

Support seen for open space plan

Written by Alex Davis Sunday, October 14, 2012 12:00 am



MIDDLE TOWNSHIP – Cape May County Parks Director Mike Laffey says Middle Township’s plan to preserve open space and expand recreational opportunities would benefit the whole county.

More people would spend money in Cape May County and also see natural resources, he said. It would be a shot in the arm, especially during the off-season, Laffey said.

“If you promote it, they will come,” he said.

Laffey has been county parks director for about five years and has been included in putting together an open space and recreation plan for the township.

He said he likes the fact that many entities are involved in the project, including the Wetlands Institute along Stone Harbor Boulevard in Middle Township.

“And we all have a good product,” Laffey said.

Together, however, the entities “can do more,” he said.

The plan project team consists of representatives of the township’s Environmental Commission and Recreation Advisory Committee, with input from federal, state, county and non-profit land-conservation and environmental groups.

On Sept. 27, they toured eight sites looking for ways to improve public information and access. More than a dozen people visited Lizard Tail Swamp and Beaver Swamp Wildlife Management Area on Dennisville-Court House Road; Reeds Beach and Bidwell Jetty; Cooks Beach; Songbird Trail at the Cape May National Wildlife Refuge on Kimbles Beach Road; Norburys Landing and Cape May County Park South in Del

Haven; and Robert "Ockie" Wisting Recreation Complex site, formerly Fort Apache Campground.

"Some of Middle Township's greatest resources are its open space and recreational amenities," Mayor Dan Lockwood said in a press release. "This project is the next step in analyzing ways for us to improve and preserve these areas for our community and our children. I am excited to be part of such a proactive approach to managing and developing Middle Township."

The group indicated that some areas in Middle Township are being underutilized, but that could be reversed through improving public information and expanding accessibility, according to a press release.

The group also discussed improving signs that lead to the sites; connecting trails to recreational facilities; removing debris; increasing educational opportunities through interpretive signs; and expanding recreational opportunities by having a launch area or constructing observation platforms.

Wayfinding signs planned throughout Cape May County will help brand communities as one destination, according to a press release. The signs would lead people from one destination to another.

The open space and recreation plan project team will release a questionnaire to solicit comments on open space and recreation in Middle Township. A public meeting is expected to take place in January where questionnaire results will be discussed and goals will be set.

Earlier this year, the Association of New Jersey Environmental Commissions awarded Middle Township an \$8,000 grant to develop an open space and recreation plan.

"I just think they're progressive," Laffey said of the township tackling the open space and recreation plan.

Middle Township Environmental Commission chairman Steve Atzert could not be reached for comment Tuesday