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New technology aims to streamline construction shared services

By Eric Colvin

Following the approval of shared construction services between Point Pleasant Borough and Point Pleasant Beach, council authorized the purchase of computer software services to help make the combined department more efficient.

"[The software] will streamline efficiency and provide customers with 24-hour access," said Council President Susan Rogers. The councilwoman, who was an ardent supporter of the joint construction department, and is also a member of the joint committee that initiated shared construction services, facilitated incorporation of the software.

Council members voted 5-1 to approve the measure.

Councilmen Mitch Remig, Christopher Leitner and William Dikun, along with Councilwomen Rogers and Toni DePaola, voted for the measure.

Councilman Jack McHugh, who voted against consolidating construction departments when the measure was decided in August, cast the only vote against the authorization.

The councilman said he did not support this particular consolidation plan and as a result, would not support a measure related to the consolidation.

The shared service committee consisted of councilwomen Rogers and DePaola, Mayor Martin Konkus and Point Beach councilmen Jeff Dyer, Sean Hennessy and Frank Rizzo.

Committee members began to consider consolidation as an option in early 2009. Committee members said, after review, shared construction services emerged as the most viable option to cut costs and prepare for the 2011 statewide, 2-percent budget cap.

The agreement to consolidate construction departments was

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Point Pleasant Borough**

forged on Aug. 17, when the borough councils of the two towns independently approved the measure at separate meetings.

Councilman Leitner, who has remained skeptical about the efficiency of a shared department, was among the council members who voted in favor of the authorization.

"Even if the consolidation was not done right to begin with," Councilman Leitner said, "things should be done right moving forward."

"We all want [the consolidation] to work, and I want the program and the department to have the tools they need to succeed," the councilman said.

The shared construction department will now operate with Mitchell Humphrey online technology.

Mitchell Humphrey is a St. Louis-based company that provides application software and services to various companies and municipalities.

According to the website, www.mitchellhumphrey.com, the company assists 200 clients across the country.

Nancy Brady, account executive for the company, said Mitchell Humphrey services 190 municipalities in New Jersey.

Point Pleasant Beach currently uses the company for Uniform Commercial Code [UCC] process-

ing and housing applications that go directly to DCA. The new software will also provide non-UCC licensing and permits for both Point Beach and Point Pleasant.

"The current system in the borough is flawed," Councilwoman Rogers said. The councilwoman said the new software will allow for traceability, plan review, full review and overall accountability, which was lacking in the department.

The borough currently uses what Councilwoman Rogers referred to as an "antiquated system," known as UCCARS.

UCCARS stands for Uniform Construction Code Administrative Record System. The program allows the department to design and use forms that will conform to monthly reporting requirements.

Ms. Brady said the shared department will be one of only two municipalities in the state to use a program called FastTrackGov. FastTrackGov is a Mitchell Humphrey program that provides online access to customers and administrators.

She said all information currently in the UCCARS format can be converted and made compatible to the Mitchell Humphrey system.

Councilwoman Rogers said residents and customers will be able to apply and see the progress of applications online. Residents and customers will also be able to ask questions, check balances, pay bills and print receipts through the system.

"Once the customer sets up an account," said Ms. Brady, "they can go online to apply and pay their bill."

Construction department employees will be able to electronically communicate with all applicants, schedule tasks to be performed and maintain internal controls.

Council members will also have access to the system, which will

allow them to analyze operational results, increase revenue potential by making renewals automatic, as well as compute fees and payments.

"Customer service will be improved," Councilwoman Rogers said. She said all customers will have 24-hour access to their accounts with the department. They will be able to view the process step-by-step, ask questions and quickly see what is needed concerning any application or existing permits and licenses.

"This is the right thing to do," Councilwoman Rogers said. "Everything will work in a unified flow."

She said Mitchell Humphrey's online solution is also a way to increase efficiency with a consolidated workforce.

This week, construction department employees and borough representatives participated in a Web-based seminar to experience the new technology first hand on Wednesday.

Another aspect of the program, Councilwoman Rogers said, is that money spent on IT consultants will be reduced. The Mitchell Humphrey suite is complete with support, should assistance be needed.

The system will also have the ability to track each borough independently, which will make keeping revenue streams separate more easily accomplished.

"This is fantastic and very exciting," Councilwoman Rogers said.

She said the software, user components, and web solution will cost approximately \$15,000.

The councilwoman said both boroughs currently pay monthly maintenance fees. Those fees will be consolidated and cover the monthly expenses charged.

"They are also giving us three months free to test pilot the program," she said.