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Press Release

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Mayor Takes the Lead on the City's Bulk Waste Removal; Orders Public Works to Request Funding to Remove Public Health Hazards

Middletown----Mayor Sebastian N. Giuliano directed the Public Works Department to submit a \$30,000 emergency funding request to the City Council for action at the Council's October 5th meeting. The additional funding will be used to remove piles of unsanitary bulk waste that have amassed throughout the City which pose serious public health hazards to residents and passers-by alike.

On July 1 the City Council approved language to replace the traditional free bulk waste pick up service model. However, almost immediately, after the new ordinance went into effect, complaints of illegal dumping were made to the Mayor's office, City Health Department and to the Public Works Department. The bulk waste piles, which include furniture, bedding, appliances and house fixtures, have accumulated in the last eight weeks as the City attempted to implement the new law. Health Department officials have already issued 64 legal orders to property owners to either immediately remove bulk waste or to have the items removed for a fee by the Public Works Department. The Health Department also reports that on average 15 to 20 calls per day regarding the unsafe and unsanitary bulk waste piles throughout the City.

“We were getting daily phone calls, e-mails and visits from property owners and impacted city residents. My office also received calls from school principals that have walking students. The principal in one case felt that his students were likely to see the piles as attractive nuisances, get stuck in or on the old appliances or even be confronted by small animals or rodents as they passed the piles. All of these factors really made me rethink our new ordinance,” said Giuliano.

The volume of calls prompted the Mayor to recently inspect the City with Deputy Mayor Joe Bibisi and City Health Officials in order to get an up close view of the reportedly increased illegal dumping. “I needed to know whether these reports of increased illegal dumping were true and exactly how bad the problem was. Seeing it all first hand gives me a better perspective and a better feel for the right solution,” said Giuliano.

Health Director Dr. Joe Havlicek said, “The volume of bulk waste that piled up all around the City is amazing. We wanted to move quickly to correct or adjust the ordinance to prevent any further health issues or hazards. Our health department staff has been working tirelessly to cover the City to ensure that the public health wasn’t compromised. I’m appreciative that the Mayor saw the issues, took our advice on the public health aspects of this and is moving quickly to lead us to the right solutions. That’s something I admire about him. He is open to our input and truly cares about the consequences on the City and its residents.”

Billy Russo, director of Public Works said, “Our phone has been ringing off the hook. I truly believe that reinstating the bulk waste pickup will help the City and get some unsafe areas cleaned up. I think the pay for service is a good idea in the long run but the Mayor is right to adjust the program to suit the City’s short and long run needs.”

Although Giuliano supports the appropriation request to reinstate the bulk waste pick up service, he did note that the vast majority of citizens were law abiding and were not the source of the illegal dumping. He said, “I have to commend the majority of our residents who abided by the law and either paid the new fee to have us remove their bulk waste or made their own arrangements to bring it to the transfer center. The problem we have is with a few bad absentee landlords who aren’t meeting their community health obligations or who are knowingly letting their renters dump bulk waste and then claiming they don’t know who did it.”

Giuliano added that those that paid the fee for pick up will not be penalized. “If they were entitled to a free pick-up in a three-year span, then that will remain intact for them,” said Giuliano.

The Mayor also noted: “It wasn’t simply an issue of the City no longer wanting to provide the service nor was it an attempt to create a new revenue stream. The problem is that the cost of providing the service increased and the service has not been equitably

provided. When we had an operating landfill, the disposal of these items cost us virtually nothing; now we have to pay to dispose of bulk waste by weight. Also, if everyone were being treated equally under the program then it might have been ok, but property owners in the sanitation district were entitled to what amounts to one pickup per week, while those outside of the district only got a pickup every three years. It was unfair to those living outside of the City sanitation district. These two factors are what prompted us to change the law.”

“Following our recent tour we have to be willing to see the actual situation and adjust accordingly. There is one law that always comes into play, and that is the Law of Unintended Consequences. While the intended consequence of the ordinance was that the bulky waste program would be more available, the unintended consequence is that more people are attempting to avoid compliance. When otherwise good people begin to disobey a law, only two explanations are possible: either the law is unclear in its intent and purpose, or it is not well-tailored to its intended purpose, or both. Nothing should be carved in stone; we should never be unwilling to reassess our actions,” said Giuliano.

The Mayor also said, “Joe Bibisi and I came away from the site tours with a renewed appreciation of the Health and Public Work’s Departments, the immense territory they have to cover and how difficult it is to catch illegal dumpers in the act,” said Giuliano. The appropriation request will be debated at the Council meeting on October 5th. “I urge impacted citizens to come and impress upon the Council the need to modify the new law to deal with some real impacts,” said Giuliano.