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POSSIBLE CHANGES TO
COMPREHENSIVE PLAN



SOUTHEAST FRONT STREET CHANGES



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HEADLINES



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COUNCIL TO DISCUSS CHANGES TO COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

BY TERRY ROGERS

At a workshop before City Council, City Planner Rob Pierce provided council with details on four proposed amendments to the 2018 Comprehensive Plan. Two of the amendments were initiated by city staff while two others were initiated by property owners. A fifth amendment, also a request from a property owner, may be added as Pierce was still awaiting paperwork.

“Every year we try to compile any revisions to our Comprehensive Plan that we want to take forward to the state of Delaware in one package,” Pierce explained. “That way, we do it one time a year. These will come back to City Council for additional public hearings and public outreach. So basically, items two and three that are in the packet, in the memo, are for informational purposes only. Again, we are not going to debate it or take any action on those this evening.”

One of the amendments would create a green space area south of Herring Branch and Deep Branch between South Rehoboth Boulevard to Walnut Street. City staff proposes changing the future land use designation of several properties from what is currently a low density or future low density land use to open space in order to clearly define intentions on not wanting those properties developed but retained for open space. One of the properties was acquired by the city several months ago while other portions of the property include the former Rookery North. There are some properties that have

improvements, but most are open agricultural land.

“About the green space for the Rookery,” Mayor Archie Campbell asked. “Will that change if somebody buys it and a developer decides to put homes on it?”

Pierce explained that by designating the land as open space, the city could work with whoever purchases the property to make that an open space area, whether the city purchases the property or someone else purchased the land. Any developer could incorporate open space into their plans, but the city’s goal is to keep that land as much open space as possible. Pierce stated that the Comprehensive Plan simply set out what the city wanted the desired land to be and that it would take time to implement the change.

“So basically, putting this in writing like this shows that we want it to be open space,” Councilman Andy Fulton said. “So that way, we’re in a better condition to deal with any developers that come along and want to do something else. Especially since it’s already been designated as open space, they’d have to go back in and ask for rezoning. Is that correct?”

Pierce stated that was correct, but that this also helped the city. “If we’re going after any funding at the state level or federal level to preserve land, those acquisitions and purchases need to be combined with a comprehensive plan,” Pierce said. “Again, those boundaries can change

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a little bit as we try to implement this.”

The next staff-requested amendment was to update the bicycle traffic language in the plan and to include some transportation projects so that they could be forward to Dover Kent MPO and to DelDOT for consideration. Several intersections were included in the plan, such as one at North Walnut and Rehoboth Boulevard, several intersections on Route 113 and looking at improving pedestrian, traffic and bicyclist flow near Marshall’s Pond.

“One of the more pressing intersections is the one at 10th Street where Walnut, Rehoboth Boulevard, 10th Street, Salevan, and Washington all come and converge together,” Pierce said. “So, we’d like to kind of get that one on the radar at the state level for some potential improvements.” Pierce also presented changing Southwest Front Street from a partial one-way street to totally two-way traffic as well as changing the intersection at Walnut and Southwest Front Street.

The final staff-requested amendment was to adjust the intersection at Jefferson Avenue and Southwest Front Street. Pierce explained that the electric department had recently removed a utility pole at the intersection and there are concerns about the traffic configuration with Jefferson being offset beside the railroad tracks as well as pedestrians crossing the tracks. There were also changes designed to incorporate the 2021 Bicycle Master Plan into the Comprehensive Plan.

The two properties whose usage change was initiated by the property owner were for lands located east of Route 1 that consists of about 120 acres. The parcels are

currently in the Comprehensive Plan as low-density residential and the property owner, Elmer Fannin of Country Life Homes, is requesting to change them to commercial.

“This is a similar request to what was heard by City Council two years ago,” Pierce said. “They have included with the request a concept that will be forwarded to the state. Again, these are just for informational purposes. This will come back to City Council at a future date, and we will probably have to hold public meetings, public workshops on this as well because it’s a revision of our Southeast Master Plan. But I did want to make you aware that these are being sent as part of our annual request of this.”

Councilman Dan Marabello asked if the property was across from the Meadows at Shawnee or was it south on Route 1 and Pierce stated that it was the Mr. Wiggles tract across from the Meadows at Shawnee.

“The Mr. Wiggles property and the former Thawley farm that stretches more or less from the overpass and Wilkins Road or Cedar Neck Road all the way up to the former four-way crossover that was taken out by DelDOT about 10 years ago, so the long stretch.”

Mayor Campbell reminded Pierce that the last time they had a request for an amendment for this property, the city was required to hold public meetings and circulate information about those meetings to those living near the property.

“Like I said, this is just an informational presentation of what’s being sent off to the state,” Pierce said. “And once we hear back from the state, we’ll know better what

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PLAN from page 4

needs to be done to formally review these at a city level.”

According to Pierce, another property owner request could be added before the final Comprehensive Plan was submitted to council for approval. Lands at the northeast corner of Route 14 and Rehoboth Boulevard, the former site of the pallet recycling company, may be looking at going from industrial to commercial. Pierce stated that they had not turned in documentation prior to the Monday, Jan. 10 meeting, but he did not want them to have to wait another year for submission since they were very close to completing the request.



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Photo BY TERRY ROGERS

FOOD BANK OF DELAWARE TO HOST DRIVE-THRU FOOD PANTRY IN EACH COUNTY

BY CHARLIE MEGGINSON

The Food Bank of Delaware will host drive-thru mobile pantries in each county beginning next week. The first event is scheduled for Wednesday, Jan. 19, at Dover International Speedway.

A food pantry originally scheduled for Monday, Jan. 17, at Crossroads Community Church in Georgetown has been rescheduled to Monday, Jan. 24 due to the potential for winter weather throughout Martin Luther King Jr. Day weekend.

In a press release, the Food Bank reminded participants to ensure their trunks or back seats are cleared out so that volunteers are able to load food. To help speed up the check-in process, participants are asked to pre-register, although on-site registration will also be available.

Service will be provided on a first-come, first-served basis and assistance is limited to one per household. Attendees must be present to receive assistance. Accord-

ing to the press release, the Food Bank is prepared to serve up to 1,200 households at each pantry. Recipients must bring proof that they live in Delaware, such as a state-issued ID, utility bill, Delaware SNAP benefits card or other documentation that demonstrates proof of residency. Upcoming mobile drive-thru pantry events include:

Kent County

When: Wednesday, Jan. 19 starting at 10 a.m.

Where: Dover International Speedway

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New Castle County

When: Friday, Jan. 21 starting at 10 a.m.

Where: Delaware Tech, 400 Stanton Christiana Rd,
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Where: Crossroad Community Church, 20684 State
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To learn more about the Food Bank of Delaware and how you can help create a community free of hunger, visit <https://www.fbd.org/get-involved/>.

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PHOTO BY ANN LEBENGOOD

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USPS DELAYS BLAMED ON HIGH VOLUME, WEATHER AND COVID

BY TERRY ROGERS

Several residents in the Milford area continue to report mail delays, some claiming they had not received mail for more than a week. “I’ve had one delivery since Jan. 1,” David Verkade said on social media. “In that time-frame, informed delivery said I was to receive six pieces. Only received one so far. Where in the world is the rest of the mail? I’m starting to believe there is a wholesale discard of mail.”

Gloria Scott commented on the post, stating that Verkade’s story sounded identical to hers and Cathy Cohee, stating that she has experienced mail delays for more than a year. Carol Whyte posted that one day last week she received a stack of mail that was about eight inches thick. Several other people stated that they had tried calling the Milford Post Office, but after the phone rang for some time, it switched to a busy signal.

“It appears both the Milford and Lincoln post offices were impacted by storms last week,” Paul F. Smith of

the Eastern Area Office of the United States Postal Office, said. “Lincoln was pretty much limited to where they were able to deliver. In some cases, if customers don’t provide a clear path, they may not have received delivery. Milford Post Office also experienced some employee availability issues last Friday, but over the weekend, they had employees in and I am told delivery is now taking place.”

When asked why mail delivery issued still continued after the roads had been cleared of snow and ice, Smith stated that the post office, like many businesses, are experiencing staff shortages due to COVID.

“We’re thankful for the incredible flexibility our workforce has shown during this pandemic,” Smith said. “The COVID-19 pandemic continues to present unprecedented challenges and occasionally impact employee availability. We also thank our customers for their understanding and continued support. As we move

See USPS on page 10



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past these short-term availability issues, we will continue to use all of the tools at our disposal to assure that Milford customers get the kind of first-class service they've come to expect."

Smith also explained that informed delivery, a program residents can sign up for to learn what mail may be coming, simply indicates what mail customers can soon expect, but delivery or mail can be delayed if carriers are unable to complete their appointed rounds, especially if there are safety concerns with snow and ice. Smith also pointed out that the volume of mail and packages handled by postal staff was significant over the past few months.

USPS reported preliminary performance metrics for the 2021 holiday season showing the organization saw volume increase when compared to the same time last year. Between Thanksgiving and New Year's Eve, it took on average 2.7 days to deliver a mailpiece or package across the Postal Service network. During the same timeframe, the network accepted more than 13.2 billion letters, cards, flats and packages for delivery, exceeding 12.7 billion accepted for delivery during the same timeframe in 2020.

"Our mission to deliver for America is an enormous responsibility, especially during the holidays," said Postmaster General Louis DeJoy. "I am humbled by the hard work and dedication of each and every one of our 650,000 employees who, despite the challenges of the pandemic, helped bring joy and commerce to people across the nation."

See USPS on page 11



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The Postal Service began preparing for the 2021 peak holiday season at the start of last year. Those preparations, which not only corresponded to challenges faced last year but aligned to the Postal Service's 10-year "Delivering for America" plan, helped mitigate delays even as mail and package volume surged to its highest peak-season level: 2.8 billion mailpieces and packages the week after Thanksgiving, from Saturday, Nov. 27 to Friday, Dec. 3.

"Under our 10-year plan, we made major operational improvements and strategic investments across the organization throughout 2021. It has made a significant difference and contributed to our success this holiday season, but our work isn't done. Every day is an opportunity to fulfill our commitment of service excellence to the American people—and on that, we intend to deliver," continued DeJoy.

The Postal Service's peak season preparations included stabilizing the workforce and attempting to prepare for challenges related to the pandemic, including the conversion of 63,000 pre-career employees into career positions and the onboarding of more than 185,000 employees since the beginning of last fiscal year, including the backfilling of the 63,000 pre-career employees and the national drive to hire an additional 40,000 seasonal employees. In addition, USPS has expanded facility footprints to resolve bottlenecks and improve the flow of mail and packages. This was done by leasing of 13 million square feet of additional space across more than 100 locations to accommodate mail and packages, including over 50 annexes with multiyear leases to address year-round space constraints due to parcel growth.

USPS has also added new package sorting equipment to expedite the handling and sorting of package volume increases with the installation of 112 new package sorting machines and more than 50 package systems capable of sorting large packages. As a result of an organization-wide focus on improving operations and strategic investments, the Postal Service boosted daily processing capacity by 13 million packages. Package sortation capacity enables efficient movement of mail over the integrated USPS delivery network as mail and packages travel together. These machines also reduce the physical toll on our workforce. Finally, USPS has developed diversified, reliable transportation options by leasing nearly 3,300 trailers just for peak season and the diversification of volume traveling across the air network among additional air carriers. The Postal Service also expanded the surface transfer center network by adding 1.6 million additional square feet and over 300 dock doors to, among other things, increase long-haul transportation utilization and mitigate driver shortage issues.

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BUSINESS GROUP: CARNEY MUST APPOINT JUDGE OF COLOR TO REPLACE SLIGHTS

BY BETSY PRICE

With Delaware Chancery Court's Joseph R. Slight III retiring, a pro-business group is mounting a campaign to have a person of color appointed to the panel of now all-white judges.

Vice Chancellor Slight's retirement came to light when the court began telling lawyers that their cases would be reassigned because of it, according to an article on www.Law360.com. Slight confirmed his retirement to Law360, but referred questions to the courts.

"Vice Chancellor Slight has been a tremendous asset to our court and, indeed, our State; he will be sorely missed," said a statement from the office of Chancellor Kathaleen St. J. McCormick. "The Vice Chancellor has done us the courtesy of announcing his retirement well in advance of his anticipated end date, which he has not yet selected, so that we can ensure an orderly transition. Per the usual process, the timeline for posting his

position and selecting and confirming his replacement will be established by Judicial Nominating Commission, the office of the Governor, and the State Senate."

Citizens for a Pro-Business Delaware on Jan. 13 announced it will launch a \$250,000 advocacy campaign for Gov. John Carney to appoint a person of color to the court. "The days of an all-white Chancery Court are over," said Chris Coffey, the campaign manager for the pro-business group. "It's time for Gov. Carney to appoint a person of color immediately."

The Chancery Court has not always been all-white. Judge Tamika Montgomery-Reeves, who is Black, served on the court for four years before moving to the Delaware Supreme Court in 2019.

Citizens for a Pro-Business Delaware and its interest in Delaware courts rose in the wake of the Transperfect

See **JUDGE** on page 13



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case before the Delaware Chancery Court. In that case, the Shawe family that owned the language translation company were angry over the court's order that it must be sold, which it was to owner Phil Shawe.

Since then, members of the Shawe family and the Citizens for a Pro-Business Delaware have worked against Gov. Carney's election and been critical of Delaware courts in general and the Chancery Court specifically. The organization has spent hundreds of thousands of dollars lobbying for changes, including more diversity on the courts, and protesting the \$3.9 million in fees that Custodian Robert Pincus' and Skadden Arps—a vast American international law firm—charged during the Transperfect court battle.

According to a biography on the Washington & Lee University of School of Law, Slight was sworn in as a vice chancellor of the Delaware Court of Chancery on March 28, 2016. He had been a partner in the Delaware law firm Morris James, where he practiced corporate and business litigation and chaired the firm's Alternative Dispute Resolution practice group.

Prior to that, he served a 12-year term as a judge on the Superior Court of Delaware, helping form the court's complex commercial litigation division. Earlier, he was a litigator in the Delaware law firms Sidney Balick P.A. and with Richards Layton & Finger.

Slight is a member of the American Law Institute, the American Bar Association and the Delaware Bar Association. He is a fellow of the American Bar Foundation and past-president of the Richard S. Rodney Inn of Court.



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CITY OFFICES CLOSED TO THE PUBLIC THROUGH JANUARY

BY TERRY ROGERS

The city of Milford has announced that its offices will be closed to the public throughout the month of January. “We closed buildings to the public for two reasons,” Mark Whitfield, city manager, said. “We have a significant outbreak of COVID with staff coupled with the COVID surge community wide. It made sense to close down for at least a month until the surge starts to diminish.”

At a recent City Council meeting, Lou Vitola, finance director, explained the difficulties faced in Customer Service and other departments due to being short staffed and dealing with COVID quarantines.

“We’re doing very well in terms of the recruitment and filling a number of vacancies that we’ve had throughout the fall,” Vitola said. “The good news is, we have our last electric lineman scheduled to start, I believe Feb. 3, and that will give us a full staff in the electric department other than the electric superintendent position which remains open. We have been hit with COVID. A number of employees are out, either who have been exposed or who actually have COVID.” According to Vitola, there are about 14 employees in the Customer Service, Public Works and Police Department.

“To provide our normal level of services is not there. And a lot of it has to do with the number of vacancies,” Vitola said. “While I’m thrilled to have those last two

hires in Customer Service, it doesn’t take away the fact that we’ve had some really, really tough times for the end of November and through December.”

Vitola explained that there are only eight full-time positions in Customer Service and, of those eight, two were open. “We had two non-COVID illnesses and three COVID cases,” Vitola said. “We have a retiree who helps on a temporary basis and the temp was on vacation. If you added that up, that’s seven. At times we only had one person in the office or working remotely. So, you know, we’re appreciative of everyone’s patience as we get through some things.”

According to Vitola, one day, only Suzannah Frederick, Cash Operations and Revenue Supervisor, was in the office. “She took 169 phone calls, missed 30, listened to all the messages and then the mailbox was full the next day,” Vitola said. “So, it’s been tough, tough months in Customer Service. But I appreciate everyone hanging in and I’m really looking forward to everyone getting healthy and being fully staffed. So good things on the horizon.”

Councilman Andy Fulton asked if people who were out due to COVID were charged sick time or if they were covered another way. Whitfield said that staff was currently required to use sick time or personal time.

“We will reevaluate at the end of the month and make

decisions on extending closures on a month-to-month basis,” Whitfield said.

Customers can call all departments with the city and utility bills can still be dropped in the boxes located at City Hall and the Customer Service building.



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COUNCIL LOOKS AT CHANGES TO SOUTHEAST FRONT STREET

were already evaluating these lights with DelDOT in order to try to look at the light at that intersection as well as turning this back into a two-way street.”

Puddicombe explained the city reached out to three firms with the low bidder Century Engineering who is doing an evaluation of the lights for DelDOT. Century Engineering’s bid was \$27,500 and would include evaluating the intersection of Southwest Front and Walnut. This could include removing the light or replacing it with a different traffic control measure. They would also investigate whether turning Southwest Front Street into a two-way street would be feasible.

“It looks like you are looking for a permanent solution to a temporary problem,” Councilman Mike Boyle said. “And yet, the proposal when you read it, says the solution appears to be a roundabout. The solution appears to be overkill. If it’s a long-term problem, we can identify it then, but I think, immediately, to fix the issue is to work on the Southwest Front Street section with turn around areas and signage to direct traffic. And I would also say that on the engineering side, they didn’t even address the issue of pedestrian traffic, significant pedestrian traffic.”

Puddicombe explained that there is a need to address the issue in the long-term as the city was in the process

BY TERRY ROGERS

The Southeast Front Street bridge, located near the former Milford Fire Hall, will be replaced as it only has a three-ton weight limit, a project that DelDOT is in the process of planning. Because the street is only one-way in one section, this could make it difficult for people to get in and out of the parking lots on the street.

“This is somewhat of a necessity or will become a necessity in the next few years,” James Puddicombe, city engineer, said. “So, we wanted to get ahead of it while we

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of turning all traffic lights over to DelDOT. There is also streetscaping planned for the area, which will require pedestrian traffic, sidewalks, industry repaving and general improvements as well as a parking lot on Southwest Front. All of these projects are included in the Capital Improvement Plan over the next few years. Councilman Boyle agreed that thinking long-term would be beneficial but felt the proposal went too far. Councilwoman Katrina Wilson asked if the two-way direction would be permanent or if this was just while the bridge was under construction.

“In the long-term plan we had done in, I believe 2015 for the Downtown Development improvements, Council had in one of the recommendations was not only to streetscape, which is on the Capital Improvement Plan, but the return of that intersection to two-way traffic. So, what is generally correct is that we have this temporary condition where we would either have to do extensive traffic control measures, which could get quite expensive, well over \$27,000, very quickly. Or we can go ahead and take that next step in accordance with that long-term plan and go ahead and try to convert.”

Councilwoman Wilson pointed out that long-time residents of Milford would recall when Southwest Front Street was two-way. “I remember when it was two-way traffic,” Councilwoman Wilson said. “When the bus station was there, I mean, you know, we used to walk up and down the street to traffic, which seemed to be normal at the time. So, I think that it would be fitting at this time and will even help the businesses on the street as well.”

Councilman Dan Marabello suggested that parking be prohibited 60 feet from the intersection if the street changes fully to two-way. Puddicombe explained that the city was trying to get RFPs for streetscaping as there were several streets in town on the Capital Improvement Plan that were supposed to have them done. The Downtown Development Plan listed Southwest Front Street, Park Avenue, Washington Street and Denny Row. Councilman Boyle reiterated that he felt the proposal had more than was necessary.

“You have some general high-level concepts in that game plan, but this design isn’t together yet and that’s something that we’re kind of starting to turn the wheels on and try to get that kind of lined up so all of the street-scapes kind of match. This is just to evaluate if the red light can be removed then it would be whether an alternative would be necessary. So, that could be anything from a four-way stop to a roundabout to a stoplight, in speaking with the engineer briefly. They did say a regular traffic circle is just not possible, but they said that they have seen and actually worked on projects with some different intersection signs that aren’t really a traffic circle but they’re almost like an oblong circle. But they present those ideas to us for approval by council before construction occurs. So, it’s really more of trying to remove that stoplight at that intersection.”

Council voted to approve hiring Century Engineering to conduct a study to determine what changes needed to be made at the Southwest Front Street intersection as well as the feasibility to convert the street to completely two-way traffic.



MILFORD CONSIDERS ADDING RESIDENTIAL SPRINKLER REQUIREMENT IN BUILDING CODE

BY TERRY ROGERS

At a recent workshop, Milford City Council heard from experts who provided information on the benefits of residential sprinkler systems. The city is considering adding a code to require them in new construction. In addition, the city is updating other areas of their building code, including language that will explain activities that are exempt from permits as well as what City Planner Rob Pierce called “clean hands” language.

“We wanted to add language related to clean hands in the building code that says if you’re not current on taxes or if you have violations or other items, we can withhold issuing a permit,” Pierce said. “We would also add a provision requiring a survey to ensure the improvements were built per the design drawings.” Other administrative changes included surveys between foundation and framing to ensure proper placement, pathways along the perimeter of roofs and ridges at the edge of solar panels to provide access passage for

firemen and a new appendix that addressed swimming pools.”

After discussion the administrative changes proposed in the code, Pierce handed the presentation over to Paul Eichler, cChairman of the Delaware Sprinkler Coalition to explain the benefits of residential sprinklers. According to Eichler, there were more than 361,500 U.S. home fires in the United States which resulted in 3,700 civilian deaths and nearly 16,600 civilian fire injuries. He explained that 75 percent of all civilian fire deaths occurred in residences. In Delaware, in 2020, there were 20 civilian firefighter deaths and \$31.2 million in damage to homes. Children under five, adults over 65 and groups who are unable to exit on their own are at highest risk of injury and death.

“Any time there is an inclusion of this idea is a good thing for me and for my colleagues,” Eichler said. “I can

See CODE on page 20

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only encourage you to continue that on and actually make it a requirement, leave it the way it is in the code itself. I'm hoping that you may be familiar with the updates that the city of Lewes has recently done, where they now require the residential sprinklers as well as the town of Milton. And just for additional Delaware background, the city of Newark, they've included the requirements since 2002. And the conversations of safety and such are overwhelming. The conversations of your detriment to economic development and such, they just don't hold water, to coin a phrase."

Eichler explained that although the number of fires have gone down slightly over the past several decades, the number of fire deaths have not. He mentioned tragic fires in New York City and Philadelphia recently, mentioning that there had already been a fatality in Delaware in 2022. He also stated that Carlisle firefighters likely assisted with a fire in Frederica that burned a house, doing over \$350,000 in damage.

"The higher number of fire fatalities are a direct reflection on style of construction employed these days," Eichler said. "If you look at some of the older parts of the city and some of the older neighborhoods, when I reference older, I would be comfortable suggesting at least 30 to 40 years old and going back from there, you will find a style of construction that emphasized compartmentalization, that emphasizes the ability to close areas off, as opposed to the popular style these days of open floor plans. These are proving to be quite challenging to the fire service in that we have a much more difficult time sectioning off the fire. Some of the

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publicity you may have heard from New York City fire the other day is a failure to close the door behind apartments that were involved in fire. That's what led to a very quick spread of that fire. It doesn't have to be anything large and dramatic. But it is a big challenge to us combined with the lightweight construction that goes into residential construction these days. It is inexpensive, it is convenient. It makes a lot of sense for the builders to be able to turn their products around and get people in their homes quickly. However, these components are affected by fire, not only the contents, but the components of the structures themselves."

Children are most at risk of death and injury from a fire because they do not have the education and understanding of how to react appropriately, Eichler explained, as they become frightened very quickly. As we age, Eichler stated, we are not able to react as quickly, putting elderly people at risk as well. In a recent fire in Delaware, the cause was an elderly person smoking while on oxygen, leading to severe injuries in two people.

In addition to providing fire statistics and the difficulties in fighting fires in certain home designs, Eichler dispelled many myths related to sprinklers.

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BY TERRY ROGERS

Milford City Council approved additional economic incentives to assist with the construction of affordable housing designed to lead toward home ownership. The incentives were a suggestion by the Milford Housing Development Corporation.

“We met with them several months ago regarding some other housing programs that work with low-income families to construct them throughout Milford. One of the things that was brought to our attention is some of the hurdles of getting financing for the construction portion of the loan as it lumps in everything from sidewalks to curb ramps on the driveways, to building permit charges and impact fees. We were asked to investigate creating some sort of assistance or preliminary lease program that would create affordable housing for homeownership.”

The ordinance would provide financial relief of city sewer, water and electric impact fees and building

COUNCIL ADOPTS ECONOMIC INCENTIVES FOR AFFORDABLE HOUSING

permit fees with the construction of low-income housing for homeownership that is overseen by a non-profit or governmental agency. City Planner Rob Pierce stated that he felt this was a good step to help provide similar Downtown Development District incentives throughout the city for low-income homeownership. Councilman Andy Fulton asked if the requirement to add sprinklers to new construction could impact affordable housing.

“I don’t have anything at this particular moment,” Pierce said. “I know that it appeared, it was a comment during the earlier presentation in the evening. It would add an additional expense on the construction, but hopefully by providing these incentives that can help offset it. But, if council elects to go the route of adopting a residential sprinkler requirement, we can wrestle with some other types of incentive, maybe a reduction of the fire company enhancement charged, but I don’t have anything off the top of my head. It’s something we can look into.”

Councilman Brian Baer asked what the costs of the low-income housing incentives may be.

“A building permit runs anywhere from \$11,000 to \$12,000 for a new home,” Pierce said. “This would reduce it by about two-thirds, down to around \$3,000 to \$4,000. So, there’s a savings of around \$8,000. When you add up the city, sewer, water and electric impact fees and the building permit charge, the remaining

funds are the remaining expenses related to the fire company, the municipal enhancement fund and the Kent County impact fee charge items that are not waived, even within the Downtown Development District.”

Russell Huxtable, vice president of Milford Housing Development Corporation spoke to council in favor of the incentives as part of the public hearing.

“I really appreciate the consideration of this proposal,” Huxtable said. “Affordable housing is difficult. It’s a matter of putting together layers and layers and layers of different financing sources to make it work. The cost of housing has increased beyond what, you know, families of modest means can afford. And we actually are serving, one of the clients we are serving right now works in the cafeteria, in the school district, in Milford. Milford is their home, they want to remain there. So this is a really good program to help keep folks living in Milford who have been part of the fabric of the community. And we really want to just appreciate your proposal, because every little bit helps.”

Council approved the economic incentives by unanimous vote.



BILL AIMS TO FINE DRIVERS WHO DRIVE SNOW- AND ICE-COVERED CARS



BY BETSY PRICE

A bill that aims to fine drivers who operate a vehicle without first clearing it of snow and ice—and penalize them further if that snow or ice falls off and causes damage to another vehicle—passed the Delaware Senate Jan. 13.

The bill, which has been in the works since 2014, had passed the Senate’s transportation committee in March but didn’t come up on the Senate floor before the session recessed in June.

Senate Bill 64 would require drivers of vehicles to remove accumulated ice and snow before driving the vehicle on any roads with a speed limit of 26 mph or higher. An amendment approved with the bill removed the requirement for any roads with speed limits of 25 mph or lower.

Sponsor Sen. Bryan Townsend, D-Newark, said that rule is geared largely toward bigger, higher-speed roads where snow and ice can fly off and hit cars or people

and cause damage or injury. The speed limit change was designed to allow people to drive through neighborhoods, he said.

“I would like people to take this seriously and clean off the ice or snow from their vehicles before moving,” he said. “But in the event that they don’t, I would much rather enforcement of it happen prior to people getting on I-95 or Route 1.”

SB64 would impose penalties of not less than \$25 and not more than \$75 for each violation of a car that is caught driving with accumulations of ice or snow. The bill also allows police to pull vehicles over for that alone. Each day a car is driven without ice and snow being removed would trigger a separate violation, but a driver could not receive more than one ticket within a 24-hour period.

When ice or snow does fly off a moving vehicle and cause property damage or physical injury, penalties are

different for personal or commercial vehicles. The driver of a non-commercial vehicle is subject to a civil fine of not less than \$200 and not more than \$1,000 for each occurrence. The operator, owner, lessee or bailee of a commercial vehicle is subject to a civil penalty of not less than \$500 and not more than \$1,500 for each occurrence. Those drivers would still be liable for legal actions by their victims, Townsend said.

The proposed law would exempt a vehicle that’s being driven continuously during the day in bad weather from having to remove ice and snow that builds up, except for from its windshield.

Other states and jurisdictions have rules similar to the ones in SB64, Townsend said, noting that AAA has endorsed the bill. “If you do not clean off your vehicles before driving them, you can pose a significant safety hazard on the roadways,” he said.

Delaware has had two snowfalls in January, with some downstate areas getting as much as 12 inches. Another winter storm is expected Sunday night through Monday morning, but forecasts are not yet specific about how much snow, sleet and rain will be involved.

“We’ve already had some weather events and potentially have some very, very serious weather event potentially happening in the coming days, and certainly in the coming months,” Townsend said.

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EDUCATION



1,500 DELAWARE BORROWERS TO GET LOANS FORGIVEN, RESTITUTION IN NAVIENT SETTLEMENT

BY BETSY PRICE

More than 1,500 state residents who borrowed money from student loan provider Navient will get a part of Delaware's \$5.34 million share of a settlement in a suit charging the company used unfair, deceptive and predatory practices. Of those, 145 Delaware borrowers will get nearly \$4.8 million in private loan debt cancellation. Others will get restitution payments.

Attorney General Kathy Jennings announced Jan.13 that most of Delaware's share will go to the people who borrowed money.

The company was charged with practices that included making borrowers agree that their loans could not be included in bankruptcy proceedings, refusing to allow borrowers to switch to loan forms like income-based payment schedules, adding interest and fees to loans when it should not have, failing to point customers to loan-forgiveness programs and charging more for loans for schools with low graduation rates.

"Addressing the student loan crisis is one of my biggest consumer protection priorities," Jennings said in a press release. "We have to recognize that even when the playing field is level, student borrowers are fighting an uphill battle. Between rising tuition and a generation of teenagers who were told that a four-year degree was vital to their success, student debt has become a crisis.

"With Day One debt burdens sometimes eclipsing six figures, it's no surprise that thousands of people struggle to make ends meet. At a minimum, loan servicers should be expected to follow the law."

Delaware's share of the \$1.895 billion multistate settlement came after the Delaware Department of Justice helped investigate Navient's alleged misrepresentations regarding the right of private student loans to be included in bankruptcy proceedings, the press release said.

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STATE, FEMA TO OPEN COVID TESTING DRIVE-THRU IN DELAWARE CITY

BY BETSY PRICE

Update: The week's COVID-19 wrap-up numbers have been added to this article.

A drive-thru COVID-19 testing site opened Monday at the Delaware City Division of Motor Vehicles complex and will operate evenings and weekends, excepts for Wednesday nights, through Feb. 7.

The announcement Jan. 14 follows several weeks of record numbers of people seeking testing, leading to venues running out of tests and also having to close because their own employees either had COVID or had been exposed to it.

The highest demand has been highest in New Castle County. The state said that 23,000 tests were given the week prior to Thanksgiving, and 61,000 tests last week.

“The demand for testing is at an all-time high and our resources are strained. Having this site will serve as a relief valve for our testing partners, particularly in New Castle County,” said Dr. Karyl Rattay, director of the Division of Public Health. “We appreciate the assistance from our federal partners and the testing staff coming to provide Delawareans with another testing option for the next several weeks to help get us through this surge.”

As the state moved to start drive-thru testing at the Delaware City DMV, it also said in its Jan. 14 COVID-19 wrapup that cases, hospitalizations and deaths were continuing to rise week from week. Delaware recorded 4,771 new cases on Jan. 7, a new record. Since then, daily new case numbers have been lower.

The Jan. 14 wrap-up said:

- The 7-day average of new positive cases was 3,153.1, up from 2,738.4 two weeks ago
- The 7-day average for the percentage of total positive tests was 32%, up from 28.3% two weeks ago
- As of Thursday evening, 729 were hospitalized with COVID-19, up from 37 from two weeks ago. Of those, 69 were critically ill, an increase of 6 from two weeks ago
- There have been 2,396 deaths related to COVID-19, including 66 in the last two weeks. Twenty of those came from a review of vital statistics records.
- Percent of Delawareans who are fully vaccinated is 65%
- The percentage of Delawareans 5+ who received at least one dose is 82.9%
- The percentage of Delawareans 12+ who have received at least one dose is 88.2%
- The percentage of Delawareans 18+ who received at least one dose: 90.2%
- Total breakthrough cases are 14,801, or 2.5% of fully vaccinated individuals. Of those 179 have been hospitalized and 155 have died.
- 93% of new cases are Omicron, according to state lab tests.
- The percentage of those hospitalized because of COVID is now close to 50-50 between fully vaccinated people and those who are unvaccinated or not fully vaccinated. Five weeks ago, that number was 72% of new cases were unvaccinated/partially vaccinated. On Jan. 14, the number was 53%.

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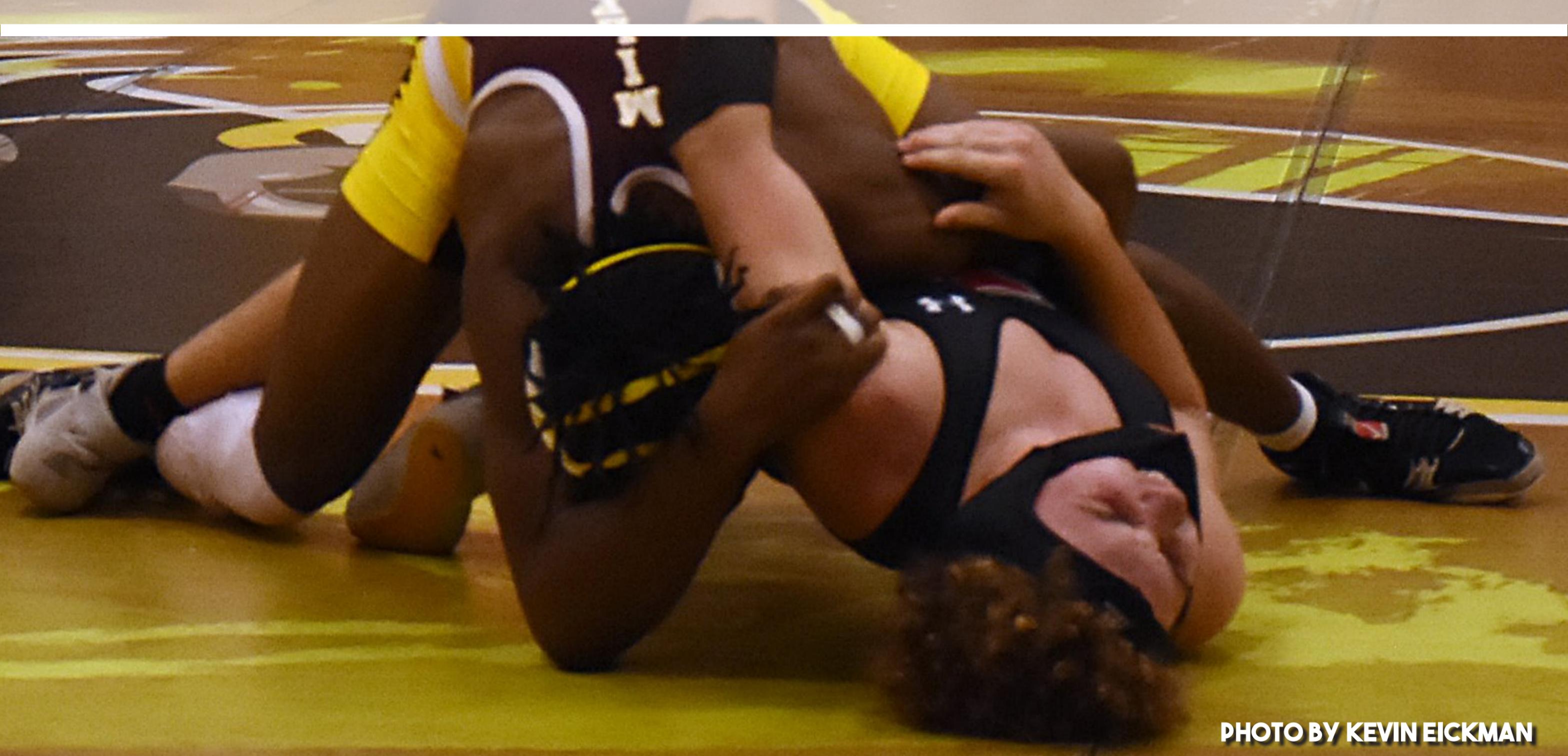


PHOTO BY KEVIN EICKMAN



BRANNAN SETTLING IN AS A.D.

BY KEVIN EICKMAN

The most difficult job in high school athletics is that of athletics director. This year, after the departure of former Milford Athletics Director Ryan Winkleblech, long-time Milford baseball coach Nick Brannan threw his hat into the ring for the job. “It was something that I had been thinking about for a while, but it was also a job I thought I would look at further down the road. When the opportunity presented itself to interview for the position, I felt that at the very worst I would get the experience of the interview. Like I always have told my players, don’t be afraid to succeed,” Brannan said.

Obviously, Brannan got more than an interview, he got the job. After completing the fall sports season and halfway through the sporting year, we caught up with Brannan to see how he was settling into his new job. When asked how things were going so far, Brannan was quick to respond. “I have to say it has been a great learning experience, there are no two days that are the same and that can make it both exciting and a little stressful at the same time. One thing that you learn pretty quickly, is that there is a great deal to the job that you really didn’t anticipate,” Brannan said. “With the situation being even more fluid due to COVID, it really enhances the responsibility that you have. There is so much involved in scheduling or rescheduling a game. Are there officials available, is there transportation available and do we have support staff in place? The list of questions is endless.”

One of the job’s more fun aspects is getting to know people better, it’s not just the coaches and athletic staff, it’s communicating with athletics directors from all over Delaware. “One of the things you learn pretty quickly is that everyone puts the health and safety of their athletes first. We work as a team to ensure the games get played and it is done so safely. We all have to work together and almost without exception there is a solution that you and your counterpart can come up with to make sure that the games happen,” Brannan said.

Another aspect which Brannan is enjoying is the ability to get to see other sports up close for what is for basically the first time. Besides being the Bucs’ baseball coach, he is also an assistant coach in football. “I pretty much already had two seasons accounted



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See **BRANNAN** on page 31

for all my athletic participation, I used to take the winter season to take a little break. But now, it is something that keeps me active in sports all year long and I really like that. Getting to know the coaches better has been great and they have been so supportive of me. It has also been great to watch all the other sports that I never really had time to do, it has been great,” Brannan said.

Like any other job however, being an athletics director comes with a downside. In the case of Brannan, it is the fact that he is no longer teaching classes. “I was a teacher for 19 years and to leave the classroom was not an easy thing for me to do and there are some times when I miss it. Being able to interact with students on an individual basis is something you miss a great deal, but now I have the opportunity to see more of them in athletics so that sort of balances it out. While I am still getting used to the job, I believe that I made the correct decision in taking the job and looking forward to whatever the future brings,” Brannan said.



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