



NEXUS Legislative Committee Stays Connected with Local Officials

Pennsauken, Camden County: The NEXUS Legislative Committee virtually welcomed Pennsauken Township Mayor Marco DiBattista and Shakir Ali, Director of Regulatory Services, to the monthly Legislative Committee meeting as guest speakers on May 19. With a population of 37,000 residents, Pennsauken operates the Township Committee form of government with five members elected to staggered three-year terms. The Mayor and Deputy Mayor are chosen from and by the Township Committee members to serve a one-year term. Mayor DiBattista was elected to office in 2018.

Mayor DiBattista kicked off the meeting discussing the Township's renewed commitment to investment in economic development, starting with revamping the Department of Economic Development and focusing on building partnerships with business owners and property owners in town. For example, a current project creates a portal to assist both private and commercial property owners in marketing their properties. The goal is to make it easier for renters to find available space while providing additional tools to property owners to advertise their properties better.

Drawing in new investment is a crucial priority for the Township. Mayor DiBattista and Mr. Ali focus on drawing investment to the Route 130 corridor and building a "downtown" for Pennsauken that has a small-town feel with local shops and restaurants. Promoting walkability in any redevelopment is essential in this effort.

Mayor DiBattista and Mr. Ali recognized that Pennsauken has long had a reputation of being hard to do business with, particularly when it comes to real estate. However, they said the Township is working hard to turn this around by being more open and responsive to investors and REALTORS®. They welcome feedback from NEXUS.

If you have suggestions, please send them to Liz Peters so that the Legislative Committee can compile and share them with the Township officials.

Want to join NEXUS' Legislative Committee? Reach out to Liz at liz.peters@nexusaor.com for more information and to be added to the distribution list.

Seaside Heights, Ocean County:

Seaside Heights Borough Mayor Anthony Vaz virtually joined the Legislative Committee meeting as a guest speaker on Wednesday, June 16. Mayor Vaz has lived in Seaside for 54 years, has served on the council for 27 years, and six years as mayor. The mayor was delighted to have the opportunity to share what is happening in Seaside heights and his vision of the Borough as a "family-friendly" resort town. Mayor Vaz said in the '80s and 90's Seaside Heights was regarded as a party town. However, they have implemented measures to change the town's reputation through code enforcement and attracting quality investors committed to improving the quality of life in the Borough.

The administration has implemented a "3 strike rule" that monitors "nuisance" complaints from neighbors regarding tenants' behavior. Under the rule, property owners are notified of each complaint. After three complaints are registered, and the Township deems them legitimate, property owners risk losing their mercantile license for some time. The rule's goal is to encourage rental property owners to select their renters and be engaged, responsible landlords carefully.

Mayor Vaz also spoke of the renaissance that is beginning to take place throughout the Borough. Many of the 3–4-unit apartment buildings are being torn down and replaced with single-family homes. The housing prices are on the rise, with developers and homeowners finding the Borough a much more desirable place for investment.

Moreover, redevelopment along the boulevard is also taking place after being long-delayed from Super Storm Sandy. As early as this fall, the transformation of the boulevard into a walkable town center is expected to take shape. Plans to redevelop some of the more extensive facilities, such as old nightclubs, into mixed-use development are also in the works. In addition, there is a trend to build commercial businesses on the first floor, parking on the second, and residential condominiums on the third and fourth levels.

Mayor Vaz said his administration is working hard to draw in tourists and investors by publicizing all that Seaside has to offer in local newspapers and reaching outside the state to advertise the community's desirability. Planned events that draw families have also been successful in boosting tourism, including concerts, shows on the Boardwalk, kite races, and camping on the beach.

Burlington County

Burlington County Launches Small Business Connect Program

With the coronavirus pandemic closing, almost a third of New Jersey's small businesses, the Burlington County Board of Commissioners and the Burlington County Bridge Commission's Department of Economic Development, and the Burlington County Regional Chamber of Commerce have started a new initiative called Burlington County Business Connect.

The program offers business owners "information about government regulations, permitting, assistance programs, promotions, and other key business issues." The program is available to both current and prospective small business owners. The next webinar (free) is scheduled for July 6 at 5:30 pm; register here: <https://bit.ly/339zkEd>

Burlington County Continues Work to Expand Trails Throughout the County

Burlington County continues efforts to develop additional miles of pedestrian and bicycling trails with the recent construction of a new route linking Amico Island Park in Delran to Pennington Park in Delanco. The new path is one of several new trail projects in the works or near completion in Burlington County, which already has more than 1,000 acres of developed parkland and 50-plus miles of interconnecting hiking, biking, and running trails.

The Amico Island to Pennington Park Trail, funded entirely with a federal transportation grant, includes a new trailhead at the entrance of Amico Island, along with a four-mile handicap-accessible path that will wind through neighborhoods and park properties in Delran, Riverside, and Delanco, including beneath the River Line light rail bridge and along the banks of the Rancocas Creek behind Newtown's Landing and through portions of Pennington Park. In addition to the trail, the County is making improvements at both Pennington and Amico, including bike racks, bicycle repair stations, kiosks, and additional parking and picnic tables.

In addition, to the Amico Island to Pennington Park trail, construction is near complete on a 5.5-mile segment of the regional Delaware River Heritage Trail through Florence and Bordentown, including a new at-grade crossing of the River Line tracks Roebing Station. The segment is anticipated to open to the public soon. It is a crucial portion of the planned 60-mile loop along both sides of the river from Trenton to Palmyra and Morrisville to Philadelphia's Tacony neighborhood in Pennsylvania.

Construction has also started on Arney's Mount Trail, a 2.2-mile path up and around Arney's Mount in Springfield, the highest point in Burlington County at 240-feet above sea level. All three trail projects are expected to connect to the County's existing regional network eventually and become part of the Circuit Trails, a planned system of over 800 miles through Burlington, Camden, Gloucester, and Mercer counties as Philadelphia and four suburban counties in Pennsylvania.

New Affordable Housing Complex—Centerton Village— Opens in Mount Laurel

Representatives from Volunteers of America (VoA) and elected officials from Burlington County and Mount Laurel recently cut the ribbon on a new affordable housing complex on Centerton Road. The new two-building complex—Centeron Village—is backed by VoA and comprises 103 apartments, including 12 set aside for homeless veterans.

Both buildings at Centerton Village are filled with one and two-bedroom units of about 750 and 850 square feet, respectively. Each building also has a community room downstairs where tenants can hang out or host gatherings. Applications are open to those making about \$50,000 a year or less. For information about availability or other questions, call 856-854-4660.

Mount Laurel Officials make changes to Ordinance 2021-8, CO Process, based on feedback from the NEXUS REALTOR® community.

Before implementing Ordinance 2021-8 as of July 31, Mount Laurel officials shared the draft copy of the CO inspection listing with NEXUS for feedback and comments. The shared concern from the REALTOR® community is that Mount Laurel's proposed inspection list expands scope beyond ensuring the health and safety of properties and delves into the actual sale transaction/negotiation process. For example, several items on the list that will be considered for inspection do not directly involve health, safety, or structural issues. The following is an overview of the general concerns and reds the changes and responses made by Mount Laurel Council.

- Inspector Qualifications: Are Mount Laurel inspectors qualified to determine certain items on the list - even licensed home inspectors refer to specifically licensed professionals like plumbers and electricians on more complex systems. The checklist leaves a lot of interpretation open for the inspector to make. **Inspector is fully qualified to do inspections.**
- Bathroom vent requirement: A vent fan is required if there is no operable window. The objection is that this is not a safety, structural or health hazard. **REMOVED FROM LIST**
- Windows: The requirement that windows need screens and seals intact is excessive. The Township should not be making decisions on this as they are not licensed windows contractors. **REMOVED FROM LIST**
- General: The general clause at the end of the inspection list is arbitrary and unacceptable, as it leaves everything open to review. **Stays per our attorney.**
- Exterior Tripping Hazard: What constitutes a tripping hazard. This is too vague and open for interpretation based on the inspector. **Per our attorney, this stays, and the inspector will use common sense if the tripping hazard is a safety issue. The state of NJ does not set a height for a tripping hazard.**
- Does Mount Laurel keep accurate permits as homeowners can be in their homes for 25-30 years? **Yes.**

While NEXUS is appreciative that our collective voice was heard and consideration and changes were implemented, the association invites the REALTOR® community that conducts business in Mount Laurel to continue to provide feedback once the ordinance is in place as of July 31, 2021.

Camden County

Demolition of Abandoned Homes in Camden City Gets Underway

Camden City recently began the first phase of a demolition project that will ultimately raze 300 abandoned homes that negatively impact neighborhoods throughout the City and pose public safety hazards. The properties will be redeveloped or left as open space.

The City is working with the Camden County Improvement Authority on the project with support from a \$15 million grant from the state.

City of Camden Planning Board Approves Plans for New Renaissance High School

Camden Prep, one of the three renaissance operators in the City, received approval from the City's planning board to build a new three-story high school on a long-abandoned property on the border of Whitman Park and Parkside neighborhoods. Uncommon Schools is the non-profit that operates the four Camden Prep public schools in the City, including two elementary schools, one middle school in South Camden, and the high school. Camden Prep has about 1,000 students and expects to grow to 2,000 as it scales up over the next five years.

The new facility would include a 29,740 square foot three-story building and a turf athletic field, a parking lot, and plenty of manicured landscaping. The high school opened this year with 65 first-year students being taught out of a temporary space on Copewood Street. They will move into the new building once finished.

Camden Awarded Federal Grant to Develop New Energy-Efficient Housing

Camden City was recently awarded a \$35 million grant to update Ablett Village, a nearly 80-year-old apartment complex. The money will be used to replace it with 350 new, energy-efficient units, including almost two dozen apartments set aside for low-income residents.

Camden County Gets \$1M Grant for LINK Trail Bridge.

The New Jersey Department of Transportation and Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission has awarded a \$1 million grant to Camden County to help pay for a pedestrian-bicycle bridge over Cooper River in Camden City. This bridge connects two significant sections of the proposed Camden County LINK Trail, diverting pedestrians and bicyclists from traveling alongside Admiral Wilson Boulevard.

The bridge is part of the infrastructure to connect those portions of the Camden County LINK Trail, a 33-mile multi-use, an off-road trail that "is expected to bring economic and public health benefits to towns throughout our county," Commissioner Jeff Nash said in a prepared statement.

Once complete, the Camden County LINK Trail, as proposed, will be a 12-foot wide, 33-mile multi-use path that connects 17 urban, suburban, and rural communities from the Ben Franklin Bridge through Winslow Township. The project, expected to begin in Spring 2022, has a total estimated cost of \$50 million, with most of the funding expected to come from various federal and state programs. More information about the Camden County LINK Trail – including the latest proposed trail map, drone videos, a 2017 feasibility study, and materials used during various public meetings – is available www.camdencounty.com/service/parks/cross-county-trail

Ocean County

Harvey Cedars Preserve Open Space

Harvey Cedar officials recently announced that a 3.4-acre area off James Street is now preserved as open space. Much of the purchase of the wetlands is being covered by Green Acres funding and the Borough's open space tax. The public will now be able to use the area for recreational non-motorized water sports like kayaking and windsurfing.

Ortley Beach 'Streetscape' Project Gets Underway

Ortley Beach is planning an extensive streetscape project to improve the Route 35 north corridor. Funded by a state grant, the project is currently in its design phase and includes Colony Road to First Avenue. The improvements are aimed at helping to beautify the area while promoting economic growth and expand the business district as the community comes into its own after being significantly hit by Superstorm Sandy.

Enhancements will be made to improve lighting, pedestrian accessibility, and bike racks. In addition, newsstands and benches will line the streets. Visibly new gateway signage and landscaping will also be added. The project is set to be completed by the spring of 2022.

RWJ Barnabas Health Moving into Long-Vacant Retail Site in Toms River

RWJ Barnabas Health will be moving into about 9,000 square feet at the Bellcrest Plaza on Fischer Boulevard in Toms River. The healthcare provider will occupy a space that was a former bank and a portion of a food store that has been vacant for over a decade.

Seaside Heights Passes Ordinance Prohibiting Smoking on the Boardwalk smoke-free.

On June 2, the Seaside Heights Borough Council passed an ordinance prohibiting smoking on the Boardwalk entirely. Smoking was already not allowed on the Borough's beaches and the majority of its Boardwalk, except for a few designated areas. Now it is prohibited altogether. Ashtrays have been removed, and enforcement is currently taking place.

Upcoming NEXUS Legislative Committee ZOOM Meetings:

Wednesday, July 21, 2021: No Guest Speaker, discussion among members of NEXUS Legislative Committee

No August Meeting

Wednesday, September 15, 2021: Guest Speaker TBD