the spending limit petition due to the inclusion of the term, "should," which he reasoned "seeks an opinion" of membership and does not "ask specifically whether they vote to approve the amendment."

Attorney Bruce Bright, who is rep-

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HONOR SOCIETY

Stephen Decatur High School recently established its chapter of the Rho Kappa National Social Studies Honor Society. Forty-five students were inducted. They gained admission into Rho Kappa National Social Studies Honor Society by earning at least a 3.5 grade point average in the discipline, completing an advanced placement course in the subject matter, and by demonstrating academic enthusiasm and integrity.

YEAR IN REVIEW 2019

Kirwan recommendations going to legislators

By Rachel Ravina

Staff Writer

(Dec. 26, 2019) Policy recommendations designed to revamp the state's public education system will go before the Maryland General Assembly next month.

The Commission on Innovation and Excellence in Education, which is also known as the Kirwan Commission, is led by its chairman William "Brit" Kirwan.

The legislation, known as The Blueprint for America's Future, included proposals for free preschool for 3- and 4-year-olds living at 300 percent below the property level, higher salaries for teachers, college- and career-readiness standards, vocational education, and allocated funding for counties.

The Senate bill went through without Gov. Larry Hogan's signature in June. However, Hogan said during the Maryland Association of Counties conference earlier this summer that he couldn't support the plan because half the monetary burden would fall to the counties in Maryland.

Dr. Jon Andes, executive director of the Eastern Shore of Maryland Educational Consortium, and former Worcester County school superintendent, said the commission would work to decide how roughly \$855 million would be distributed throughout the state.

He added there would be about \$725 million on the table for fiscal years 2021 and 2022, "with a potential of an additional \$130 million."

Andes said state funding for schools is distributed "inverse the wealth," which puts Worcester at a big disadvantage, since the state calculates wealth for

school funding by comparing the total assessed value of real property in a county to its total population.

"[The] more local wealth you have, the less state aid you receive," he said.

Worcester County receives the second lowest amount of state funding at \$4,217 per student and some \$26.5 million overall in fiscal year 2019.

The county's tax base wealth, however, is largely because of resort- and tourism-based properties and has nothing to do with household income, as is evidenced by the 10.3 percent of county residents whose incomes put them below the poverty line, according to the Census Bureau.

The Kirwan Commission created a subgroup charged with finding better ways to allocate millions of dollars in state funding to improve the state's schools.

"[The] 13-member commission that's been appointed — all western shore folks," Andes said. "There's no one from the Eastern Shore or no one from rural communities on the commission."

"It's critically important that a representative of rural communities be in the room when people are making determinations with the distribution of state aid," Andes said. "Without the voice of rural Maryland in that room, the needs of students in rural communities will not be met."

Andes also pondered how Worcester County would be treated.

"It could potentially negatively impact the funding formula, especially if the funding ... is distributed based on wealth in terms of Worcester County," he said.

Locally, Worcester County Commis-

sioner Bud Church appeared to be caught off guard when he learned of the makeup of the funding formula work group.

"I think that was a blatant mistake," Church said. "We are a part of the state of Maryland."

A few weeks later, State Sen. Mary Beth Carozza (R-38) publicly objected to the Kirwan Commission's funding formula workgroup's decision to go into executive session during a Sept. 19 meeting, charging that it is a public body and is therefore obligated to work in the open.

"I ... strongly objected to this decision to work on education funding formulas in secret," Carozza said. "These meetings should be open to the public and not behind closed doors."

However, Kirwan responded that the formula could have "sensitivity to different assumptions" and members wanted to see "what happens with the formula as you change some assumptions" in order to get a better understanding of the formula.

"So the whole process where the decisions are being made will be in the public, and I just wanted to emphasize that point," Kirwan said.

The Kirwan Commission's funding formula workgroup issued a set of preliminary funding formula recommendations during an Oct. 15 meeting.

The commission's wealth calculation incorporates the property tax base and income tax totals. Worcester County, with a population of a little more than 51,000, has a resort-generated assessable base of almost \$16 billion.

The formula shows that Worcester County would have to budget an addi-

tional \$5.3 million on its schools in 2030, while the state's contribution would grow by \$7 million for a combined \$12.3 million increase in 2030 school spending in Worcester.

By contrast, Wicomico County, which ranks 22nd in the state in per capita wealth, would receive an additional \$73.8 million from the state, while its local contribution to the school budget would have to grow by \$9.4 million, according to figures released during an Oct. 15 meeting.

Carozza also took issue with the workgroup's ideas of property value-based wealth.

"The problem with the current formula is that it is more skewed towards property values rather than making an adjustment to incorporate poverty to more equitably distribute school funds to the school systems," Carozza said.

Lou Taylor, superintendent of Worcester County Public Schools said more than \$255 million in state funding for fiscal year 2020 was included as part of "The Blueprint for Maryland's Future," and of that Worcester County received just \$688,000.

The commission, however, was directed to determine what public schools needed financially to implement new programs, but not how to pay for it. That has earned strong opposition from Gov. Larry Hogan.

"Unfortunately, the 'Kirwan Tax Hike Commission' is hell-bent on spending billions more than we can afford, and legislators are refusing to come clean about where the money is going to come from," Hogan said. "Even after more than three years of meetings,

See EDUCATION Page 27

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Dec. 31: Roaring 20's New Year's Eve Party w/33 RPM (ticketed event)
Jan. 1: Bingo w/DJ Rupe, 6 p.m.

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410-524-7575 / www.bjsonthewater.com
Dec. 27: Chest Pains, 9 p.m.
Dec. 28: Over Time, 9 p.m.
Dec. 31: DJ Fast Eddie, 10 p.m.
Jan. 1: Old School, 6 p.m.

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116th Street, Ocean City, behind Fountain Head Towers Condominium
443-664-2896 / www.bourbonstreetonthebeach.com
Dec. 27: Dave Sherman, 7 p.m.
Dec. 28: Rockoholics, 7 p.m.
Dec. 29: Randy Jamz, 6 p.m.
Dec. 31: OHO, 4-7 p.m.;

New Year's Eve Party w/Reform School, 8 p.m.
Jan. 1: New Year's Day Hangover Party w/2 Guyz & A Mama, 3 p.m.

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Dec. 27: Beats by Jeremy, 9 p.m.
Dec. 28: Adam Dutch, 10 p.m.
Dec. 30: Karaoke w/Jeremy, 9 p.m.
Dec. 31: Beats by Crop Top, 9 p.m.
Jan. 2: Beats by Wax, 9 p.m.

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49th Street and the bay, Ocean City
410-524-4900 / www.seacrets.com

Dec. 27: DJ Tuff, 9 p.m. to 1 a.m.
Dec. 28: Whiskeyhickon Boys, 5-9 p.m.; DJ Bobby-O, 6 p.m. to 1:50 a.m.; DJ Tuff, 9 p.m. to 1 a.m.; Stellar Mojo, 10 p.m. to 1:50 a.m.
Dec. 30: Opposite Directions, 1-5 p.m.; DJ Bobby-O, 5 p.m.; Dec. 31: Full Circle, 4-7:30 p.m.; New Year's Eve Bash, 4 p.m. to 4 a.m.; DJ Davie, 4:45-9:30 p.m.; DJ Tuff, 8 p.m. to 2:30 a.m.; Nowhere Slow, 8:15-11:30 p.m.; Garden State Radio, 8:15 p.m. to 12:15 a.m.; DJ Bobby-O, 10 p.m. to 3:50 a.m.; DJ Mike T, 10:15 p.m. to 4 a.m.; Hott Todays, 12-3 a.m.; Lima Bean Riot, 1-4 a.m.

SKYE RAW BAR & GRILLE

66th Street, Ocean City
410-723-6762 / www.skyebaroc.com
Dec. 27: Rick Artz (Formerly of Love Seed Mama Jump), 4-8 p.m.
Dec. 30: Aaron Howell, 4-8 p.m.
Dec. 31: New Year's Eve Party w/champaign toast and party favors

YEAR IN REVIEW 2019

OPA charts financial success during 2019

Continued from Page 18

While several other large pipe replacements were found to be warranted, Phillips said public works would focus attention on the most problematic flooding areas, while also investigating less costly alternatives to the bulkhead replacement plan proposed by Bailey.

Simultaneously, Steve Phillips took the leadership role on implementing the new Northstar software system, starting with developing a timeline in conjunction with an outside consultant, while also tracking a nearly completed forensic audit conducted by Baltimore firm Gross Mendelsohn.

The board approved the fiscal 2019/2020 budget on Feb. 23, which totaled \$12.8 million and set assessment fees at \$986 per homeowner, significantly lower than the \$1,078 figure suggested by Bailey in January.

The week before, the board hashed out numerous cost-trimming measures, including reducing expenditures for marketing and human resources among other department cuts, along with restructuring health care coverage rates to assign 20 percent of costs to employees.

Looking to reverse the scales after suffering significant financial losses in 2017 and 2018, Viola's initial move as general

manager was to form multiple workgroups that paired elected officials with staff and association members to examine dredging and drainage, building construction, a new compensation study and contracts for food and beverage.

Following budget approval, in early March the board voted for a compensation study to determine of pay and benefits were on par with surrounding communities.

By June, the final figures for fiscal 2018/2019 were released and showed the association closing more than \$130,000 ahead of budget.

This represented a marked improvement over the prior fiscal year where OPA operating funds ended more than \$1.2 million below budget.

Viola reported revenues were \$535,000 more than had been budgeted, with expenses doing some \$392,000 better than anticipated.

By June, results of a forensic audit of the OPA Food and Beverage and Public Works departments, ordered the year before, were released.

The report from accounting firm Gross Mendelsohn found that the losses of more than \$700,000 in food and beverage operation and the public works department in fiscal 2017/2018, were due mostly to bad management.

In August, residents were presented further evidence of the association's financial turnaround during the annual homeowners' meeting, when Viola shared a financial forecast far brighter than in recent years.

"We were favorable this year \$116,000 to the budget, [which] is a big difference from the last two years where I stood up here and had to inform you of losses of around \$350,000 and \$1.4 million," he said. "We're definitely moving in the right direction."

Fiscal 2018/2019 assessment revenue was roughly \$5.8 million and overall expenses for operating departments was approximately \$6.25 million versus budget estimates of \$6.27 million, reflecting a savings of about \$27,000.

Viola said positive financial trends were also tracked among the array of amenities provided in Ocean Pines.

During fiscal 2018/2019, the net from amenities, which was budgeted at \$474,000, totaled approximately \$575,000, for a positive variance of just over \$101,000.

"Food and Beverage [operations] this year is approximately \$13,000 favorable to budget, [which] is a big difference from the prior two years," he said.

Viola said to help reduce the previously accrued debt that weighed down the operating budget, annual assessments, were raised in 2019, with \$71 of that charge dedicated to paying down operating fund deficits.

Viola said the operating fund, which had a balance of merely \$6,000 in fiscal 2016, dropped to a negative tally of \$369,000 the next year, before falling to a deficit of about \$1.3 million by fiscal 2018.

Viola said the recent assessment increase has helped trim about \$600,000 off the operating fund deficit, which ended fiscal 2019 at about \$895,000.

"We went from the \$1.3 million negative ... to a positive \$115,000 and that's the way we will track," he said.

In December, Viola said the current fiscal year has continued trending in the right direction, with ledgers sitting about roughly \$551,000 favorable to budget.

While cautioning that the favorable figures at the mid-point in the current fiscal year will scale down slightly through next April, Viola said ending in the black is virtually assured.

"Keep in mind the next six months we do utilize cash [but] I feel comfortable saying that we definitely will be favorable to budget for the year," he said.



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YEAR IN REVIEW 2019

Town Council passes budget, tax rate increase

By Rachel Ravina
Staff Writer

(Dec. 26, 2019) The Berlin mayor and Town Council approved a \$15.2 million budget for fiscal year 2020, but getting to that final vote involved one of the most tumultuous budget processes in years.

“This has been a challenging budget cycle – that’s an understatement,” said Mayor Gee Williams about the need to raise revenue and lower costs to restore the town’s financial reserves.

At the heart of the problem was a sewer utility that had been losing money for years because rates were too low. But rather than raise the rates, the town propped up the utility with money borrowed from the town’s general fund reserves.

Those chickens came home to roost this year, with Williams and the council that much higher sewer rates and a major property tax increase would be needed to right the ship.

Reacting to howls of protest, town officials began slashing at the budget.

The parks and recreation department decreased by 36.84 percent, the police department was cut by 11.02 percent and the economic development department’s budget decreased by 18.24 percent.

Councilman Thom Gulyas urged residents to attend meetings and voice their concerns.

“There’s five of us [on the council] and the mayor – five people to make the decisions ... but if no one shows up ...

we figure you guys are happy,” Gulyas said.

Gulyas said the town has been covering utility losses with money from the general fund for several years now, and the blame rests on the mayor and council.

Resident John Watson voiced his frustrations about the situation during a budget meeting.

“You’re the ones that got us into this mess and now you’re putting it onto us to get you out of it, and I think that’s very unfair,” Watson said. “I’m upset and I’m not happy. And I don’t mean this as a threat ... but elections have consequences.”

The general fund had about \$6.2 million approved for fiscal year 2020 as opposed to the roughly \$7.2 million for fiscal year 2019, according to budget reports. That’s a 13.80 percent decrease.

The water utility rate went up to 5 percent, and the sewer utility’s rate rose by 25 percent for the fiscal year 2020 budget.

“These increases are needed to ensure these three utilities no longer need to borrow from the general fund to support their operations,” Williams said.

The town’s water fund budget decreased by 18.79 percent for fiscal year 2020, according to budget reports. There was about \$1.2 million approved for fiscal year 2019 and nearly \$916,000 approved for fiscal year 2020.

The sewer fund budget decreased by 7.72 percent, or about \$200,000, budget reports show. There was about

\$2.6 million approved for fiscal year 2019 and approximately \$2.4 million for fiscal year 2020.

Berlin’s electric utility’s budget decreased by 7.12 percent, according to budget reports. There was about \$5.7 million approved for fiscal year 2019 and about \$5.3 million approved for fiscal year 2020.

The stormwater fund budget for next year also decreased by 71.69 percent, or about \$1.2 million. There was about \$1.6 million approved for fiscal year 2019’s budget and nearly \$455,000 approved for fiscal year 2020.

Property tax rates were also a contentious issue during the fiscal year 2020 budget session. At the beginning of budget discussions, officials anticipating increasing them anywhere from 20 to 34 percent.

“I was outraged when I heard that Berlin may increase their taxes up to 34 percent ... and possibly raise their sewer and stormwater rates as well,” said resident Jason Bratten. “If there is an increase, it should be in phases from at least three-to-five years ... not all at one time.”

Resident Jim Meckley said a recent budget listening session at Stephen Decatur High School drew about 200 people, many of whom many told heart-wrenching stories about how increases could affect them.

“People cried,” he said. “And mayor, at the first work session, you sit down and open your meeting and ask for a 29 percent raise. [That’s] irresponsible.”

Williams proposed a 20-cent increase in the property tax rate, from 68 to 88 cents per \$100 of evaluation, for both residential and commercial properties.

The tax increases would also amount to a \$600 increase on the annual tax bill for a home assessed at \$300,000.

Representatives of 50 Berlin businesses signed a letter written by Salt Water Media owner Stephanie Fowler, who read the letter to the town officials during the public comment portion of the meeting.

“We are here because we see the incredible potential of this town,” Fowler said in the letter. “You have asked for our input and claimed that our absence from Town Hall is a silent approval. Let us fix that now: we are asking that you do not make it harder to live and work in Berlin.”

“The residents deserve better. The business owners deserve better,” Fowler said in the letter. “Please do better.”

The Town Council agreed the 29 percent tax rate, or \$.88 per \$100 of assessed value, introduced during an April 22 council meeting was too high.

“It was a good place to start and got everybody to pay attention,” Williams said.

The proposed, and eventually agreed upon rate, would come out to \$.80 per \$100 of assessed value for the upcoming fiscal year, according to Williams. Fiscal year 2021’s rate is “to be determined.”

OPA reaches agreement for Comcast digital

By Greg Ellison
Staff Writer

(Dec. 26, 2019) Apparently responding to Ocean Pines’ residents requests for competition among digital service providers, the Ocean Pines Association Board of Directors agreed in September to give Comcast the rights of way it needs to build a project that will put it up Mediacom.

The beginning of the end of Mediacom’s decades-long exclusive contract to deliver internet and cable TV to Ocean Pines customers took place on Sept. 10. The board agreed to give Comcast access to association rights of way so it can install its own network along the same routes as Mediacom.

Mediacom has been the sole Internet and cable provider in Ocean Pines since it bought American Cable TV in 1997.

In a “History of Ocean Pines, Maryland,” author E.A. Rogers said the OPA cable franchise, which was initially granted in 1978, was taken over by Simmons Cable TV after it purchased Triad CATV in 1987, which was subsequently sold to American Cable TV in 1992.

To clear a path for Comcast to enter the market, the board in July revised contact terms with Mediacom, which eliminated an exclusivity agreement for use of easements and rights of way permitted in the 1970s under federal law. In 2008, the FCC killed that regulation.

Prior to reaching agreement with Comcast, OPA President Doug Parks said the previous contact with Mediacom dated to 1998 and included exclusivity rights granted initially in 1978.

“Once we signed a new contract with Mediacom, it removed that concept of exclusivity,” he said.

Matching the soon-to-follow Comcast terms, the Mediacom agreement was revised as a right of way contract, Parks said.

The renegotiated Mediacom contact altered previous terms that granted the association 3 percent of gross revenues from cable service to now permit collection of 1.6 percent of all services, including phone and Internet.

The lower percentage collected for an increased array of services would likely

balance out financially, with Parks estimating the association would continue to net in the area of \$150,000 annually.

During the Comcast contract signing in September, Parks said those terms were negotiated at the same percentage of return as the Mediacom arrangement.

“We are collecting the same 1.6 percent, and it’s not a franchise fee, it’s a right-to-access fee,” he said.

Parks was also quick to note the pending introduction of Comcast services would not preclude the continued involvement of Mediacom or affect current customers.

“This is not a replacement,” he said. “They will be in addition to the incumbent vendor which is Mediacom.”

Parks also highlighted the involvement of OPA Attorney Jeremy Tucker and former Board member Tom Terry during the contract negotiations with Comcast.

Terry, commenting during the contract signing in September, said the initial conversations trace back nearly two

years.

“At that point, their offer came back with, basically, everybody in Ocean Pines has to buy service through the OPA and that was rejected,” he said.

During the interim, Terry said the lines of communication remained open regrading service options until Comcast recently came back to the table with more palatable terms.

“Basically, it’s an unsolicited offer,” he said.

Terry said introducing competition for cable and internet services could lead to innovative approaches beneficial to consumers.

“When you had a contract, which was Mediacom-only for years here, no one could come in and compete,” he said.

In September, Parks said the Comcast deal also specified terms to provide required infrastructure, with the entire community build-out required to be finished within five years.

“We don’t get to pick who gets built out first, but one of the things we did tell

See COMCAST Page 27

Puzzles

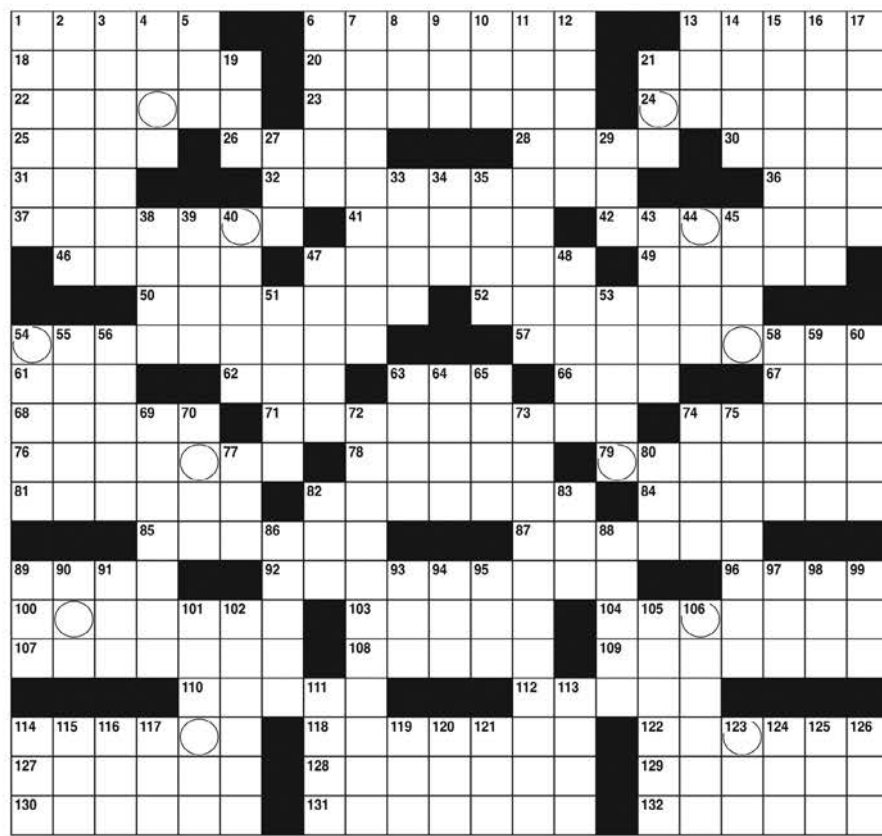
DOING A DOUBLE TAKE

BY CHRISTINA IVERSON AND JEFF CHEN / EDITED BY WILL SHORTZ

Christina Iverson of Ames, Iowa, is a stay-at-home mom with an almost-2-year-old and a child on the way. She started solving puzzles only in the summer of 2018. She found it was an easily interrupted activity when her baby was constantly waking up in the evenings. Also, "Crosswords met my need for something more intellectually stimulating than reading 'Goodnight Moon.'" Soon she made it a goal to have a puzzle published in The Times. Her collaborator, Jeff Chen, is a writer and professional crossword constructor in Seattle. They met through Jeff's daily column on the website XWord Info. — W.S.

- ACROSS**
- 1 Sandwich with an apostrophe in its name
 - 6 Last-minute eBay bidders
 - 13 Speaker
 - 18 Family written about by Margaret Mitchell
 - 20 Laureate
 - 21 California city whose name translates to "the table"
 - 22 Concise and to the point
 - 23 Improvement
 - 24 Desirous
 - 25 Word with coin or ring
 - 26 Enclosure for a slush pile, for short
 - 28 Salsa and guacamole
 - 30 Foe of the Jedi
 - 31 Boor
 - 32 This puzzle's subjects, by another name
 - 36 Beats by _____ (audio brand)
 - 37 For now
 - 41 One of 24
 - 42 Group running a celeb's social media accounts, say
 - 46 "My _____"
 - 47 Fragrant item in a fireplace
 - 49 Doorway
 - 50 What violence might lead to
 - 52 Political figure on whom Snowball is based in "Animal Farm"
- DOWN**
- 54 Hitting close to home?
 - 57 Pattern on a barber pole
 - 61 Shade
 - 62 Word before rip or slip
 - 63 F.D.R.'s last veep
 - 66 Boatload
 - 67 Youngest animal in the Hundred Acre Wood
 - 68 Daily cable show that has covered Hollywood since 1991
 - 71 Part of a parade float on New Year's Day
 - 74 Send over the moon
 - 76 Duties imposed
 - 78 Ainer of "Arrow" and "iZombie"
 - 79 Party notifications sent with a click
 - 81 Members of un monastère
 - 82 "Well, golly!"
 - 84 Maximally mannered
 - 85 "None for me, thanks"
 - 87 Brain, slangily
 - 89 Cry just before the birthday guest arrives at a surprise party
 - 92 Juniors, to their fathers
 - 96 Tingling, in a way
 - 100 Tousles, as hair
 - 103 Muscat native
 - 104 Bog growths
 - 107 Bit of off-road equipment
 - 108 Where Orange County is, in brief
 - 109 Something with many variables to consider
 - 110 Chow down on, biblically
 - 112 Judea and Sheba, in the Bible
 - 114 Warehouse stacks
 - 118 Relating to theft on the high seas
 - 122 Some South Africans
 - 127 French schoolteacher
 - 128 Chord known as "the devil in music" on account of its unsettling sound
 - 129 Title role played by Hilary Swank in a 2009 biopic
 - 130 "Alas ..."
 - 131 Good thing to find on a boat
 - 132 Agreeable response to a parental order
 - 15 George W. Bush's nickname for himself, with "the"
 - 16 Where to set your butts down
 - 17 Pandemonium
 - 19 _____ admin
 - 21 Retro-cool music purchases
 - 27 Producer of bills
 - 29 When repeated, "Cheerio!"
 - 33 The Jets, but not the Giants
 - 34 Lead-in to long
 - 35 Drink with a straw
 - 38 Hatcher of "Lois & Clark"
 - 39 Lawman at the O.K. Corral
 - 40 In the slightest
 - 43 What amber comes from
 - 44 Cleaning up the mess, for short?
 - 45 Texter's "ciao"
 - 47 Certain bean or horse
 - 48 "_____ run!"
 - 51 Levels
 - 53 Provocative poster
 - 54 Keeper of the books?
 - 55 One who fixes flats?
 - 56 One of Chaucer's pilgrims
 - 58 Hot under the collar
 - 59 Things students take
 - 60 "Whither thou _____"
 - 63 Mischievous titter
 - 64 Erupt
 - 65 Fortune 500 category, informally
 - 69 Most sinewy
 - 70 Florist's cutting
 - 72 Weather phenomenon whose double lights were said to represent this puzzle's subjects
 - 73 Baseball double play, in slang ... or a hint to understanding the 12 Across answers that have circles
 - 74 Like a "mwa-ha-ha" laugh
 - 75 Freedom
 - 77 Abbr. on a keyboard key
 - 80 Derrière
 - 82 India's smallest state
 - 83 Orange Sesame Street monster
 - 86 It's a start
 - 88 Founder of the Ottoman Empire
 - 89 "That's odd ..."
 - 90 Chits inits.
 - 91 Wet firecracker, e.g.
 - 93 Genre akin to goth
 - 94 _____ fly
 - 95 Finish of three U.S. state names
 - 97 Flash-drive port
 - 98 The big eau
 - 99 Org. that began welcoming girls in 2019
 - 101 California's _____ National Forest
 - 102 Wiped
 - 105 Seasoning in a yellow-and-blue tin
 - 106 Disgusting, quaintly
 - 111 Picks, with "for"
 - 113 Near impossibilities on par-5 holes
 - 114 Fig. watched by some dieters
 - 115 Bit in a feedbag
 - 116 Some fraternity-row letters
 - 117 G.R.E. administrator
 - 119 Coastal inlet
 - 120 "The pond": Abbr.
 - 121 Here's the kicker!
 - 123 Marks out
 - 124 Its seeds whirl to the ground
 - 125 Hit 2011 animated movie
 - 126 Pusher of green eggs and ham

Online subscriptions: Today's puzzle and more than 4,000 past puzzles, nytimes.com/crosswords (\$39.95 a year).



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HARD - 67

Fill in the blank spaces in the grid so that every vertical column, every horizontal row and every 3 by 3 box contains the numbers 1 through 9, without repeating any. There is really only one solution to each puzzle.

		9		7				
3	2			8			9	
1				9				4
							6	
	9	4		1		5	7	
	5							
4				3				7
	6		7				8	2
				5		6		

Answers to last week's puzzles

8	3	6	9	2	5	1	4	7
9	5	7	3	1	4	8	2	6
4	1	2	7	8	6	3	9	5
2	8	5	6	9	7	4	1	3
1	7	4	8	5	3	9	6	2
3	6	9	2	4	1	5	7	8
7	9	1	5	3	2	6	8	4
5	2	8	4	6	9	7	3	1
6	4	3	1	7	8	2	5	9

J	A	R	A	S	C	A	P	A	B	B	O	T	U	T	E	S
A	F	E	W	K	E	L	S	O	T	R	U	L	Y	F	E	T
B	R	E	E	Z	I	N	E	S	S	R	E	C	A	P	F	A
B	A	L	I	I	N	D	O	N	E	S	I	A	E	D	I	T
E	M	E	R	G	E	S	H	A	D	T	O	E	Z	I	N	E
R	E	D	D	T	I	R	A	D	E	B	O	Y	Z	I	M	E
				N	I	N	E	T	O	D	I	N	E	A	T	E
I	N	A	S	E	C	S	H	O	R	I	N	G	M	Y	B	
N	A	D	I	A	G	E	E	Z	E	R	U	S	B	E	C	K
K	R	I	S	T	E	N	W	I	G	N	E	H	I	L	O	L
E	N	D	O	D	O	S	E	E	T	O	I	A	M	N	E	Z
R	I	A	L	I	M	A	M	N	I	N	T	E	N	D	O	W
S	A	S	E	F	E	M	S	T	R	E	W	S	P	L	A	N
			X	V	I	A	B	U	S	I	V	E	W	H	Y	E
O	P	S	W	E	E	Z	E	R	N	E	R	V	E	D		
J	A	C	O	B	R	I	I	S	A	G	R	E	E	R	S	P
I	L	U	V	U	S	N	I	P	S	N	E	S	T	E	R	S
B	E	L	U	G	A	E	A	S	Y	O	N	T	H	E	E	Y
W	A	L	L	U	N	G	S	O	V	E	R	E	X	P	O	S
A	L	E	E	A	M	I	E	S	D	I	N	A	R	A	T	T
S	E	R	S	S	P	A	D	E	A	D	E	L	E	E	S	T

Calendar

Submit calendar items to: editor@oceancitytoday.net. Submission deadline is 5 p.m. Monday, the week of publication. Local submissions have priority. Area event listings are subject to space availability.

Thurs., Dec. 26

3D THURSDAY

Snow Hill library, 307 N. Washington St., 12:00 PM - 4:00 PM. Visit the library to see the 3D printer in action. Enter a raffle for a free 3D print. <http://www.worcesterlibrary.org>

OPEN ICE SKATING

Worcester County Recreation Center, 6030 Public Landing Road, 12:00 PM - 7:00 PM. Featuring open skating on the new synthetic ice rink. The cost per person is \$2, which includes skate rental and unlimited skating for the day. Children under the age of 14 must be accompanied by an adult at all times. Children age 6 and younger are not permitted to skate without an adult on the ice with them. Allen Swiger, aswiger@co.worcester.md.us, 410-632-2144, Ext. 2520

FIRESIDE CHAT

Berlin library, 13 Harrison Ave., 3:00 PM. Explore new authors and genres during this lively chat about favorite good reads. <http://www.worcesterlibrary.org>

FREE FAMILY HOLIDAY ACTIVITY

Dunes Manor Hotel, 2800 Baltimore Ave., 5:00 PM - 6:00 PM. Featuring Christmas Trivia with prizes. Surprise questions of Christmas history, holiday facts and holiday cheer. <http://www.dunesmanor.com>

BEACH SINGLES

Thursdays - Harpoon Hanna's, 39064 Harpoon Road, Fenwick Island, DE, 4:00 PM - 6:00 PM. Beach Singles, 45 years and older, meet for happy hour. Info: 302-436-9577, 410-524-0649 or BeachSingles.org

GRIEF SUPPORT

Thursdays - Ocean Pines library, 11107 Cathell Road, 11:00 AM. Coastal Hospice provides grief support and education. Participants work together to help each other navigate through grief at their own pace. Free and open to the public. Nicole Long, 443-614-6142

Fri., Dec. 27

FREE FAMILY HOLIDAY ACTIVITY

Dunes Manor Hotel, 2800 Baltimore Ave. Featuring Zippy's Ugly Sweater Party, 7-9 p.m. (featuring drink specials). <http://www.dunesmanor.com>

FIBER FRIENDS

Ocean Pines library, 11107 Cathell Road, 10:00 AM. Bring your lap work and join this group as they knit, crochet and embroider. All are welcome. Victoria Christie-Healy, 703-507-0708, <http://www.worcesterlibrary.org>

OPEN ICE SKATING

Worcester County Recreation Center, 6030 Public Landing Road, 12:00 PM - 7:00 PM. Featuring open skating on the new synthetic ice rink. The cost per person is \$2, which includes skate rental and unlimited skating for the day. Children under the age of 14 must be accompanied by an adult at all times. Children age 6 and younger are not permitted to skate without an adult on the ice with them. Allen Swiger, aswiger@co.worcester.md.us, 410-632-2144, Ext. 2520

Sat., Dec. 28

FREE FAMILY HOLIDAY ACTIVITIES

Dunes Manor Hotel, 2800 Baltimore Ave. Featuring Holiday DIY Treats, 2-3 p.m. (featuring creation and design of tasty goodies); Holiday Arts & Crafts, 1-2 p.m. (featuring creation of Christmas-themed ornaments and gifts). <http://www.dunesmanor.com>

ALL-YOU-CAN-EAT BREAKFAST BUFFET

Whaleyville United Methodist Church, 11716 Sheppards Crossing Road, 7:00 AM - 10:00 AM. Buffet will include pancakes, bacon, sausage, scrapple, scrambled eggs, chipped beef, hash brown potatoes, toast, fruit and assorted beverages. Cost is \$8 for adults and \$4 for children.

OPEN ICE SKATING

Worcester County Recreation Center, 6030 Public Landing Road, 12:00 PM - 7:00 PM. Featuring open skating on the new synthetic ice rink. The cost per person is \$2, which includes skate rental and unlimited skating for the day. Children under the age of 14 must be accompanied by an adult at all times. Children age 6 and younger are not permitted to skate without an adult on the ice with them. Allen Swiger, aswiger@co.worcester.md.us, 410-632-2144, Ext. 2520

YAKOV SMIRNOFF - HAPPILY EVER LAUGHTER

Ocean City Performing Arts Center, in the Ocean City convention center, 4001 Coastal Highway, 7:30 PM. Doors open at 7 p.m. Yakov Smirnoff is an iconic comedian, movie star and best-selling au-

thor. He continues to inspire others with his message that America is still What a County! Tickets cost \$47, \$38 and \$29. 410-289-2800, <http://www.ticketmaster.com>

FARMERS & ARTISANS MARKET

Saturdays - White Horse Park, 239 Ocean Parkway, 8:00 AM - 1:00 PM. Featuring live music, chef demos, children's activities and other special events. Shop for everything from fresh local produce to unique handmade artisan goods. Open to the public.

Sun., Dec. 29

FREE FAMILY HOLIDAY ACTIVITY

Dunes Manor Hotel, 2800 Baltimore Ave. Featuring Art Bar, 5-6 p.m. (an adult activity featuring craft cocktail lesson from the Dunes' resident mixologist). <http://www.dunesmanor.com>

OPEN ICE SKATING

Worcester County Recreation Center, 6030 Public Landing Road, 1:00 PM - 6:00 PM. Featuring open skating on the new synthetic ice rink. The cost per person is \$2, which includes skate rental and unlimited skating for the day. Children under the age of 14 must be accompanied by an adult at all times. Children age 6 and younger are not permitted to skate without an adult on the ice with them. Allen Swiger, aswiger@co.worcester.md.us, 410-632-2144, Ext. 2520

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Mon., Dec. 30

TAKE OFF POUNDS SENSIBLY MEETING

Atlantic General Hospital, Conference Room 1, 9733 Healthway Drive, 5:00 PM - 6:30 PM. TOPS is a weekly support and educational group promoting weight loss and healthy lifestyle. Berlin group No. 169. Rose Campion, 410-641-0157

DELMARVA WOMEN'S A CAPELLA CHORUS

Mondays - Ocean Pines Community Center, 239 Ocean Parkway, 7:00 PM. Come and sing. Drop-ins welcome. Carol, 410-641-6876

Tues., Dec. 31

NEW YEAR'S EVE CELEBRATION AND FIRE-

WORKS

Northside Park, 200 125th St., Ocean City, MD. A fireworks show at midnight to celebrate the beginning of 2020 and the 27th Annual Winterfest of Lights. There will be live entertainment, hot chocolate and the opportunity to ride through the Winterfest of Lights. 410-289-2800 or 800-626-2326

BERLIN NEW YEAR'S EVE BALL DROP CELEBRATION

Downtown Berlin. Featuring two New Year's Eve Ball Drop celebrations. A kids celebration will be held from 5-7 p.m. with a ball drop at 6 p.m. The second celebration will be held from 10 p.m. to 12:30 a.m. with DJ's Big Al Reno and Schwab, dancing, beer, food vendors and a ball drop at midnight.

Wed., Jan. 1

NEW YEAR'S DAY ASSATEAGUE ISLAND BEACH WALK

Assateague State Park, 6915 Stephen Decatur Hwy., 1:00 PM. Assateague Coastal Trust to lead the Ilia Fehrer - Judy Johnson Memorial Walk. Meet at the State Park concession stand. Participants are asked to wear clothes and shoes appropriate for the weather (rain, snow or shine). Hot chocolate served on the concession deck following the walk. To save on disposables, personal mugs are encouraged. Dogs on a leash are welcome only as far as the boundary of the State Park. Billy Weiland, billy@actforbays.org, 443-366-4866, <http://www.ACTforBays.org/Events>

PENGUIN SWIM

Princess Royale Hotel, 9100 Coastal Highway, 1:00 PM. Featuring fun and games in the Atrium on the second floor, awards for top fundraisers, costume contest, gifts for oldest/youngest penguins and dollar carnival games. Swimmers earn an official Penguin Swim short-sleeve T-shirt for their \$25 registration fee. Additional prizes can be earned. Proceeds benefit Atlantic General Hospital. Visit www.aghpenquinswim.org or #OCPenguinSwim on Facebook, twitter and Instagram. Advance check-in and registration available on New Year's Eve from 2-4 p.m. in the Premier Lobby. Joy Stokes, js-tokes@atlanticgeneral.org, 410-641-9671, <https://aghpenquinswim.org>

MAYOR'S NEW YEAR'S DAY CONCERT

Ocean City Performing Arts Center, in the Ocean City convention center, 4001 Coastal Highway, 4:00 PM - 6:00 PM. All residents and visitors are welcome to attend this free event. After a brief meet and greet with Ocean City elected officials and community partners, the 2020 Mayor's New Year's Day Concert will feature Beatlegacy. 410-289-2800

YEAR IN REVIEW 2019

Heron Park chemical spill: space still closed

By Rachel Ravina
Staff Writer

(Dec. 26, 2019) The spill of sodium hydroxide at Heron Park this year turned out to burn more than the grass around it — it was projected to burn through more than \$280,000 by the time the cleanup of the caustic chemical could be completed.

The park, previously known as Berlin Falls Park, a former Tyson chicken processing plant, was closed after an undisclosed amount of sodium hydroxide (caustic soda or lye) was spilled in June during demolition work by a contractor.

“I think ... this has been more complicated a bigger challenge than any of us foresaw,” said Mayor Gee Williams during a September interview.

Sodium hydroxide is extremely alkaline and can be used as an industrial cleaning agent, because it dissolves grease, fat and oils, while it is also used in the manufacture of paper.

Berlin officials said they learned of the incident around 11:45 a.m. on June 26 after a Facebook post began circulating about the spill, according to former Managing Director Jeff Fleetwood, who now serves as the town administrator.

Town staff contacted the town’s consulting firm, EA Engineering, Science and Technology Inc., Chesapeake Environmental Services and the Maryland

Department of the Environment.

Williams also said the town was made aware of the incident when the liquid “found its way into the soil” and “gathered into a small pool.”

The spill was located “adjacent to two ponds,” according to a statement from Williams. He said tests were done and “no chemicals were found” in the ponds.

While the circumstances of the spill were unclear and are still pending results of an investigation, Williams did confirm the spill happened at some point during the building’s demolition process.

“We’re very restricted in what we can say because of potential legal issues,” Williams said earlier this month.

Chesapeake Environmental Services handled the clean-up process, which cost more than \$200,000. During a September interview with the Bayside Gazette discussing the matter, Williams did appear to take ownership of the incident.

“It doesn’t matter if we knew or not,” Williams said. “We’re still responsible for cleaning it up and suffering the consequences.”

The Maryland Department of the Environment and Environmental Protection Agency continued investigating the release of sodium hydroxide on park grounds.

Town officials first closed the park after receiving advice from the Worces-

ter County Fire Marshal’s Office. At first, Allen said that “we received clearance from the fire marshal to have the fire-works” on July 3 at the site on Old Ocean City Boulevard.”

Allen said she expected the park to be closed for roughly two to three weeks, but it ended up being shut down for more than one month.

The park reopened about six weeks later, for a short time.

In order to cover the extensive costs from the chemical spill, the town drew from its contingency fund and used the \$150,000 previously set aside for park improvements.

Williams also said the town will have spent about \$283,000 once everything is completed.

During a Sept. 23 meeting, the Town Council approved closing the park indefinitely. Councilman Dean Burrell was the sole dissenter in a 3-1 vote.

Williams informed staff, council members and residents during the same meeting that Goody Hill Groundwork could finish the remaining demolition if the town authorized up to \$55,000 to pay for a series of projects.

Williams’ initiative was dismissed after receiving opposition from the public and some council members. When asked how it would be paid for, Williams suggested borrowing from another fund

or from money set aside for a community center.

Fleetwood suggested releasing requests for proposals for a scaled-back version of the remaining demolition projects.

Fleetwood called Williams’ proposal a “high-end figure” that was “making a lot of assumptions for the unknowns.”

Fleetwood also clarified that “the unknowns” consisted of a scenario where underground piping could be discovered during the excavation process.

“I also want to emphasize that the discussion that evening about \$55,000 ... that was [a] worst-case scenario,” he said.

Fleetwood said officials planned to more of take a realistic approach by delegating some of the work to town staff. He added that they would remove some debris and “backfill” any existing holes with dirt.

Bids were due Nov. 20. Once staff open bids, the successful bidder would then go before the mayor and council. The exact meeting date is unclear.

Education funding recommendations affect Worcester

Continued from Page 20
there is still no clear plan whatsoever for how either the state or the counties will pay this massive price tag.”

Hogan added that it would require a 39 percent increase in personal income tax, an 89 percent sales tax increase and a 535 percent property tax increase, which would create an \$18 million state deficit.

Vince Tolbert, chief financial officer for Worcester County Public Schools, said the numbers could result in more of the same for this district.

“Based on this ... the fact that wealth equalization is going to continue to be a part of the formula concerns us, because the state considers us a very wealthy county even though 42 percent of kids come from poverty, so that does concern us,” Tolbert said in an October interview.

Worcester County education officials and elected leaders attended a public meeting on Nov. 12 in Annapolis.

“The Kirwan recommendations, if adopted in their current form, would deepen the disparity between what is fair and what is not,” Worcester County Commissioner Chip Bertino said during the public hearing.

Carozza was one of three Kirwan Commission members who voted against the funding

The recommendations passed, and the approved potential policies will go before state leaders when the General Assembly reconvenes on Jan. 8.

Comcast begins build-out in Pines

Continued from Page 24

them was that we wanted to make sure that the highest priority we had was to build a backup business network at the Yacht Club and the other amenities,” he said.

Parks also noted Comcast has also agreed to provide Wi-Fi access points and video outlets.

“We’re putting public Wi-Fi out at all the different amenities,” he said. “We pay nothing for the Wi-Fi.”

The Comcast build-out could open the community to even further service providers in the future.

“So while Mediacom was required to keep their network available for everyone, Comcast has to build a network for everyone,” Parks said. “Which sets the stage for any other carrier who wants to come in [to] not just cherry pick where they want to go.”

Terry said opening the community to additional service providers is a topic for discussion.

“That’s one of the issues that, going forward, Ocean Pines has to decide — how many carriers do they want to allow to utilize the right of ways?” he said. “There’s no guidelines that’s been established by the board, that I know of, to govern that.”

The Comcast terms also stipulate

that transmission lines must be underground, with the OPA allowed to review build-out, or design, plans, Terry said.

“That allows us to understand what communities are going first, second, third, fourth,” he said. “We don’t pick that, they’re picking that, but at least we will be able to communicate with the community as to their plans.”

Parks said in terms of the eventual service packages offered by Comcast, the association only reached agreement to provide access to easements and right of ways, which does include dictating consumer pricing.

After breaking ground on its multi-year infrastructure build-out the day before Thanksgiving, Comcast officials held a town hall meeting on Dec. 3 to provide residents details about the ongoing work.

At that meeting, Terry said the eventual payoff comes with an initial sacrifice.

“It is my job to inform you ... that this is going to be a construction site,” he said. “Be aware this is not going to be a pristine finger-food effort.”

Comcast Director of Technical Operations Tom Yates outlined plans to install fiber optic cable to feed specific nodes, or areas of homes, typically comprising 60 residences.

“What we’re building here is a hybrid fiber-coax network,” he said.

Yates said Ocean Pines service network would consist of 130 nodes divided into eight sections.

“We’ll be able to do the activations by sections,” he said.

Individual properties will be connected to adjacent nodes within 1,000 feet by coaxial cable

“We’ll be putting new cable all the way to the side of your house,” he said.

Yates also said lines would be placed about two-feet underground.

“We will not cut driveways and we will not cut roads,” he said.

Noting the entire scope of work would likely run until at least early 2021, Yates said more precise estimates would be forthcoming.

“We’ll need about a month to understand how much we can do in a given day,” he said. “We’ll know more as we get into the month of December.”

Yates said the first two sections, located in the northwest area of Ocean Pines, should be completed by the middle of 2020.

“Before we’ll do any construction, you’ll see a door tag that will be placed in every home a couple days prior,” he said. “Our commitment, from a restoration perspective, is as good or better.”

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