



PRESIDENT JOHN HIMMELBERG'S MESSAGE

The year just concluded was important and productive for the Bethany Beach Landowners Association, and our Board of Directors is committed to building on last year's successes. We will need your membership support and your participation in our communications program to continue to achieve the goals we try hard to pursue, based primarily on our understanding of your thoughts about the issues.

The number of Bethany member households, and the extent to which those households help us with both communications and opinion surveys are the association's chief strengths, and whatever we may say or do on your behalf has impact because of our numbers and perceived strength in those numbers. When we share our members' views with elected officials here, they know we are accurately representing our members. Become dues-paying members, fill out our mini-opinion surveys, and keep sharing your views and concerns with us.

Bethany citizens were saddened by the recent passing of Julia Jacobsen – a long time, active, and dedicated BBLA Board member whose years of productive service to our association and the Town will be sorely missed. From BBLA's earliest days, Julia helped define the kind of town Bethany Beach wanted to be and contributed her considerable intelligence and energy to achieving the reality of that vision. She fully embraced the notion of community common good and never failed to promote it.

Last year's mini-survey asked members to reflect on the founding principles of the association and tell us whether they were still relevant and worthy of pursuit. Members told us overwhelmingly to continue to identify policy issues affecting the common good, solicit members' views on those issues, and represent those views before Bethany's elected officials. We were actively involved in deliberations affecting costly improvements to the Town's vital water supply, including strong support for citizen approval of the funds required for the upgrades. We are convinced that BBLA's continuing input into the overall effort that led to the highly successful water supply outcome is something to be quite proud of.

BBLA was deeply engaged last year in deliberations with town government over activities related to the Christian Church-Neff property on the west side of Route One in the center of Bethany. An item on page 4 of this newsletter and our mini-survey on page 5 are devoted to this item. BBLA's Board members appreciate the personal time and attention that Bethany's Town Manager, Cliff Gravier, gave us with respect to a variety of issues of concern to our members. We look forward to direct dialogue with Cliff and with members of the Town Council in 2013. Concerns related to taxation, budget, public services, Bethany's physical appearance, planning, and other issues are always on BBLA's agenda.

More detailed reports on several of these matters follow, as does our membership application and the mini-survey. BBLA continues to revamp our website and invites you to visit www.bbla.us. The new system enables us to post announcements, images, videos, links, and current information easily and quickly so you can keep tabs on local developments. Please visit the site often, add it to your bookmarks, and provide feedback on features or items you would like to see. Convenient email links to the BBLA President directly or to info@bbla.us are included.

PLEASE RENEW YOUR MEMBERSHIP, PARTICIPATE IN OUR SURVEY, AND HELP US REPRESENT YOU

GARFIELD PARKWAY SAFETY AND BEAUTIFICATION

Bethany Town Government has labored for years with consultants, with its citizens, and with the State Department of Transportation to produce a plan to enhance pedestrian, auto, and bicycle safety, and at the same time improve the aesthetics of Garfield Parkway. By early 2011 Town Council approved a design concept for the undertaking, with an emphasis on pedestrian/ bicycle safety and sidewalk enhancements . Much time and attention were given to balancing the need for parking spaces with the near-universal desire to make Garfield Parkway more inviting and pleasing to the eye. Since the street belongs to Delaware, the state transportation agency (DELDOT) was heavily involved in design and financing issues.

Utility poles are now gone, new and attractive lamp posts are installed, and contracts for street and sidewalk revitalization are about to be let. DELDOT intends that the construction work will be done in phases and completed by Memorial Day. BBLA's President, John Himmelberg, has asked Town Government to urge DELDOT to permit contractors to work on weekends and extended hours, if necessary to guarantee completion by Memorial Day. Design of the actual work schedule is such that continuous access to businesses on Garfield Parkway will be a very high priority for the contractors.

BREAKING NEWS

Real estate developer, Jack Burbage recently discussed with Town Council his proposal to build a "flagship" hotel on the oceanfront where the Bethany Arms motel complex now stands. The hotel site must accommodate at least 100 rooms. When speaking to the Council, Mr. Burbage stated that he would do the project only if Bethany Beach wanted it. He also linked the proposal to his belief in a "vital, strong downtown." BBLA will be paying close attention to developments and informing its members as promptly and completely as possible. As is always the case, any positions the BBLA board decides to take will be rooted in the views of our members. Check out the entire M. Patricia Titus story at http://www.coastalpoint.com/content/flagship_hotel_proposed_downtown_bethany

CORPS OF ENGINEERS FLOODING STUDY

Bethany's Town Manager, Cliff Graviat, briefed BBLA's Board of Directors this past December on the status of a feasibility study of possible solutions to tidal flooding problems in Bethany Beach. The study is being conducted by the Philadelphia office of the Army Corps of Engineers with the able assistance of Bethany staff and the Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control. Flooding problems associated with Hurricane Sandy and the Nor'easter associated with that storm are being added to the study, and delays are being experienced by both the Corps of Engineers and the state agency.

BBLA will be requesting additional information on the status of the study and an estimate of when there may be a detailed presentation to the interested public about interim findings and conclusions stemming from the work to date. BBLA understands that the focus of attention related to sources of tidal flooding in the Northern sections of Bethany continues to be on Indian River high tides entering via the Loop Canal from Assawoman Canal and from northern routes via Fresh Ponds State Park and a large cove just south of Indian River Inlet.

CITIZEN PARTICIPATION AND MONITORING OF THE TOWN'S BUDGET PROCESS

BBLA has long advocated for meaningful citizen input and monitoring in public policy decisions.

Per the Town charter, the town manager, with input from his staff, has responsibility to prepare the Town's operating and capital budgets for approval by the elected town council, normally at the March Council meeting. There is a full time finance director who monitors revenues and expenditures and performs needed analysis including multiple scenarios for future planning.

Assisting in preparing the budget is a Budget Committee of citizens who review the manager's proposed budget, request analysis from the finance director, and make recommendations to the manager and Council. The Committee also monitors adherence to budget in public meetings each quarter.

Monitoring the integrity of town finances is done by an audit committee of three citizens, none of whom are council members. A paid part time internal auditor reports directly to the Audit Committee at public committee meetings. Each year an audit of town finances is made by an outside accounting firm that specializes in audits of government finances. Their written report is made to the Audit committee, before being made to the Town Council. These independent audit reports consistently give the town a clean bill of health and are posted on the town website for the past 8 years*. These efforts are unusual for a small town.

They have contributed to no defugalities , balanced budgets, maintenance and improvement of infrastructure, capital and operating reserve funds to smooth over variations in revenue and capital expenditures, as well as high quality, cost effective services.

The town has a general fund and two business type activity funds for Sanitation and Water. Fees and rates for the business type funds are set so they support all operating costs and capital costs in Sanitation (primarily trash pickup) and Water. All other expenses, such as police, public works, building inspector, beach patrol, parking enforcement, etc. are in the general fund.

BETHANY WATER TOWER PROGRESS (prepared by Patrick McGuire)

Bethany is making steady progress on the approved plan to build the new water tower on the existing Water Department property on Collins Ave. Since the approval by Town voters last September of \$2.6 million, progress has been made on all elements of the project. Early on, BBLA saw the need to help Town Government win citizen support for preserving our first-rate water supply system and was pleased to be able to participate with the Town in generating overwhelming citizen approval for plans and funding.

A bond has been created and documents executed to permit the Town to draw down up to \$2.6 million at a very attractive interest rate of 2.13%. The bond must be repaid or amortized over a period of not more than 20 years. Total project costs (TPC) will not be known until final engineering plans are put out to bid, but it is expected that TPC will be significantly less than the \$3.7 million available from the bond and Water Department capital reserves. At this point, it is not anticipated that water rates will rise, and barring unforeseen additional capital water projects, the bond will be retired in approximately 13 years.

Bethany's Town Manager has been meeting since November with a committee of citizens who live adjacent to the property and have agreed that only one tree, a dying cypress, will have to be removed. The committee requested a redesign and relocation of the mineral retention pond as well as a redesign of the aerator and its enclosure. The engineering firm is working on both suggestions, and the citizens committee will review and comment on the recommendations. Remaining on the committee's agenda and still being addressed are fencing and planting proposals. The project is expected to be completed by the start of the 2014 summer rental season.

A NEW EDITION OF BETHANY BEACH – A WALK THROUGH HISTORY

In the works, thanks to a generous donation of funds to BBLA by the daughters (Susan, Ann, Nancy, and Wendy) of Val and Sally Montanari, is a new edition of the booklet first published by the Bethany Beach Landowners Association in 1976. The first edition commemorated the 75th Anniversary of the founding of Bethany Beach on July 12, 1901. Val Montanari edited the initial publication, and unselfishly served the Landowners Association for many years in a variety of capacities, including enlarging and deepening our appreciation of Bethany's history.

Bethany Council member and BBLA Board member, Margaret Young, and Dan Costello will be spearheading the project and they look forward to hearing any ideas and suggestions interested citizens have in the coming months. The publication's pamphlet format may give way to a small booklet design – to provide additional space for photographs, but the Bethany Beach map and its Key to interesting locations will still be its major feature.

BETHANY BEACH FARMERS MARKET

The 2012 farmers market season ended successfully on the Sunday before Labor Day. The season was characterized by good weather each Sunday, crowds of enthusiastic shoppers, and an early and sustained abundance of fruits and vegetables – locally grown and freshly picked. Market vendors reported gross sales nearly 15% higher than 2011 sales. Everyone associated with the market wishes to thank Bethany Beach Town Government and PNC Bank for enthusiastic support, without which the market would not have even taken place, much less prospered. On some Sundays, residents represented a majority of shoppers, and on others our visitors/vacationers were in the majority. Local real estate/rental agencies were instrumental in making sure visitors knew all about the farmers market.

If you are interested in helping to promote the farmers market, be sure to e-mail Dan Costello at Dancostello2@verizon.net for one of our attractive refrigerator magnets. If all works according to plan, the market will be open for 11 Sundays in 2013, beginning on June 23rd and ending on September 1st the Sunday before Labor Day. We will also be looking for an early Sunday morning volunteer to help manage the vendor set-ups. Gene Jordin, a critical member of the set-up and take-down crew wants to be relieved of his duties. Let Dan know if you are interested in more information about the actual tasks.

CHRISTIAN CHURCH-NEFF PROPERTY

When Joan Neff sold her portion of the parcel to Bethany in 2004, she intended the sale to be to the citizens of Bethany and hoped that property owners would have a say in how the property was to be used. Bethany's Council discussed uses for the parcel in 2005 and 2006, agreed that it ought to be a community park, expressed individual preferences for and against a long list of potential uses and features, but went no further with park development. Council held a public hearing at the time, and for approximately 35 minutes Council listened to the views of 18 property owners who expressed a variety of ideas about the kind of park they would like to see.

In 2008 Council approved funds for preliminary planning for a park based on features Council had agreed to in 2005, but no work was authorized for nearly 4 years, except for important maintenance tasks. The Town Manager, increasingly concerned with the deteriorated appearance of portions of the property, gained permission in the spring of 2012 for cleaning and clearing work to improve its appearance.

Town staff undertook steps it believed would greatly improve the appearance of the parcel, e.g. substantial tree removal, top soil spreading for grass growing, extensive clearance of underbrush, and some filling of lower spots, but without seriously reducing specific use options for the park. The work set off waves of citizen questions and concerns, – few of which appeared to be anticipated by either Council or staff. Phone calls, letters to the papers' editors, angry comments on the boardwalk, street, and at the post office demonstrated that large numbers of property owners had little idea of the meaning or purpose of the actions being taken at the parcel.

The pot continued to boil through the summer, and growing numbers of letters-to-the-editor of the weekly papers demonstrated that concerns were not limited to the Town's regular complainers and trouble makers. BBLA members were urging the association to involve itself more intensely in the Church-Neff controversy, and board members met with the Town Manager for extensive and productive conversations that clarified our understanding of what was happening on the parcel and the rationale for those actions. BBLA greatly appreciates the time and attention we received from Cliff Gravier and Bret Warner and their interest in hearing what we had to say.

Bethany held a well-attended public hearing on September 22nd, and took a great deal of testimony regarding both park development and the pressing need for much more extensive public involvement in how the park will evolve. A number of BBLA board members offered their thoughts about the parcel as interested residents and property owners. Substantial time was devoted to the issue of fully capturing the views and expertise of Bethany's citizens as park development moved forward.

Speakers referred to the comments of Joan Neff, former owner of part of the park property, who had said that she sold it to the town's citizens, not just its council, when they urged the Council to develop a much more extensive public participation process. A former Town Councilman, Don Doyle, had testified earlier warning the council not to rely too heavily on citizen involvement, opining that "... citizens, as well-meaning as we all are, have biases from our past." He expressed the view that a citizens committee might not have too much input and that the Town might not get much benefit from it.

Town Council held a workshop on October 15th and among the matters discussed was a detailed Path Forward for the Church/Neff Park, developed and presented by the Town Manager. Among items in the proposal were: a comprehensive, objective, and professionally developed public survey sent to all Bethany property owners, a public meeting to review the responses and findings, careful selection of a landscape architect to develop multiple concepts for the park's features and elements based on survey results, a mailing of concepts to citizens in a town newsletter, soliciting their comments, and a continuous review of concepts in public forums until the Council is ready to select a park concept by a majority vote.

Council members were favorably impressed with the Town Manager's path forward and are expected to give it formal approval soon. The principle of serious public involvement from beginning to end of the process is firmly embedded in the plan, and BBLA's board and members look forward to positive and constructive participation.

OUR 2013 MEMBERS MINI-SURVEY

These questions are not intended to substitute for Bethany’s upcoming professionally prepared survey regarding the Church-Neff property. Your responses will help BBLA’s board to continue to represent you as accurately as possible in our contacts with town government. If you can, please respond as a household. If opinions differ among you, please try to indicate.

Do you agree that a community park is the best use for this property?

Yes No Not sure

Are you okay with the information that town government has provided so far about features and uses of the proposed park?

Yes No Not sure

Parts of the property are low-lying and frequently quite wet. Would you prefer that the town:

- fill in the wet areas
- create a sizeable pond or fountain
- develop a rain garden or wet meadow with native plants and vegetation

Will you participate in the town’s public involvement process to help select design and features to be included in the park?

Yes No Not sure

Listed below are some features and uses Town Council found acceptable or unacceptable in 2005. Please agree, disagree, or have no opinion on the Council’s 2005 choices for park features.

THESE WERE ACCEPTABLE IN 2005:

- Walking paths. agree disagree no opinion
- Gardens and benches. agree disagree no opinion
- Fountains. agree disagree no opinion
- Open pavilion. agree disagree no opinion
- Model on John West Park (Ocean View) agree disagree no opinion
- Small playground area agree disagree no opinion

THESE WERE UNACCEPTABLE IN 2005:

- Basketball courts agree disagree no opinion
- Soccer/softball fields agree disagree no opinion
- Tennis courts agree disagree no opinion
- Skateboard park agree disagree no opinion
- Large parking lot or garage agree disagree no opinion
- Enclosed building(s) with HVAC agree disagree no opinion

Yes, I want to be a member and support BBLA

Sign me up as a dues-paying member of the Bethany Beach Landowners Association
My name and mailing address are on the reverse side of this coupon.

Telephone: _____

My Bethany Beach Street Address is: _____

I prefer to receive the BBLA newsletter by: U.S. Mail E-Mail Both

E-Mail Address _____ (PLEASE PRINT LEGIBLY)

Enclosed is our \$15 for 2013 Dues I’m enclosing a contribution to Help with BBLA expenses

I would like to be considered for membership on the BBLA Board of Directors or otherwise become a more active member. Please contact me.

Concerns and/or comments:

Town accepts greater responsibility for Fourth of July Parade.

For many years, The Fourth of July Parade Committee has organized the parade and the Town has provided support from the Public Works and Police Departments. The Committees funding has come from T shirt sales, the 5 k run, and from donations solicited by the Committee. These solicited donations came from businesses, citizens and groups, including BBLA. The Town's support may increase with an item in the Draft budget item of \$30,000 for the parade such that the committee may focus on the parade and not on soliciting funds. BBLA Board members have spoken with Mr. Phil Rossi, long time chair of the parade Committee and the transition appears seamless. The Committee will become one of the committees appointed by the Mayor and approved by Council, with the same Chair, Mr. Rossi. BBLA Board supports this change as a way to help ensure the long term continuity of this part of Bethany's character.

Join BBLA and Help Us
Help Our Town
Membership Renewal for 2013
Survey on Church/Neff