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Electric Rates to Rise in June



Council Hears CIP Plan



Southern Delaware Golf Club Opens

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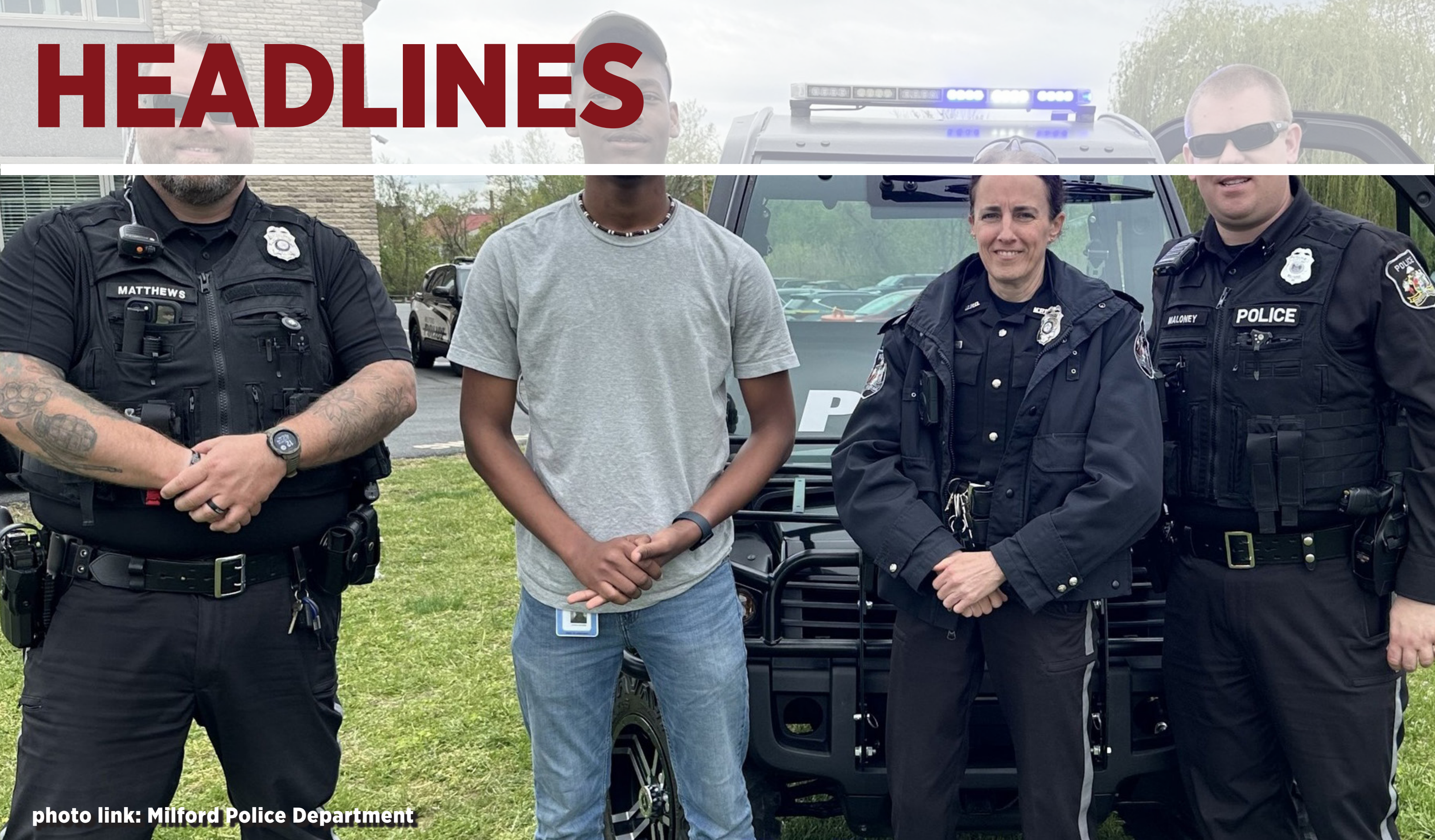


photo link: [Milford Police Department](#)



MILFORD ELECTRIC RATES TO RISE 2.4% IN JUNE

BY KEN MAMMARELLA

Starting in June, electric bills for the average residential and small business accounts in Milford are going up 2.4%, the city has announced. Commercial accounts in Milford can expect an increase ranging from about 2.3 to 3.0%, depending on demand, load factor, seasonality and time of use.

“The power cost increase is entirely due to market-driven capacity cost increases that impact all electric users on the Delmarva Peninsula,” the city’s announcement said.

Milford, a community electric utility powered by the [Delaware Municipal Electric Corp.](#), will increase the

current power cost adjustment by \$0.00353 per kilowatt-hour to \$0.02477 per kWh for energy usage beginning in June.

“DEMEC strives to represent the city of Milford and all public power cities and towns in Delaware with rate stability and cost control at the forefront of its goals,” Finance Director Lou Vitola said, “but the auction-based market for capacity is unpredictable. Fortunately, DEMEC has physical hedges in place that helped cut the rate impact of the auction results nearly in half.”

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To help offset this increase, the city encourages customers to utilize **Efficiency Smart** for rebates and an electric usage monitor, insulating windows, purchasing a water heater jacket, utilizing the city's budget plan and servicing their HVAC system. Reducing household energy consumption by about 6 kWh per day will completely offset the cumulative effect of all wholesale power costs passed through since 2020.

Questions regarding utility billing or the upcoming power cost adjustment can be directed to the city's customer service department at 302-422-6616.

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CULTURE



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DIRT THERAPY: BENEFITS OF GARDENING FOR MENTAL HEALTH

STAFF REPORT

Everyone loves the taste of a garden-fresh vegetable; especially if they worked diligently to grow it themselves. The hard-earned harvest is not only a delicious reward but a physical one as well according to Bayhealth Family Medicine Physician **Brintha Vasagar, MD**. It is proven that time spent working in the dirt and warm summer sunshine are valuable to your wellbeing.

Here are some of the benefits that gardening can have specifically on your mental health according to Dr. Vasagar:

Spending time in the garden significantly reduces anxiety. It's a lot easier to forget about your endless to-do list when you are focused on caring for tender, new

life. "The connection to nature helps us to feel grounded and more stable. Also, endorphins—happy hormones—are released with physical activity, like the labor of tending of a garden," explained Dr. Vasagar. This helps to significantly lower stress in both mind and body.

Accountability is established. A garden requires maintenance consistently, if not every day. This means that you're getting outside more often for an intentional amount of time. "It can help create a rhythm in your life that maybe wasn't there before. Building accountability in one area of your life can overflow into other habits as well," said Dr. Vasagar.

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Resilience is developed in us. Nature has an amazing way of bouncing back from harm. Whether it be from an animal tearing into the garden for a snack or a destructive summer storm, regrowth often comes back bigger and stronger. “It can bring a different perspective to us as we figure out ways to allow the challenges of life make us stronger,” explained Dr. Vasagar.

Patience and perseverance are developed in the process. Excitement builds as you watch a little sprout grow bigger and bigger each day. One day it has a bloom that will soon turn into a fruit or veggie and endurance develops in you knowing the good things are coming. Waiting is easy because you see the progress of how far each plant has come.

Great satisfaction comes from helping a seed grow into a bountiful harvest. “It can help those who struggle with depression to feel a great sense of purpose, knowing their time and hard work produced something good,” said Dr. Vasagar. Focusing on something positive helps keep you from focusing on yourself, which can often turn negative.

To get started, look online for the best plants to grow in your area. You can even create a Pinterest board for inspiration. Head to your local farmstand or home improvement store to get the supplies needed. After a few weeks, you’ll be enjoying the harvest.

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BUSINESS



photo link: [Marcia Reed](#)

DMI ANNOUNCES REBRANDING

BY TERRY ROGERS

A few days prior to the Bug and Bud Festival, Downtown Milford Inc. (DMI) announced the “dawn of a new era” with an entirely new brand and identity. The changes were announced on social media.

“We are excited at the new direction DMI is taking,” Shelby DiCostanzo, president of DMI said. “We have several new board members who are bringing a new energy to the organization and we felt that it was time to not only reorganize internally, but to make some changes externally as well.”

According to the social media posts, DMI’s rebranding effort reflects the deep commitment to serving and uplifting the heart of its city, downtown Milford. The organization recognized the evolving needs of its community and is dedicated to meeting them with innovation, enthusiasm and a renewed sense of purpose.

“One thing that will not change is our support of downtown businesses,” DiCostanzo said. “That is something that is the foundation of DMI and we would never change that. However, we are hoping to strengthen that support in any way we can while also promoting downtown as the heart of our River Town, Art Town, Home Town.”

DMI began as the Downtown Revitalization Committee which grew out of an Oct. 26, 1992, city workshop. Then-Ward 1 Councilman Lawrence Lewis urged the



Council to take action to revitalize the downtown business area. Then-City Manager Michael Booker and Police Chief Richard Carmean agreed there was a need to beautify and improve infrastructure downtown, they felt it should be handled by a private entity.

Under the direction of Councilman Lewis, the Downtown Revitalization Committee (DRC) was officially established on Feb. 1, 1993, with a focus on Walnut Street from Causey Avenue to Northwest Front Street with portions of North and South Front Streets plus other adjoining streets added later. Chris DeMartin and Councilman Lewis were the first co-chairs with Dr. Bruce Topol replaced DeMartin as co-chair.

In 1994, the Delaware State Economic Development and Tourism Division started providing technical support for Milford to participate in the National Main Street Program, a project sponsored by the National Trust for Historic Preservation. This led DRC to begin

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organizing under Main Street principals.

A \$150,000 grant from the state was obtained in 1994 and was used for sidewalk and street improvements. Milford City Council also agreed to pay for a full-time director. In January 1995, another \$176,000 was received for more sidewalk and street improvements. Marguerite Ashley was hired as the coordinator in 1995. Although council approved paying the salary of the coordinator for two years, they did not approve a third year and Ashley left the position in 1996.

In February 1995, the organization's name was changed to Downtown Milford, Inc. (DMI) and became a member of Main Street later that same year. By the middle of 1995, DMI had raised \$500,000 in grant funding. The funding was used to place utility lines underground, placing brick pavers on sidewalks and crosswalks, installing new traffic signals, installing historic streetlamps, and landscaping with trees, shrubs and benches. The grant required DMI to raise \$42,000 in matching funds and a membership drive raised the funds in just a few months.

The Farmer's Market was launched in July 1995 with a grant from the Department of Agriculture plus support from local businesses. The first logo, created by combining two logos that won first and second place in a contest, was adopted in 1996. The original winning designs were created by Donna Juharden and Dan Bond, but combined by Martha Pileggi.

The Milford Heritage Festival, designed to celebrate Milford with an emphasis on natural history, began in June 1996. In 1997, partnering with the Milford Histor-

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ical Society and Milford Community Parade to organize the “Holiday Glow” and built the Santa House.

Over the years, DMI has completed multiple projects in downtown Milford, many of which are still ongoing. Using the Community Redevelopment Fund, DMI was recognized for its beautification efforts in the downtown area. A revolving loan fund was created in 2000, providing small, low-interest loans to downtown businesses. The same fund was also used to create a Façade and Awning program, providing business with funds to help them improve the outside of their buildings.

On May 30, 2003, a fire swept through downtown, destroying several buildings. The next day, DMI held the Strawberry Festival across the street as planned and three days later met with local and state leaders in the downtown area. DMI was instrumental in getting \$25,000 state grant money to help property owners obtain assessments of the damage.

The Bug and Bud Festival began in 2004 as a way to recognize the 30th anniversary of the ladybug being named the state bug. The festival continues today, and this year celebrated its 20th anniversary, while also recognizing it as the 50th anniversary of the ladybug designation.

“Our history shows that DMI is vital to the growth and improvement of downtown,” DiCostanzo said. “With our new branding and identity, we intend to help promote our thriving, growing downtown.”

DMI continues to seek volunteers to help promote its mission. For more information, call 302-839-1180 or visit its [website](#).



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GOVERNMENT & POLITICS



photo credit: Ben Muldrow



COUNCIL HEARS FIVE-YEAR CIP PLAN

BY TERRY ROGERS

At a recent workshop, Milford City Council learned from each department their suggestions for Capital Improvement Plans for the city. The plan, which covers years 2025 to 2029 totaled \$94,339,510. Items included everything from replacing chairs for the conference room to land purchases for parks.

“One of the things I found really disturbing right away was it has no IT projects listed,” Councilman Andy Fulton said. “We know that is a very expensive and ever evolving system of updates and they’re not cheap. They’re costly, but they’re not in the CIP at all.”

City Manager Mark Whitfield explained that most of the IT for the city had been moved to the cloud which then meant there was not a need for CIP fund to be set

aside. Those costs would now appear in the general operating budget. Councilwoman Nirmala Samaroo asked about the increase in the sidewalk connectivity projects.

“I think in the first year or two that was working in conjunction with the planning department. For the first year or two we had put a lower dollar amount just to kind of get our feet wet and as the years go along the areas that sidewalk infill needs to occur and tend to fall into areas without curbs or areas that need heavier grading,” James Puddicombe, city engineer, said. “So, for that reason, the cost of doing those infill sections tends to go up a little bit. We also found that we were falling a

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little bit short on being able to do essentially whole blocks with \$150,000. So, by having it around \$350,000 It allows us to do essentially a whole block of sidewalk into at a time to just complete an entire area.”

Councilman Brian Baer questioned whether the city could obtain grants for some of the bicycle paths and TAP projects.

“Actually, I can answer that. Yes, first of all, the TAP projects are already a federally funded program through DelDOT. What is listed as part of the project is actually our portion of that project. So, there’s a match that we have to make same with the bridge projects that are listed there in 90% is federal and 10% is city that goes in for the bridge replacement projects,” Whitfield said. “We have a lot of opportunities on bike paths for various grants that come available through DelDOT and the federal government. This is also an approved DelDOT plan who are looking at grant opportunities that may come around, particularly those that are along or within state rights of way. So, they have that on their radar. The other opportunities that we have are municipal street aid that we can use for various street projects, and we also have community transportation funds that we receive through our state legislators, both the Representatives and the Senate. They have money that we can request through them to get that get those funds for those types of projects. So and again, I think we’ve been pretty successful at obtaining those grants and we’re always looking for those grant opportunities to be able to run a lot of these projects.”


Rob Pierce, city planner, explained that Dover Kent County Metropolitan Planning Organization also helps prioritize transportation projects, including bicycle and pedestrian projects through DelDOT. We’ve been doing a lot of these studies recently through their organization to help funnel some of these projects into state funding. DelDOT has given the city a commitment to do the shared use path from Parson Thorne Apartments, out by the fire house and on up to the high school and 113. That project was in the design stages currently.

“I would just say this about sidewalks. And you know, I love the idea of connectivity. I like sidewalks that goes somewhere, not just going in abruptly at a dead end or something like that,” Fulton said. “I will remain of the opinion that sidewalk repairs should not be placed upon the citizens. It should be the city’s responsibility for those repairs. I don’t think it should be on the citizens. And that’s something that I think needs to be looked at in the future.”




Councilwoman Katrina Wilson agreed, stating that many property owners were struggling to pay their taxes already and adding sidewalk repairs was not helpful.

“I hate being historian but sometimes we require that. Councilman Todd Culotta and I have worked on this very aggressively and took a very strong position and in fact when we had the committee’s this was our particular topic, and we understand this so this is just a little refresh. We understand information was provided to us and our first general counsel really, really fought this and that the city manager provided me with a history


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and the reasons why that is paid for by the citizens and some of it was due to liability,” Councilman Jason James said. “I still think this council can take this action, we can start to take the action and do the research into the homework and say what would it cost and what would it take? How do we remove the city for liability from everything that could happen on the sidewalk that’s adjacent or in front of someone’s property and make a proposal to the council as a whole and come up with an idea. We can we have the power to make that happen through our collective efforts. We can’t just say I don’t think it’s a good idea to sit and wait for the city administration to have this council present a proposal because I think it could work and unless you have that and I’m still willing to be part of that because I believe the same as you all do, but it has to be done the right way. And it has to be done to mitigate or remove the city from any liability.”

Councilman Culotta thanked Councilman James for bringing up the liability issue with sidewalks.

“I think for a long time the sidewalks were ignored in the city. We talked about a walkable city and connected city but the upkeep on sidewalks was really ignored and then all of a sudden, we came up with the sidewalk repair program,” Councilman Culotta said. “And we said well charter says the homeowner is responsible for it. So, let’s charge them or make them do it. And one of three different ways. A fourth way which wasn’t initially announced was also providing funds for people that can’t afford it.”

Councilman Culotta continued.

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“But I think the initial part of it can be expensive because the longer you wait, the more it costs, but I also think that was also ineffective in how we did it because people said that okay, fix where we say because the city determine where the fixes needed to be. The homeowner has to comply with that. So, the homeowner says ‘Well, I’m only going to fix where you tell me to fix it’. So we take this section out, fix it, take that section and fix it,” Councilman Culotta said. “If you talk to anybody that’s doing the work if you took this whole sidewalk all it at once and fix it, it will be cheaper. And I think to that extent, it was somewhat ineffective. And then we came back and made fixes to it and people got bills that were three times what they were expecting. And we corrected that. I mean, we went through that process, but I think we avoid all that when the city takes care of it, because then we determine where the fixes need to be and the priority for repairs. We can easily do that and still would have liability in terms of making sure the sidewalk is fixed. Our liability does not require us to shovel snow, that is the homeowner’s requirement. You know it is a right of way. So, I do think there’s kind of echo what Councilman James said there is room for us to design a better path.”

Councilman Fulton pointed out that if someone fell on the street, the city could be held liable, so he did not find that argument valid. Whitfield pointed out that council had tasked him with researching whether the city could afford to repair sidewalks in all areas, and it was determined that it was cost prohibitive. He cautioned council to consider those costs before they made changes to code.

Many of the projects listed under streets included bicycle and pedestrian paths, including on Marshall Street, route 113, Airport Road, near Milford High School, Wickersham, Southern Delaware Golf Course and Watergate. There are also costs over the next five years for several TAP projects and streetscapes on Denney Row and Park Avenue. Southwest Front Street, Columbia Street and Franklin Street are also scheduled to get streetscaping. Over the next five years, the city could spend \$30,934,811 on street projects with plans to seek grant funding for many of them.

Electric projects for the city over the next five years are expected to total \$4,668,678 while water projects are expected to cost \$18,222,130 and sewer projects total \$7,424,301. Solid waste projects could cost \$515,500.

“As for Public Works Department, Customer Service needs HVAC system replacement and upgrades to the drive through,” Whitfield said. “We also have curbs that need replacing as they are deteriorating. We are also purchasing 20 chairs for the conference room as they have lived their life.”

Parks and Recreation’s request for the CIP included an F350 dump body and a brush cutter. In addition, Brad Dennehy, director of Parks & Recreation, explained that the basketball courts needed rehabilitation for \$40,000.

“We are looking at the Marshall Pond riverbank development. This is the area along Marshall Pond, and it backs up to the Pop Warner field,” Dennehy said. “Our aim is to create a recreation area here. This is property that we currently own. There’s an old amphitheater

down there and this is a way to create some sort of cohesive park system down there to give more passive and active recreation, whether it’s a beach volleyball court, picnic pavilion, some sort of possibly a dock for kids to fish off of.”

The total projects for Parks and Recreation were \$9,188,851 with approximately \$2,820,000 proposed for open space acquisition. The city is also looking at creating a park area in front of City Hall. There was also funding included to redesign the parking lot behind city hall along with other parking lots owned by the city. The CIP will be discussed, and projects approved during the budget hearings planned for late May.



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EDUCATION



photo link: [Milford School District](#)

SCHOOL BEHAVIOR GROUP WANTS MORE FUNDING FOR SPECIALISTS

BY JAREK RUTZ

The state task force dedicated to evaluating the ongoing problems with student behavior and school climate acknowledges that there is a real problem in Delaware schools. The 24-member Student Behavior and School Climate Task Force, made of government and educational officials as well as school behavioral specialists and resource officers, got its first taste of official suspension data April 29.

Several members said schools need more money for specialists than they now are getting.

Statewide data from 2021-2023 shows that the most common suspension is out of school with no service requirements (33,000 cases, 47.53%), followed by in-school suspensions (29,000, 42.1%) out-of-school with service requirements (5,000, 6.52%) and in-school suspensions with interventions (2,000, 2.8%).

That number is total disciplinary referrals, but changes depending on the incident. For example, 79% of students were disciplined with out-of-school suspensions

without service requirements for fighting. For skipping class, 72% of students received in-school suspensions. The overwhelming majority of infractions also took place in schools within New Castle County.

The task force recognized that certain groups of students, such as Black students and students with disabilities, are punished at a disproportionate rate compared to White traditionally learning students.

For a couple years now, parents have flooded school board meetings to tell disheartening stories of their child being bullied or a victim of bad behavior by classmates. In November 2023, for example, one mom said that students in the Milford School District hold a “fight club” in the school, and videos are circulated through social media.

The task force’s job is to study the needs and options of students and educators to improve student behavior and school climate policies.

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Its end goal is to recommend a course of legislative, regulatory and operational action that considers or addresses:


- The causes of student behavior issues, including the connection between student behavior and the social determinants of learning.
- The impact of student behavior issues on student learning, including for the individual student with behavior issues as well as for their classmates.
- The impact of student behavior issues on educators' job satisfaction and retention.
- The effectiveness of current school discipline policies and initiatives in preventing and addressing student behavior issues, including restorative practices as adopted in Delaware and other jurisdictions.
- Adoption of data-driven, developmentally-appropriate school discipline policies and interventions to improve school climate in Delaware schools.
- Effective school policies related to engaging families in the process of addressing student behavior issues.

Dorrell Green, superintendent of Red Clay Consolidated School District, said out-of-school suspensions aren't ideal. They often take children out of a learning environment and leave them in a home environment that might be the foundation for the bad behavior, he said. But, if a child is disrupting the learning of others, they might have to be removed from the classroom.

State Sen. Eric Buckson, R-Dover, said the state often treats everything as a new intervention where it doesn't have to be. Buckson said he believes a lot of children are

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misdiagnosed with behavioral disorders when they don't necessarily have them.

While some of the members want to see more restorative practices and professional development for teachers to appropriately respond to misbehavior, some had a more simple approach.

Donna Husten, who teaches in the Indian River School District, said the state doesn't allocate enough funding resources to behavioral interventionists—those that could help and ease the burden of teachers to play the role of disciplinarian. Other educators added that it's difficult on teachers, who already have enough on their plate, to be tied into behavioral responsibilities.

Vilicia Cade, superintendent of Capital School District, said the state puts so many regulations and requirements on schools that adding behavioral specialists is just another task to complete, and it's difficult.

Senate Education Committee Chair Laura Sturgeon, D-Hockessin, agreed that more funding for these positions would help.

The task force did not take any action. Its next meeting is yet to be scheduled but will likely be in May. It is expected to submit a formal report to the General Assembly by Nov. 1.



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HEALTH



photo link: Bayhealth

UNPACKING STRESS AND THE PAIN THAT COMES WITH IT

STAFF REPORT

Because patients feel comfortable confiding in their primary care doctor, that physician is often the first person to hear about stressors, says Rebecca McIlroy, DO.

“Probably the most common with my patients is caregiver burnout, the burden of caring for elderly parents—the emotional and physical burden,” she said. But Dr. McIlroy said patients also talk about relationship issues, financial problems, a spouse’s medical issues and, of course, job-related stress.

While some patients are able to identify how stress impacts their lives, Dr. McIlroy looks at physical symptoms—headache, body aches, back ache and abdominal discomforts—that are frequently associated with stress.

“Osteopathic training looks at the person as a whole, but often I say, ‘What’s going on in your life?’ Some are very self-aware and will say, ‘I think it’s the stress,’” she said. Nevertheless, Dr. McIlroy will then prescribe tests

to “methodically go through any possible medical diagnoses, before I conclude it’s stress induced,” she explained.

“I use the metaphor of a backpack and people putting bricks—one at a time—in the backpack. We have to eliminate some of the bricks if they can’t take the backpack off,” Dr. McIlroy said. “I don’t want acute stress to become chronic stress. We might have to use medication or therapy if they can’t make changes themselves.”

She offers some suggestions:

Find other people to help

What support system is available and who’s involved? This might require more communication, and even some mediation, among family members.

Find personal time for enjoyable activities

“It’s getting back to the basics: Do what you like. Smile every day and make time for yourself,” advises Dr. McIlroy.

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Dr. McIlroy urges patients to avoid stress eating, try to eat a healthy diet and get better sleep. Dr. McIlroy also follows up with patients within a couple of weeks to see if people have made changes. “Frequent office visits are very helpful in the healing process,” she said. “I ask them to make one small change for each visit. They have to strive.”

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MILFORD
LIVE

SPORTS



photo credit: David McCallum



SOUTHERN DELAWARE GOLF CLUB OPENS

BY DAVE MCCALLUM

It had been nearly 3½ years since the last drive was hit on the first tee and the final putt was sunk at the old Rookery North golf course in Milford. Milford-area golfers' agonizing wait to strike another tee shot and sink another putt ended at 7:36 a.m. May 1 (Wednesday) when co-owner Matt Johnson of the new Southern Delaware Golf Club struck the first tee ball on the new, but old course.

"I think it's great to be 14 months into a total renovation," the younger Johnson said. "The fairways are starting to pop and the greens are looking excellent. We planted the greens nine months ago, but they are still very young."

Johnson, along with his father Tim, spearheaded the effort to bring the former Shawnee Country Club/Rookery North layout back. He said it is hard to put a number on how many workers and manhours it has taken to get the course to this stage which is only in its infancy when one considers the different crews that have been involved in the reboot. Chief among those crews is one led by Bill Kupfer, the course's superintendent and head of agronomy.

"Bill has a crew of 10 or 12 guys that have been out here working for the last 14 months," Matt Johnson said. "Of course, you have the pro shop staff who are led by our director of golf Stewart Fisher and his assistant Caden (Stanley) who have been working around the clock for the last couple of months getting everything

dialed in, making sure the pro shop looks great and the course looks great."

As for Fisher, he could not be happier with how opening day and, for that matter, the first five days have gone for a course that actually dates back to 1958 when it was only a nine-hole layout.

Although Mother Nature put a damper on things Saturday with off-and-on rain showers, those water droplets were not enough to wipe the smile off golfers' faces as they were ready to get back on the course which measures 6,324 yards from the back or "blue" tees, and 5,145 yards from the red tees.

"Expectations were a little bit of organized chaos just to get golfers on the course, what their expectations were," he said. "We redid the parking lot and the flow of traffic and educating everyone on the bag drop and how that's going to work and our greeters and starters. It was a little bit of a learning curve for everyone, golfers and our staff, but everything went really well. We're very excited to see golfers on the course again.

"They (golfers) were just very happy to see the course again. I heard the comment several times throughout the day, 'I thought this place was never going to be a golf course again and I'm so glad that it is and I'm ready to get back out there.'"

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Fisher said one of the neatest things that he's heard was from golfers that knew the course as Shawnee and Rookery North liked the layout and they're very happy to see the course stay similar in that respect as well as the green renovations, bunkers, etc.

"The overwhelming response has been that the course looks great and that they can see all the hard work and time that has gone into making this happen, and we (golfers) can also see the vision into what you want the course to become in the future," Fisher said. "I'm very happy with how things have gone with all the work that Bill (Kupfer) and his staff have done as well as my inside and outside staff. Everyone has done a great job."

As for future plans, there are plenty of things golfers and non-golfers can expect, he said. Those include renovations to expanding the driving range, along with moving the temporary putting green from its current location to just across the cart path near the 10th tee. There are plans for a chipping area, but only if at least three major criteria are met—the configuration of the new putting green as well as the proximity of the 10th tee and 18th green—the last two to keep golfers' safety in mind.

In addition, there will be an actual 19th hole on the back of the property so as improvements are continued to be made golfers will still be able to play 18 holes if work needs to be done on one of the current holes. The 19th hole will be a short par-four or long par-three, he

said. Also, there will be weekly leagues starting in June—a 9-hole men's league will be on Wednesdays with a 5 p.m. shotgun start. The ladies' league will be either Monday or Tuesday evenings. The specific day and time are yet to be determined.

For those who love pickleball, work continues inside the fenced-in area of the parking lot. Fisher said the completion date is to be determined, but the club will keep the public informed when the courts will be open and how to make reservations.

Those wishing to make golf tee times can do so either by calling the pro shop at 302-491-7933, stopping by in person or doing so online at www.southerndelawaregolfclub.com. Folks can also keep up with other club activities on the website.



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MAY 27, 2024
10:30AM

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