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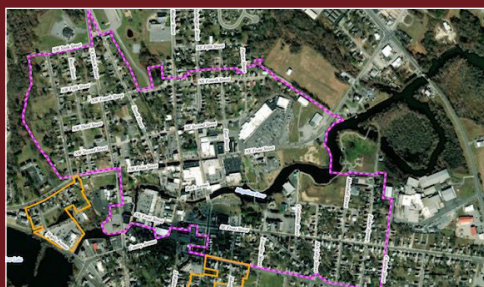
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June 6, 2023
Vol. 13 • Issue 23

Headlines2
Culture.....5
Business8
Government & Politics 12
Education..... 16
Health 19
Sports 21
Stay Connected24



City Wraps Up Budget Hearing



DDD Expansion Discussed



37th Annual Torch Run for Special Olympics

HEADLINES

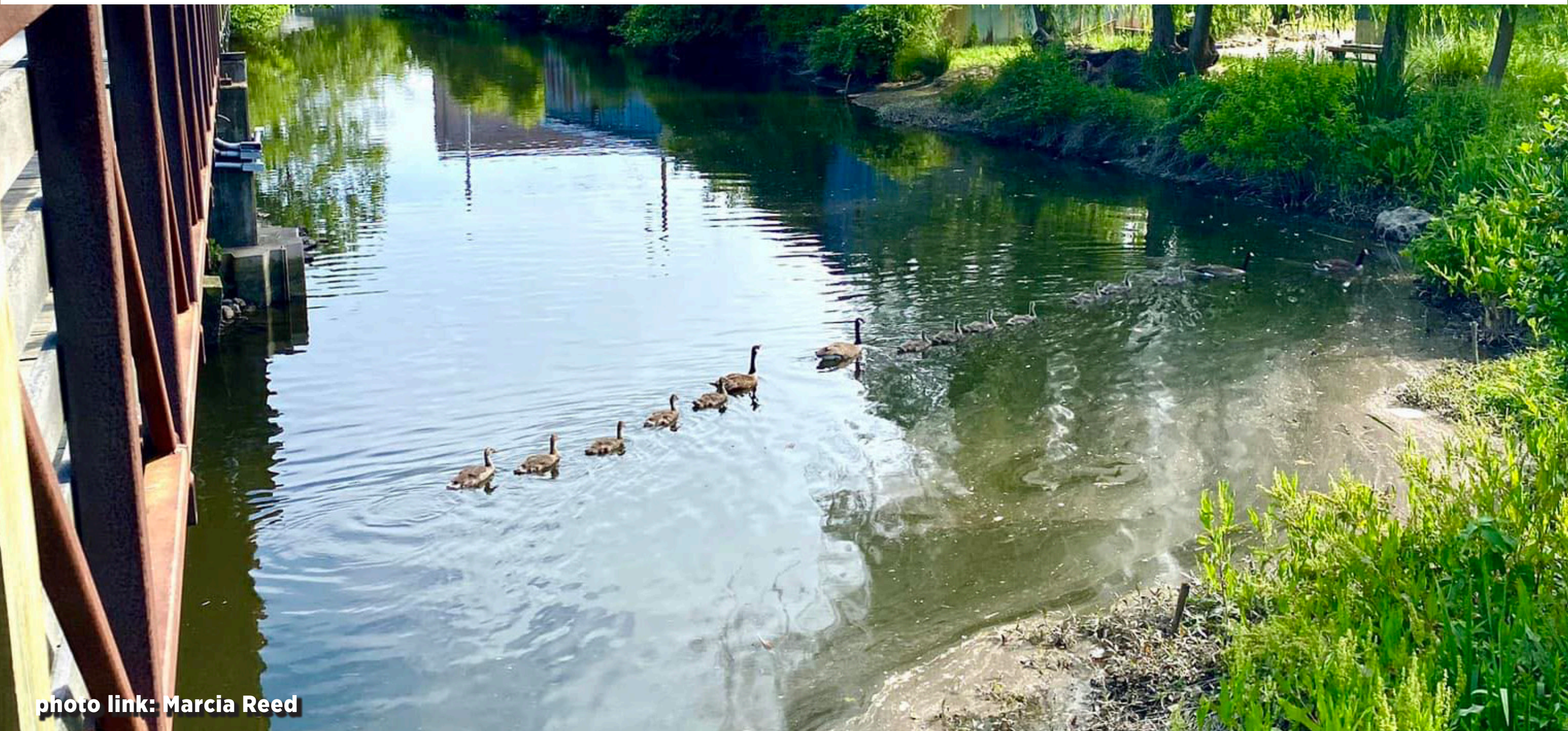


photo link: Marcia Reed

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CITY WRAPS UP BUDGET HEARINGS

BY TERRY ROGERS

Over four nights, Milford City Council held budget hearings, gaining an understanding of the 23-24 budget from various department heads as well as City Manager Mark Whitfield and Finance Director Lou Vitola. Council was presented with a balanced budget totaling over \$59 million.

“We did have one meeting and I basically challenged all the department heads and said either you cut or I will,” Whitfield said. “They all went back and relooked at their numbers and really looked at where there may have been things double counted and really tried to pare everything down so Lou and I did not have to make any cuts.”

Much of the increase was due to increased personnel costs. In addition, the budget includes a significant amount of capital improvements, including streets, parks, water and sewer. The budget includes an increase in property taxes which include debt service for the new

police station as well as to cover operating costs. The proposed increase would change the rate per \$100 of assessed value from \$0.49275 to \$0.546, 9.7 percent higher.

“For the average Milford home with an assessed value of \$147,000, the increase will be \$5.81 per month, or \$70 per year,” Whitfield said. “No portion of the property tax increase is unscheduled or emerging suddenly from the inflationary operating cost environment. Rather, the proposed movement in the property tax is rooted in City Council’s push for a structurally balanced budget as outlined in the strategic plan along with the voter-approved referendum to construct the new police facility.”

In addition to the increase in property tax, Whitfield stated that water rates would increase about 53 cents a month, sewer increases will be about \$2 a month, electric \$1.21 a month, and trash \$2.20 a month. This would bring the total increase for a home appraised at \$147,000 to \$11.75 a month or \$141 per year.

see page 4



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Just five years ago, the city's budget was \$42.8 million which reflects an increase in the city budget of 28 percent. Based on a summary provided by Whitfield, there has been an increase in general fund expenses of 12.1 percent, in water fund expenses of 4.8 percent, in sewer fund expenses of 21.3 percent, in solid waste fund expenses of 11 percent and in electric funds of 7.5 percent, totally a 9.9 percent increase in overall expenses from last year. The budget also includes a 2.5 percent increase in base pay for non-union employees as well as step increases that could be as much as 3 percent per step. Healthcare premiums also rose by 9.4 percent.

During the fourth night of the hearings, council asked many questions related to personnel costs, questioning if processes could be streamlined to reduce those costs. One position requested by the city clerk's office was discussed extensively with council questioning if a third position was needed or there could be cross-training among other employees to cover some of the duties. After much discussion, council decided to leave the new position in the budget as a placeholder with further discussion when the budget came up for vote.

"The budget is balanced using additional transfers from utility accounts," Whitfield stated. "While the transfers are defensible, continuing to rely on utility accounts may result in increases in utility rates, making it financially less attractive to reside or maintain a business in the city. Council should consider setting limits on the transfer amounts."

In addition to increases in funding for city operations, the budget includes funding for various non-profit organizations as well. The Milford Museum could receive \$40,000, up from \$35,500, an increase of 12.7 percent. DMI is slated to receive \$50,000, a 5.3 percent increase while the library could see \$28,000, an increase of 4.7 percent. The Milford Armory could see \$25,000, an increase of 156 percent. Community festivals were included at a cost of \$70,000, the same as in prior years while Carlisle Fire Company will receive \$205,000, the same as last year.

Council will vote on the budget at its June 12 regular meeting.



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photo link: [Downtown Milford Inc.](#)

BUSY MONTH PLANNED AT THE MILFORD LIBRARY

BY TERRY ROGERS

Milford Public Library has announced their events calendar for June. One of the featured events is a Super Local Author Event on June 15 from 5 to 7 p.m. in the Smith Room.

“Local authors from all age groups will be in attendance,” Carolyn Tabor, program manager, said. “Each author will have their books available to purchase. We hope to see you for this mingle event to celebrate our local authors!”

In Lions Room A, Miss Robin will assist children in making “Bookmarks for Dad” on June 14 at 2 p.m. These will be personalized bookmarks designed especially for dad by children. Registration is required for this event and can be completed by visiting [HERE](#).

“On June 9, a virtual presentation with author Suzanne Woods Fisher is planned for June 9 at 1 p.m. in Lions Room A and B,” Tabor said. “Once you register, we will provide you with a link to view from home or at a location with friends. Suzanne will provide the background of her new book “The Secret of Happiness,” which is the second of her Cape Cod Creamery series. The book provides details on the curious and fascinating history of ice cream. We will have an ice cream bar set up in the library for this event.” Register for the event [HERE](#).

On June 27, PACE Your Life will present “Successful Components of Aging” at 1 p.m. in Lions Room A. This presentation includes lunch.

see page 7

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“We are very excited to announce the return of Music in the Park,” Tabor said. “We will open this summer series on June 28 at 7 p.m. with the Milford Community Smooth Sound Dance Band. Bring a chair or blanket, relax around the amphitheater and just enjoy the live music. We will be selling hot dogs again!”

The library has also announced that it will be cutting hours starting June 5.

“Milford Public Library has been serving the community for over 120 years, however, due to unforeseen circumstances, starting June 5, 2023, the Milford Public Library will be opening its doors less than usual,” a message on their website announced.

Director Ella Wilkerson was apologetic about the change in hours.

“We wish we did not have to take such drastic measures, but with this budget shortfall we have few options,” Wilkerson is quoted as saying in the message. “We apologize for any hardship and inconvenience this may cause our patrons. Our Adult, Teen and Children’s programs and services will carry on as the budget allows.”

The message suggests that anyone who wants to assist the library with this budget matter should contact their local legislators and request that the tax for public libraries be raised. In addition, donations, which are tax deductible, are always welcome. The library also needs volunteers to help with fundraising projects, community outreach or daily operations.

The new hours for the library are Monday from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.; Tuesday and Thursday from 12 noon to 7 p.m.; Wednesday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Friday and Saturday hours will be 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. Anyone interested in volunteering or learning more about donation options, call 302-422-9416.



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BUSINESS



photo link: Marcia Reed



BY TERRY ROGERS

Harbor Freight officially opened its doors on May 30, filling half the space that previously housed Peebles and Gordman's in the Milford Plaza Shopping Center. A grand opening is planned for June 17.

"This is our second store in Kent County," Craig Hoffman, director of Communications, said. "We're excited about this new location because it is more convenient for customers in the Milford community. Now that we have opened, customers will not need to drive to Dover or Seaford."

Although smaller than other Harbor Freight locations in Delaware, the Milford location carries Harbor Freight's full line of tools and accessories geared toward automotive, air and power tools, storage, outdoor power equipment and generators, plus much more.

"We chose to open in Milford due to the wide pool of qualified applicants," Hoffman said. "This store will bring 25 to 30 new jobs to the area. We offer competitive pay, great benefits and the opportunity to advance."

HARBOR FREIGHT OPENS IN MILFORD

The opening of the store was exciting news for some.

"Harbor Freight in Milford is open for everything we didn't know we needed plus some," Ben Tebbens posted on social media. Tim Cantwell called the store "the adult male Toys R Us."

Harbor Freight opened in 1977 when Eric Smidt and his father, Allan, opened their first store, Harbor Freight and Salvage, in a small building in California. It began as a mail order tool business, specializing in liquidated and returned items. As the company grew, the name changed to Harbor Freight Tools and began including in-house brands in their retail outlets.

The company is also known for its philanthropy, with one of their core values giving back to the communities where they live, work and serve. In 2013, the company donated \$1.4 million in tools and equipment to the Los Angeles Unified School District as well as \$100,000 in tools to South Carolina schools. In 2016, the company formed The Smidt Foundation, designed to support education, health, safety and community needs. The Harbor Freight Tools for Schools Prize for Teaching Excellence also awards over \$1 million to skilled trades teachers.

Hoffman explained that the store is still hiring for many positions. Those interested may apply at www.harborfreightjobs.com/retail. Once on the site, search for Milford DE. Store hours are 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. Monday through Saturday and 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. on Sunday.



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THIRD THURSDAY RETURNS IN JUNE

BY TERRY ROGERS

Downtown Milford Inc. (DMI) recently announced that Third Thursday will return starting June 15. The theme for the first event is Downtown Superheroes.

“Bring your mask and cape,” Janne Collins, executive director for DMI said. “As a business in our downtown district, you are welcome to have a spot on Walnut Street or Park Avenue during the event at no cost. If you would like to do something special during the event that goes with the theme, let me know and we will promote it. Some examples are superhero training, a game or a special giveaway. If you are choosing to do your own thing off site, that’s cool, too! Just let us know so we can steer folks your way.”

Third Thursday runs from 4:30 to 8 p.m. on the Third Thursday of summer months. The theme for July 20 is Fire & Ice with Cascading Carlos the fire juggler. On Aug. 17, the theme is Dancing in the Streets.

“This is always a fun event with food trucks and music,” Collins said. “It is a great way to see what downtown Milford has to offer, as our boutiques are open late that night. You can learn more about the many businesses downtown as well as more about volunteer opportunities, not only with DMI but other non-profits as well.”

Anyone interested in learning more about Third Thursday can reach Collins at 302-839-1180.

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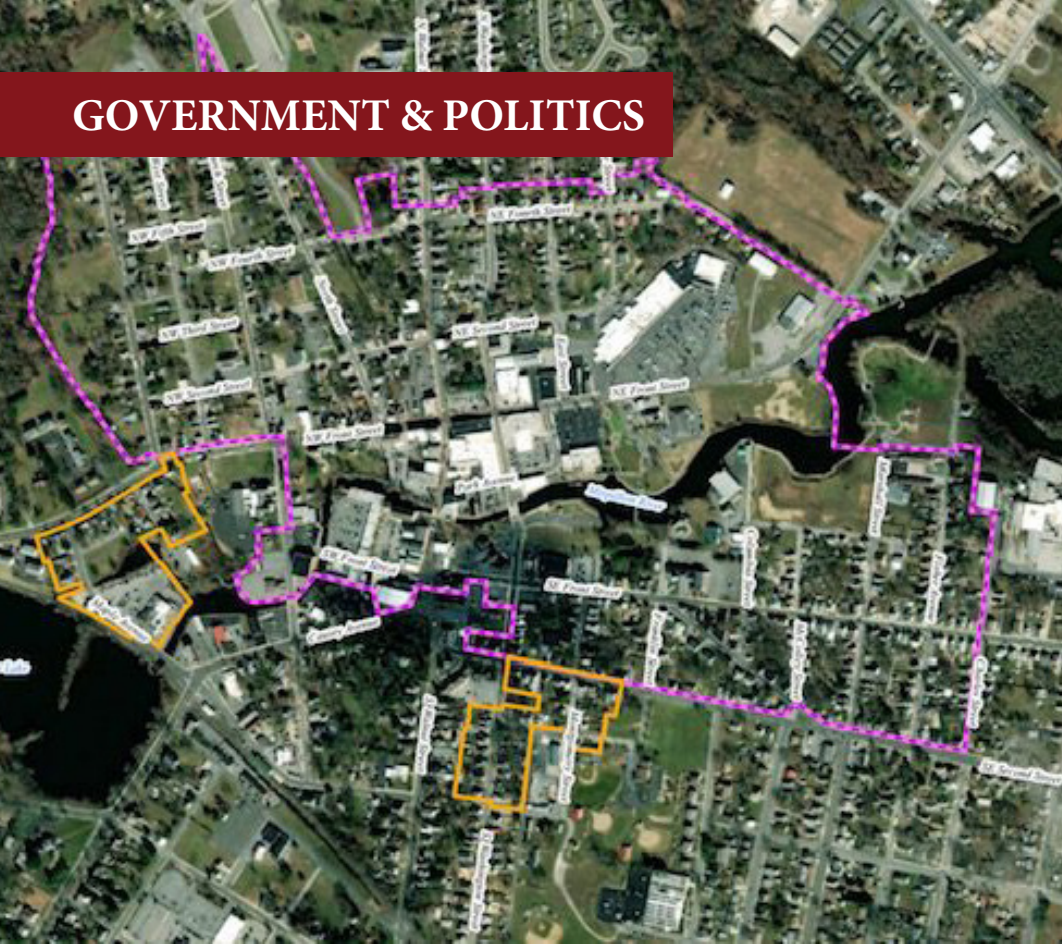
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DDD EXPANSION DISCUSSED BY COUNCIL

ment, property maintenance code violations, and blighted structures.”

Pierce explained that the city performed a similar expansion in 2019 with council deciding to expand into the northern section of the city. The first option was centered on South Washington Street and would include sections of Southeast Third, Southeast Fourth, Montgomery and Franklin Streets. This option was considered for the 2019 expansion as well. The second option incorporates God’s Way Thrift Shop on Maple Avenue, an area identified as a potential redevelopment project in the Rivertown Rebirth Master Plan. That option also includes sections of South Washington Street. Pierce also explained that the city could choose to leave the DDD as it was and wait until it was expanded again.

“Thank you, Rob, for putting this together. It makes it clear. I’ll give you somewhat of my opinion. Option one, which is mostly South Washington. I really think that street is definitely in need of rehabilitation. I think any incentives that we can latch onto right now would be great. I do appreciate that,” Councilman Todd Culotta said. “However, option two. I also like because it does include somewhat of a good chunk of South Washington, but it also includes gateway into the city when you’re coming in from Front Street. So, there’s a lot of

see page 14

BY TERRY ROGERS

City Council learned at a recent meeting that the Downtown Development District (DDD) could be expanded by 15 acres. Expanding the area could bring more investment into the downtown area, according to Rob Pierce, city planner.

“The state of Delaware in November of 2022 updated their Downtown Development District program guidelines, which increased the local district acreage for municipalities our size from 185 acres to 200 acres,” Pierce said. “Right now we sit at about 184.89 acres. So, we’re just under the 185 which would allow us to increase by a little bit more than 15 acres. If Council desires to do so, areas adjacent to our current district were randomized by staff for low income populations and vacancy rates, availability of vacant land for develop-

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from page 13

value in that. And then also, with God's Way, there's commercial development, and those dollars usually are much easier to come by when there's incentives like this than just residential. I do like infill, and I think that's really benefited Jason's area where a lot of new houses have been built. But I always thought the spirit of the DDD program was to rehabilitate and give you incentive to redo that house instead of tearing it down for historic value, but also because typically tearing it down and rebuilding it is cheaper."

Councilman Culotta stated that he did not like the option to wait and see if the state expanded the acreage again, believing the city should "take the money where they can get it."

Pierce stated that in the DDD program, the state offered a 20% rebate on investments over \$25,000, a rebate on hard construction costs provided that at the end of construction once proof of payment is provided. There's also a match at the county level. So, depending on what side of the DDD someone was on, Kent County provides a match a grant up to a certain amount and so does Sussex County.

"From a local incentive perspective, the city waives our building permit fee for any work being done no matter what level of investment, whether you spend \$1 or \$1 million, we do not charge you a building permit fee. And we also waive our sewer, water and electric impact fees which can amount to around \$6,000 or \$7,000 for new construction," Pierce said. "So, a typical home permit is around \$11,000 in most of the portions

see page 15

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from page 14

of Milford you can get a permit for \$3,000 or \$4,000 for new construction here. The city also offers full tax abatements for new construction up to five years and full or partial tax abatements for 10 years for redevelopment. So, it depends. If you fully redevelop a property and improve its assessed value of 1%, you'll get a full tax abatement for 10 years. So, we were really foregoing the majority of our revenue in this area.”

Pierce explained that the city often used the DDD program as a carrot when someone was found to have a code violation. The program is available whether the property is owner-occupied or rented. There are also no income eligibility stipulations. Councilman Mike Boyle recalled an in-depth discussion in 2019 when the northern section of the town was selected.

“I kind of remember we needed to put it up there first, but option one would be the next heavy consideration,” Councilman Boyle said. “This is probably the one area where we can have the biggest impact and it can be saved or become a nice little neighborhood if money is invested.”

Pierce will take both options to the state and once he receives feedback from them, will present the options to council for adoption. Current DDD projects can be viewed by visiting <https://cityofmilford.com/ddd>.



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photo link: [Milford School District](#)

BOARD HAS FIRST READ OF UPDATED STRATEGIC PLAN

BY TERRY ROGERS

At a recent meeting, Dr. Bridget Amory, director of Student Learning, presented the first draft of the updated District Strategic Plan. The plan was compiled with input from students, staff, caregivers and community members.

“We’ve agreed upon a path forward,” Dr. Amory said. “In keeping with our Buccaneer theme, we agreed that we will be ‘Charting a Course to Excellence’ throughout Milford School District. The steering committee convened multiple times to guide the key elements of the plan which include a portrait of a Buccaneer, revision of our core beliefs, vision mission, as well as a priority compass.”

The compass presented included statements such as “Building Our Future,” “Supporting the Whole Student,” “Empowering and Investing in Our People,” and “Academic Excellence.” According to the presentation, the strategic plan will support each student’s social, emotional and behavioral well-being, provide equitable access to academic excellence and high-quality instruction, recognize that the people who work in Milford are the driving force behind its success, and evaluation,



Our four priorities are the four quadrants on our compass

planning and future development of district facilities and systems of engagement.

“Revised statements include a vision statement that reads ‘Milford School District students will be prepared with the attributes, knowledge and skills to fulfill their life pursuits,’” Dr. Amory said. “A mission statement that reads ‘the mission of Milford school district is to provide all learners a comprehensive individualized education in a safe, supportive, rigorous environment where learners are prepared to grow and thrive in a

see page 18

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Dr. Amory explained that the new plan narrowed the district focus on the four main core areas described in the introduction.

“Each of the elements contributes to setting the stage for the next several years of focus throughout Milford schools,” Dr. Amory said. “The strategic planning process elevated stakeholder voices through a survey that was completed by over 1,000 of our community individuals, and numerous focus groups designed to gather input from all stakeholders. This will serve as a guiding framework as we work to align school data and refine our goals throughout the district moving forward.”

School Board President Jason Miller thanked the steering committee who worked to put the plan together.

“I speak for the board that there’s been a lot of time and energy invested in this project and the document in my opinion is fantastic. It’s an amazing document and I hope that it serves as a resource to springboard us up into whatever the next phase that we are going on to as a district,” Miller said. “I’m really looking forward to just being part of it and being able to enjoy that process. So thank you, and thank you to everyone who participated all the staff, all the community that came and provided input. Mr. Fitzgerald, Mrs. Wylie, I think it was a unique opportunity to experience that. And again, I’m looking forward to seeing where it goes from here.”

The board will vote on the final strategic plan at a future meeting. Anyone who wants to review the plan can contact the district office at 302-422-1600.



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HEALTH



photo link: Bayhealth Medical Center

YOUNG BREAST CANCER SURVIVORS BENEFIT FROM DBCC PROGRAM

BY TERRY ROGERS

A diagnosis of breast cancer at any age can be frightening and stressful, but for younger women, learning you have breast cancer can be especially devastating. The Young Survivors in Action (YSIA) program through Delaware Breast Cancer Coalition (DBCC) is designed to help people between the ages of 20 and 40 who have been diagnosed with the disease.

“We have one goal, to focus on our survivors holistically,” Stephanie Cumella, manager of the program, said. “YSIA includes educational, support and networking options designed to address the whole person. The program is designed to assist physically, mentally and emotionally.”

Cumella explained that the word “young” can be subjective, but this program focuses on people in their 20s, 30s and 40s who are breast cancer survivors. A

young survivor may also be someone who was diagnosed with cancer at a young age and has continued to thrive, as they are inspirations to those who were recently diagnosed. However, Cumella also stated that someone who is young at heart and has survived breast cancer is welcome to join.

“When we talk about holistic wellness, it is an approach to being healthy that looks at whole body health and not just on the cancer,” Cumella said. “All the events and workshops are designed to assist with emotional, spiritual and social well-being.”

One of the newest programs offered through YSIA is Yogalates, a combination of yoga and Pilates which is perfect for cancer survivors.

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37TH ANNUAL STATEWIDE LAW ENFORCEMENT TORCH RUN FOR SPECIAL OLYMPICS



photo credit: Bill Ritchie for Special Olympics Delaware

STAFF REPORT

The 37th Annual Statewide Law Enforcement Torch Run For Special Olympics, which involves over 600 law enforcement officers and includes multiple legs spanning the state, will be held between Wednesday, June 7 and Friday, June 9, 2023.

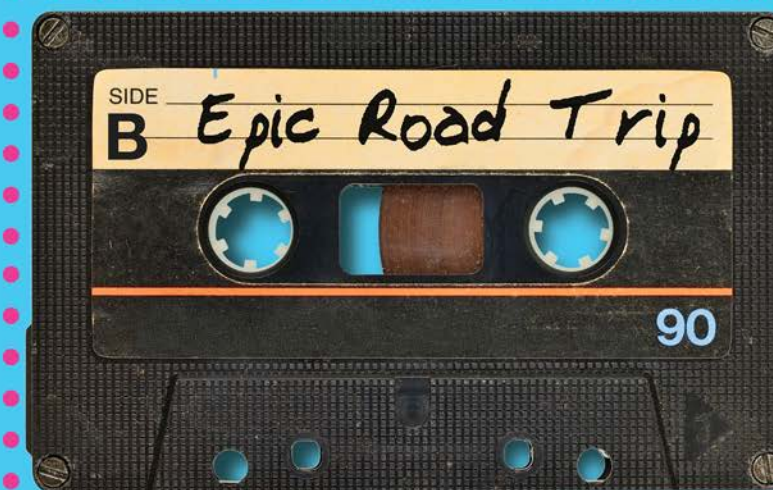
This year's Torch Run will be a three-day event. On Wednesday, June 7, at 9 a.m., it will begin at the New Castle County Police Department and travel to the Wilmington Police Department, where there will be a ceremony at 9:30 a.m. The torch will then travel to Delaware State Police Troop 6. Downstate, at approximately 3:30 p.m., it will begin at Fenwick Island and travel to the Rehoboth Beach bandstand for a 20-minute ceremony starting at 7 p.m. Immediately

following the ceremony, the torch will depart for a one-mile run to Grove Park.

On Thursday, June 8, downstate, the torch will start in two locations. At 6 a.m., one leg of the Torch Run will depart from the Delmar Police Department. At 6:40 a.m., a second leg will start at The Circle in Georgetown and the two legs will unite in Harrington and then run to a Dover ceremony, held on the Legislative Mall at 1:45 p.m. Upstate, the torch will depart from the Middletown Police Department at 10:30 a.m. and also arrive for the ceremony in Dover. All law enforcement, Special Olympics Delaware athletes, and legislators are invited to attend.

see page 23

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The event continues on Friday, June 9, with the torch leaving the Newark Shopping Center at 4 p.m. The event culminates with the final leg into the University of Delaware Bob Carpenter Center for the official Opening Ceremony of the 2023 Summer Games at 4:15 p.m., where the Flame of Hope will be delivered.

In its history, Delaware Law Enforcement for Special Olympics has raised more than \$10 million to support Special Olympics Delaware's year-round program of quality sports training and athletic competition for children and adults with intellectual disabilities. A family of enthusiastic volunteers makes this program possible for the thousands of athletes who compete in Special Olympics Delaware. The organization builds sports skills, confidence, strength, motivation, and self-esteem not just for the athletes, but for everyone involved. You can visit the Special Olympics Delaware [website](#) for more information.



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