

September 22, 2017

To: Scott Morgan, Upper Township Administrator

From: Herb Hollinger, President; Citizens for Strathmere & Whale Beach

cc: Citizens for Strathmere & Whale Beach and Strathmere Improvement

Association

Re: Follow-up to September 16 Strathmere town meeting

Dear Mr. Morgan,

Thank you for attending our annual town meeting on September 16, and for sharing your personal resume and listening carefully to the concerns of your Strathmere neighbors. I’m writing to offer a recap of the meeting, and to ask for a follow-up conversation to see what actions might be taken in response to those concerns.

Let me go through the numerous items that we talked about and what actions we are expecting below:

*1.* First and foremost, I think you heard the people’s outrage that our community was blindsided by FEMA’s designation of more than 80 Strathmere properties as being in a *Coastal A* zone. It is clear that Upper Township knew of this profound change to these properties – some of the most valuable in and for the Township – and either swept the news under the rug or simply didn’t comprehend its meaning and potential effect. Or both. Either way, to so many Strathmere property owners, it’s an example of Upper Township’s failure to communicate with, and advocate on behalf of this community when we need it most.

*What steps is Upper Township planning to take to collaborate with neighboring coastal communities that were out in front of this calamity, and that were successful in pushing back against the* Coastal A *designation? What steps are you taking to coordinate with Cape May County and Upper Township’s state and federal representatives to mitigate the effects of this* Coastal A *designation? What steps are you taking to*

*make certain that such a failure to communicate with the citizenry cannot happen again?*

1. We discussed the potential for Upper Township to help our community survey the bayside of Strathmere to determine whether the two conditions that determine a *Coastal A* zone are actually in existence here. Our coastal engineer (Doug Gaffney, who has collaborated with us in the past, most recently in the bulkhead height ordinance of a couple years ago) is poised to work on this. With the appropriate scientific data in hand, an effective appeal to FEMA can still be mounted. *Will Upper Township hire the appropriate expertise to gather the data necessary to understand whether our* Coastal A *zone is actually warranted?*
2. Some of our residents have reported potential flood insurance premiums of tens of thousands of dollars due to the new *Coastal A* zone designation. *Has Upper Township done any fact-finding about this issue? Note: this* Coastal A *designation affects many other properties in the township – bayfront and riverfront. Township’s failure to address the issue is much more than just a Strathmere problem.*
3. We discussed the rag-tag nature of our bayfront bulkheads, and you agreed that it didn’t make much sense. Why is it that our beach dunes are the same height up and down the coast, yet we allow our bayside bulkheads to be of inconsistent height, or in fact not exist at all? *You promised to look into the potential for grants for building new and/or increasing the height of existing bulkheads. Please let us know the status of your research. The security of the entire community is endangered by the few bayfront properties that lack sufficient bulkhead protection.*
4. You told us that the need for speed humps along several streets in Strathmere will be evaluated. Williams and Neptune Avenues, especially, were discussed as streets that experience high-speed drivers. In August *2016* Mayor Palombo promised that our township engineer would review the possibility of speed bumps – even temporary ones – and let us know the result. (Clearly that never happened.) *Please let us know the status of this evaluation process and when we will know one way or another. As you know, residents are putting out their own speed humps in fear of their families’ safety.*
5. Parking and public-safety go hand-in-hand. You heard plenty about the inability of emergency vehicles to pass through many of our side streets during the summer, when both sides fill with parked cars from beach day-trippers. Prescott Avenue is especially affected, and you heard testimony that first responders cannot get to the Bayview Avenue boat ramp for water recues. *Please tell us when Township*

*Committee will finally address this issue and limit parking to one side of our narrowest streets.*

1. You heard the concern that the trailers in town lack anchorage. In the event of a flood they will become floating projectiles. *Please let us know if the Township will consider mandating an anchoring system for the trailers.*
2. All parties can agree that the Bayview Avenue boat ramp reconstruction has been a disaster, from inexperienced planning and inept design to incompetent construction and the use of inappropriate marine materials. You told us that this matter is being addressed and resolved with a patchwork response. It may or may not improve upon the original, faulty design. *Please let us know how Upper Township will correct and learn from its mistakes in this matter.*

Unresolved from 2016

We shared with you three letters from last year’s Strathmere town meeting. The first was our follow-up from the meeting reminding the Mayor and Committeeman Young about the actions they promised, with a request for the status of those next steps. The second letter was the response from Upper Township about those items. The third was a reminder to the mayor and committee about promises that had not been kept or simply ignored. As a reminder to you, the unresolved issues from last year are listed below. We trust that you will follow up on these issues.

1. In July 2016 we were promised Upper Township homeowners would receive a letter from Paul Dietrich “within 30 days” with details about a FEMA grant program created to help *secondary* homeowners mitigate storm damage from Sandy and Jonas. In the mayor’s letter of August 23 we were told that approximately 30 properties in Upper Township might be eligible for these grants, and that he expected a letter from Mr. Dietrich to be sent “prior to Labor Day.” Two Labor Days have come and gone since that promise and no such letter has arrived. *Can you give us any details about this program and how Upper Township plans to assist its property owners with this matter?*
2. Letters to Upper Township Committee from the Strathmere Improvement Association, Citizens for Strathmere & Whale Beach, the Fire Commission and the Strathmere Volunteer Fire Company have asked Upper Township to advocate on behalf of Strathmere, and ask Cape May County to consider one-sided parking along the dangerous Whale Beach stretch of Commonwealth Avenue. This is

the scene of many summertime medical emergencies. To date Upper Township has simply ignored entreaties of the above named civic organizations. All we ask is that Upper Township being a public dialogue with county representatives about this important safety issue. *Please let us know how members of Upper Township Committee will address this issue before next year’s dangerous summer season.*

1. Last year Mayor Palombo promised to consider a conversation with those residents who live near the Williams Avenue lifeguard station to hear and understand their concerns about the negative quality-of-life issues that spring from the station. *Please let us know if* you *will take on that discussion before next Memorial Day.*
2. Last year we were (twice) promised that the mayor would convene a special committee to consider the eventual feasibility of beach fees in Strathmere and Whale Beach. We talked about a study that could have taken place this past summer to gather the data required to have an intelligent discussion on this subject. While our organization takes no side one way or another on this issue, we are always in favor of basing decisions on accurate and appropriate data. We continue to stand ready to participate in that data collection and subsequent discussion. After proposing a township committee with Strathmere representation to study the possibilities and ramifications of beach fees, the mayor has been silent. In light of recent press articles about the abundance of such revenue generated by neighboring beach communities, this issue is back in vogue. *Please let us know how Upper Township plans to determine whether beach fees might make sense in the future. Also, please let us know how, if at all, Upper Township has reached out to neighboring beach communities to inquire about their experience with generating beach-fee revenue.*
3. The Township regulated jitney service between Sea Isle City and Strathmere this past summer. Three official stops were designated – Mildred’s, La Fontana and the Deauville Inn. Jitneys prohibited from side streets and Bayview Drive. However, in 2017 jitneys continued to stop wherever passengers flagged them down. *While we recognize and value the safety advantages of the jitney service, the lack of adherence to the rules by the jitney drivers endangers the quality of life and safety of pedestrians. What plans does Upper Township have to enforce its regulations during the next summer season?*

Finally, Mr. Morgan, I think you heard something loud and clear from the residents of Strathmere about the attitude of some of Upper Township’s governing officials. During the Township Committee Meeting of September 11, 2017, Strathmerians were again met with derision, dismissal

and condescension by members of Township Committee and by our Township Solicitor. You nodded your head in agreement as you listened to a few people talk about their experiences that night in Township Hall. This is a not new phenomenon.

You said that such attitudes and condescension have no place in our representative government. At the very least this fuels the perception that Upper Township continues to be uninterested and incompetent when it comes to marine-community matters. At worse, it adds to the list of misfeasance and nonfeasance that led to the 2007 de-annexation initiative which cost close to a million dollars in combined legal fees from both sides. No one wants to see that list grow again.

Last Saturday you witnessed the passion of the people based on the perception that their local government has little interest in their unique concerns, and less ability to address them. We hope that we can strike a cordial and productive working relationship with you and your relatively new office. We’re grateful that you and your wife made the trip to spend some of your valuable Saturday with us in Strathmere. We look forward to your continued engagement, and we are eager to collaborate.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Herb Hollinger

President, Citizens for Strathmere & Whale Beach

The Executive Board of Citizens for Strathmere & Whale Beach