

Mayor's Message

August/September 2022

If you've driven around Oceanport lately (while observing the posted 25 MPH speed limit, of course), you've probably noticed a lot of construction going on. Oceanport is undergoing a facelift like it hasn't seen in a long, long time. If you enter Oceanport from Little Silver, you'll notice that Oceanport Avenue has been re-paved all the way to Port Au Peck Avenue. Make a right into the Fort and you'll see that three large redevelopment projects are now under way: Allison Hall (a \$25 million dollar repurposing of about 12 acres along Oceanport Avenue limited to office, retail and commercial uses), The Lodging Area (a \$30 million dollar repurposing of about 15 acres that will result in 144 high end, for sale town home units and 36 affordable housing rental units), and Barker's Circle (a \$22 million dollar repurposing of about 20 acres and seven buildings that will result in 75 residential for sale units, an office building, and a restaurant). A little further in, Fort Monmouth's former Dance Hall property has been completely renovated by owners Trip Brooks and Alecia Brooks. This site will re-open shortly as The Park Loft, an event space for weddings, parties, and larger celebratory functions. I was given a tour of The Park Loft in July and the Brooks' transformation of this 1941 government building is nothing short of spectacular.

While these Fort Monmouth related projects are all being done by private developers, the Borough of Oceanport is also in the process of upgrading our recreational facilities on a grand scale. Many of you may have noticed that Maria Gatta Park (across from Monmouth Park on Port Au Peck) has been torn up and trucks on the site are moving large piles of dirt back and forth all day long. Contrary to some of the rumors going around, the park is not being converted into a housing project, a mall, an air strip or more parking for the racetrack. In fact, the fields --- which were really just an old, macadam parking lot with a few inches of dirt on it --- are being converted to an artificial turf surface that will maximize the playing area and allow for multiple sports (e.g., soccer, lacrosse, field hockey, football) to be played simultaneously on an almost year-round basis.

This is a multi-phase project and will cost a little over 3 million dollars. This will be funded by a Monmouth County Improvement Authority Bond which will be paid down over the term of 20 years. Once completed, Oceanport's recreation youth sports teams and school teams will be able to use these fields for free. The demand for this type of field facility in our area is so great, however, that the annual debt service on the bonded indebtedness is projected to be paid by user fees (travel teams, club teams, tournaments, etc.).

Additionally, Oceanport's Community Center Park is going to be getting some long needed tender loving care in August after the Borough's Action Camp concludes. The plan is to reconstruct the baseball field by regrading it, installing a new backstop, fencing, benches, and bleachers (making them ADA accessible), reconstructing the Port Au Peck parking lots with curbs and pavement, installing a curb along Tohicon Avenue to stop the erosion on that side of the park, replacing the tennis fencing and benches, and putting in a sidewalk to allow for access to the playground and basketball court. The cost of this \$419,000 project will be offset, in part, by a \$150,000 Monmouth County Open Space Grant.

Councilman Bill Deerin and the entire Recreation Committee, Councilman Bryan Keeshen and Councilman Mike O'Brien have all worked non-stop to ensure that these projects have moved forward as planned.



Without their collective commitment and dedication these infrastructure improvements and investments in our future would not be taking place. Kudos to all!

You'll also notice that Trinity Park, BlackBerry Bay Park, Charles Park, the Seawaneka Launch and various other locations in town have been given a lot of attention by our Department of Public Works this summer. Most notably, however, our Department of Public Works took on the task of rehabbing the Old Wharf House (where we housed our Municipal Offices from 2013 to 2021) as we transition the facility back into a Senior Center. The DPW's efforts saved the Borough tens of thousands of dollars and expedited the projected time frame for bringing the seniors back into the building by several months. By the time you read this, our seniors should be back enjoying the amenities of the Old Wharf House for the first time since the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy.

And it's not only our seniors who will be enjoying upgraded facilities! Both Maple Place and Wolf Hill schools have had a substantial amount of work done as the Oceanport Board of Education's upgrade to both sites continues. In 2019, the Borough's residents approved (by a 61-39 majority) a 33.8 million dollar referendum to pay for renovations to both schools. This comprehensive, four-year, multi-phase infrastructure improvement project will bring classrooms, cafeterias, and gyms into the 21st century, provide for new boilers and roofing, remove asbestos and asbestos related materials, and update both the fire prevention, and security systems. You can view the project plans and watch project related videos by visiting the Oceanport Board of Education's website and clicking the "referendum" button.

If you happen to see Oceanport residents Bert Lynch, Tim Britton, or Katheen Cawley around town, make sure to thank them for their part in rescuing people who were in desperate need of help in the Shrewsbury River. On the evening of July 7, 2022, Bert, a former Oceanport councilman and current man about town, and Tim, who some refer to as "Oceanport's Al Bundy" because of his high school gridiron heroics, worked together --- in the dark, mind you ---- to bring in a woman whose kayak had capsized off of Paul Sommers Boy Scout Park as the result of high winds. As Tim, who is not a marine biologist, noted, "The sea was angry that day, my friends. Like an old man trying to send back soup in a deli." After hearing her screams for help, Tim immediately kayaked out to the woman to ensure that her situation would not worsen. Bert, who lives a few doors down from Tim, heard the same cries of help coming from the water, jumped into his boat, drove out to the capsized kayak and, with Tim's assistance, got the victim into his boat and brought her back to shore. Oceanport OEM, First Aid, Fire and Police took over from there.

Then, on July 17th, while on her pontoon boat, Kathleen Cawley happened upon a small, capsized vessel with 5 people clinging to it in the widest part of the Shrewsbury River. In short order, Kathleen was able to get the 5 people out of the water, contact the Coast Guard, enlist the help of a passing boater to right the capsized boat, tow it out of the channel and salvage a great number of personal items from the water, all which were returned to the owners. This rescue and recovery effort took several hours, and I would be remiss if Captain Cawley's efforts weren't recognized. Thank you to Lynn Greco for bringing this to my attention.

Oceanport is blessed to have access to the Shrewsbury River, but we need to remember it can be as dangerous as it is beautiful. If you are going out on the river, make sure you are aware of the weather,



wear a life vest and, if you are going out alone, make sure that somebody knows you are out on the water. As Buddy Brocklebank is fond of saying, "Safe Boating is No Accident."

Enjoy the rest of the summer and make sure that as you are enjoying it, you are driving slower than the posted speed limit here in Oceanport.