



NON-PROFIT

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FAIRNESS IN TAXES

P.O. Box 565

OCEAN CITY, NJ 08226

609-398-6411

2015

WINTER NEWSLETTER

PRESIDENT'S LETTER - Michael Hinchman

I attended the Administration's 5-year capital plan meeting on January 15th. In sum, the City would like to spend nearly \$80 million on capital projects over the next 5 years or about \$16 million per year. About 1/2 of the \$16 million is for roads and drainage. The largest items over the five-year period include \$10 million for back bay dredging and completion of the Boardwalk. The plan also includes \$4.5 million for a public safety building. Whether that is renovation or construction of a new one is unclear.

I and other FIT members endorse the heightened spending on capital items so long as they are necessary or have an operating savings feature. Also, the spending must be well thought out. I have written three additional articles regarding poor planning at Peck's Beach, the Boardwalk reconstruction and the attempt to install artificial turf at Cary Field. Sometimes the Administration and Council do not exercise nearly enough planning.

Also, the Administration and Council approved a new 4-year contract with the Police Department. The increases were slight—about 1.5%, but did not rationalize the force to the permanent and decreasing year-round population.

Needless to say, our work continues.

Best wishes for 2015,

Michael Hinchman

POOR PLANNING AT PECK'S BEACH - Michael Hinchman

Two weeks ago Alesia Watson, Ocean City Housing Authority Executive Director announced a plan to raze the 60 units at Peck's Beach over the next two years. I was outraged and vigorously argued to Council that this showed no planning. Why? In March 2014 Council approved the replacement of the roofs on these units at a cost of \$500,000. The actual work was done in April and May 2014.

Surprisingly, Councilmen Hartzell and McClellan defended the Council vote with Councilman Hartzell even going so far as to say he would do the same thing on buildings he owned. What complete nonsense. You patch and repair roofs on buildings you intend to raze in two or three years. How completely wasteful.

Jim Mallon, the new Business Administrator said the source of the funds was a Federal Block grant.

ARTIFICIAL TURF VS GRASS AT CARY FIELD—Michael Hinchman

After quite a bit of unfavorable information broadcast on NBC News regarding health concerns of artificial turf, Mayor Gillian and Council delayed, for now, the \$1.4 million decision to install artificial turf.

In a three-minute call to Tuckahoe Turf I was able to dismiss the economic argument for artificial turf by replacing the grass with sod between the hash marks every year (if necessary) for \$14,000.

Part of the argument for replacing the grass was the field “looked like the moon” after the football season. I walked the field on January 13th and it looked pretty good; so good, I invited Dave Nahan of the Ocean City Sentinel to take pictures and do an article on the condition of the field.

In sum, exaggerated claims to justify needless spending.

BOARDWALK RECONSTRUCTION—Michael Hinchman

For the past 2 winters I suggested the city consider using fiberglass coated pilings under the Boardwalk which is being replaced. It costs more but lasts forever.

No one on Council took the time to investigate the additional costs.

Consequently, I talked to the foreman on the job and had a three-minute conversation regarding the pilings. He said on the block they are working on now there are 613 pilings. The additional cost to coat the pilings with fiberglass is \$350 per piling or about \$200,000 extra. Each block currently costs about \$1.8 million. How long do the pilings currently being installed last? He said 50 years. The lifespan of fiberglass coated pilings is (his word) “forever”.

EDUCATIONAL REVIEW - Vic Staniec

Joe Clark was re-elected School Board President and Tom Oves was re-elected Vice President for 2015.

Both votes were 8-1 with Ray Clark the lone dissenter in both elections.

Six students from Ocean City High School were on the winning team that participated in a national contest to have their science experiment launched into space to the International Space Station. They are testing the effect of gravity on e-coli on lettuce. Their initial experiment was scheduled to be launched from Wallops Island, VA three months ago. The students, their teachers and school administrators were all gathered in Virginia and were horrified and amazed when the rocket was detonated only 6 seconds after take-off. The experiment was reconstructed and a new space launch was re-scheduled for January 3, 2015 from Cape Canaveral, FL. After 3 delays, the Falcon 9 rocket was successfully launched on January 10th at 4:47 A.M. Unfortunately, no one from Ocean City was present to witness this event.

The five new smaller air handlers that were installed to replace the one original air handler in the Ocean City High School have been so loud that they are interfering with the educational process. They have been retrofitted with shock absorbers in an attempt to decrease the noise.

The annual state audit of the Ocean City School District for the 2012-2013 school year indicated that there is a \$2.5 million surplus squirreled away in 3 separate accounts as “cash reserves”. Basically, this is money that the school district collected in taxes, but was not needed to operate the school district. This amounts to 1.2 cents on our tax bills. While this surplus allowed the school district to qualify for the best possible rates when they bonded money for the needed repairs to school buildings, this is money that should be in the taxpayers’ pockets. When a similar situation occurred 8 years ago, FIT protested to the State Department of Education and the school district was forced to return \$1.9 million to the taxpayers.

EDUCATIONAL REVIEW CONT'D - Vic Staniec

The State fined the Ocean City School District \$500 for turning in paperwork late. Pat Pascarelli, the Business Administrator was responsible for this fine and, although he was hired less than one year ago, he is no longer with the district. Mark Ritter has been acting as temporary Business Administrator until a new administrator is hired.

Any parent or guardian who has a problem with the invoice they received from the Ocean City School District for lunches charged by students should contact their principal to try and resolve the situation.

VOTING RIGHTS SURVEY—Jim Tweed

Thank you to all those FIT members who responded to our surveys on non-resident property owner voting rights *(proposed resolution below). Those of you for whom we had current, accurate e-mail addresses were able to respond on line. The rest had the option to respond to a second survey via return sheet from the paper newsletter. If you did not receive the survey by e-mail, you are one of those for whom we; a) do not have an e-mail address on file, b) the e-mail address we have on file is not current or, c) the e-mail address we have on file is not accurate. If you did not receive the survey via e-mail, please send your current address to Bill Hartranft, wdhartranft1@comcast.net.

Also, thanks to Ken Adams who spent many hours typing in the e-mail addresses for 475 households for whom e-mails addresses were on file. Of those 108 addresses were rejected. Of the remaining sample we had 93 or 25% response; 79 in favor and 14 opposed.

Although the paper response was significantly smaller, the results corroborated the e-mail survey. Of 38 respondents, 33 were in favor and 5 opposed. If these samples are representative of our membership, we can assume that a least 85% of FIT members are in favor.

The favorite refrain of the voting rights opponents is: "It'll never happen." Indeed, no one should underestimate the challenge. It may require an amendment to the New Jersey State constitution and a public referendum. Before either of those takes place a lot of public education is required. To that end FIT has extended an invitation to the Mayor of Rehoboth Beach, DE to speak to us about how non-resident property owner voting works in his city.

***RESOLVED: Fairness In Taxes supports the right of non-resident property owners who are citizens of the United States, at least 18 years of age, holding fifty percent or more ownership interest in real property located within the municipal boundaries of the City of Ocean City, and paying a minimum of one thousand dollars per year in property taxes to vote as an individual for the elected offices of Mayor and City Council members. Owners of multiple properties shall choose one location to determine the ward in which they may be registered."**

FROM THE TREASURER— Bill Hartranft

Welcome to 2015. As treasurer, I'm looking forward to the many envelopes containing dues that will grace our mailbox, P.O. Box 565 in Ocean City. To me, that means that you appreciate our efforts in watching, advising, criticizing and even complimenting expenditures of your tax monies.

Last year our listed members numbered 887. We received dues from approximately 55% of them. It'd be a real treat to see the number of members dues paid reach 75% this year and perhaps 90% in 2016. Your dues fund our advertisements in local newspapers, mailbox rentals, insurance, printing, postage. And meeting expenses when necessary.

I'd also encourage you to "talk up" membership in our organization for folks who can support our efforts to ensure fiscal responsibility of the City administration. As an aside, I personally wish our politicians spent taxes as though they came directly out of their own pockets, as well as being held accountable for any bad judgments. I know that's naïve, but it's on my "bucket list".

Last year we looked hard at our expenses which resulted in a change of insurer for liability and realized a savings of over \$50.00 or the equivalent of 3 family membership dues. We cancelled our phone line due to lack of calls being received (we had none in 2014). We believe that e-mail is now the preferred method of communication. This realized an additional \$500 in savings or the equivalent of 34 family membership dues. There is nothing else to eliminate.

We've improved our web site thanks in large part to our web site guru, Jim Rudolph and, with Jim's help we are looking into using PayPal through the web site to collect dues. This will save both time and money for our members. If you haven't visited the web site recently, please do so. Between Jim and our Secretary, Sheila Hartranft it is kept up to date including articles written by our board members and our meeting minutes. Our thanks to both of them for their continued efforts.

FROM THE SECRETARY— Sheila Hartranft

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

Time 3:00 P.M.
Place: Ocean City Library
17th Street & Haven Avenue
Room #110

Very often there are guest speakers from city and county administration and local businesses, most recently Mike Datillo, Ocean City Business Administrator in December to talk about budgets and ongoing projects, and Gary Shaeffer, Cape May County Sheriff in January to discuss the plans for the new Cape May County prison.

We would love to see you there!

OC FLOODING COMMITTEE—Eric Sauder, Chairman

This letter is to inform you that a committee comprised of Fairness In Taxes members has been formed to address the problem of recurring flooding in our neighborhoods. Although property owners have called attention to the problem in the past, the city has been negligent in responding to repeated complaints. Mayor Gillian and City Council need to be reminded that the needs of our community are more important than their wants. Our tax dollars should be spent on the quality of life issues affecting property owners before being spent on pet projects. Where are our priorities?

The flooding around our homes has only gotten worse in the past few years. Water can be seen bubbling up from storm drains at high tide even under clear skies. There has been an increase in flooding events as well as an increase in the depth of flood waters. Some have reported standing water as deep as 2 feet! Storm water flooding our homes, streets and sidewalks contains potentially deadly bacteria such as e-coli, garden materials like dirt, sand and mulch, animal urine and feces, herbicides, pesticides, broken glass, rusty screws and nails, wood, trash and more.

Health concerns aside, many property owners are also experiencing recurring property damage from flood waters. Sidewalks and streets are crumbling, vehicles are being lost. Property owners are being besieged by mold, and salt water intrusion is causing grass and plantings to die. You, as a homeowner are expected to bear the financial burden of remedying the damage caused by the failure of the city to rectify the problem.

The standard response is, *we live on a barrier island and it's going to flood*. The simple fact of the matter is our storm water system is antiquated. Storm water pipes no longer meet capacity requirements. Those pipes have deteriorated to the point they no longer adequately handle storm water. Check valves, designed to allow water to flow out of the system and prevent back flow are either non-existent or non-functioning. In some neighborhoods pumping stations are required. The good news is that there is much the city CAN do to alleviate flooding in our neighborhoods. What is required is to make street flooding a first priority and focus our resources on that.

If you follow local news, you know that municipal government has made a major commitment in the 5-year capital plan to infrastructure. Past experience shows us that throwing money at the problem doesn't ensure that it will be rectified. There is a plan for repaving streets, but not for overhauling the storm water system and addressing the flooding issues we currently have. You can't approach this piecemeal. We need a comprehensive plan that addresses both. Common sense tells us that a storm water plan needs to be integrated into the road repaving plan. Since road resurfacing is driving the project, there are areas of town which regularly flood that are not addressed in the 5-year capital plan. Is your neighborhood one of them?

We, the tax paying homeowners of Ocean City have the right to expect and demand that our elected city government stop the frivolous spending of millions of tax payer dollars and ensure the health and safety of our families, homes and property.

What can YOU do? It is urgent that you contact local government now! Please write, e-mail or call Mayor Gillian and City Council and tell them to make flooding and the tax payer's quality of life a top priority before they take the final vote on the capital budget in February. If you would like to join our committee or offer any input, please contact us via e-mail, www.ocflooding@gmail.com, or contact us directly by phone; Eric Sauder, 609-402-6393, Suzanne Hornick, 540-834-7891. All contact information for the city administration is included in this newsletter.

FAIRNESS IN TAXES

P.O. Box 565

Ocean City, NJ 08226-0565

FAIRNESS IN TAXES

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

Email—www.fairnessintaxes.com
and select Contact Us.

Please notify us of any address changes.

FAIRNESS IN TAXES WEBSITE

www.fairnessintaxes.com
CHECK FOR UPDATED INFORMATION!!

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

1st Ward	Michael DeVlieger	861 Asbury Avenue	231-8987	mdevlieger@ocnj.us
At-Large	Peter V. Madden	4 W. Aberdeen Road	513-4781	pmadden@ocmj.us
At-Large	Michael Allegretto	9 W. Station Road	432-8739	mallegetto@ocnj.us
2nd Ward	Antwan L. McClellan	448 West Avenue	545-7660	amcclellan@ocnj.us
Mayor	Jay Gillian	861 Asbury Avenue	525-9323	jgillian@ocnj.us
At-Large	Keith Hartzell	720 Asbury Avenue	399-5324	khartzell@ocnj.us
3rd Ward	Tony Wilson	23 West 15th Street	363-8669	awilson@ocnj.us
4th Ward	Peter J. Guinosso	4815 Central Avenue	398-2560	pguinosso@ocnj.us

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