

City to offer shuttle to beach

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BY KENNYWALTER

A weekend jitney service that will shuttle beachgoers to the oceanfront may become a year-round fixture in Long Branch, city officials said last week.

During the March 13 City Council workshop meeting, Business Administrator Howard Woolley Jr. said that if the jitney is successful, the city would look to expand the service and would likely be able to solicit sponsorships, which would bring in additional revenues.



Summertime jitney would carry passengers from train station to beaches

“We only have it Memorial Day through Labor Day for three days a week,” Woolley said. “If we were doing it seven days a

week, they’d paint it whatever color we want and put on whatever you want it to say. “If it takes off and we got our own deal, we could put anything on there,” he added. “The idea is, hopefully, this will be so successful that some of our businesses will want to sponsor it.” Following the discussion, the council passed a resolution approving the agreement with the Meadowlands Transportation Brokerage Corp., which also operates under the name Meadowlink, to provide two jitneys for the summer. The Wood Ridge-based company received a federal grant to fund the transportation service, and the city would pay off part of the matching portion of the grant, which, according to the resolution, would cost the city no more than \$33,600. Meadowlink was incorporated as a public private partnership to improve access, reduce congestion and promote economic growth by working with business and government agencies to address commuting issues. Jacob Jones, director of the Long Branch Urban Enterprise Zone (UEZ), said the company does not want to put a lot of signage on the shuttles because they are also being used in other towns, including Neptune, Belmar, Asbury Park and Bradley Beach. “They have some reservations about what signs can go on the actual vehicle; they are very conservative about what signs could go on there,” he said.

The jitneys will operate on weekends and will charge a \$1 fare and will run from 9a.m. until 9 p.m., with an option to extend to 11 p.m. if ridership demands. Jones said the city is working with the county to apply for

a grant that would allow the city to provide year-round shuttle service.

Included in the resolution are two daytime route maps with stops along the beachfront and lower Broadway, and an evening route map that eliminates most of the beach stops and makes additional stops in the city's popular West End section.

Each route will begin at the Third Avenue train station, Woolley said a test run was conducted for the routes, and they were completed, with stops, in less than 30 minutes.

"We try to keep it to that because we want it to come by every 15 minutes to [encourage] people to take it," he said, adding that if the ride takes too long, people may skip the shuttle and walk to the beach from the train station.

Because this is the first time the city will be offering the shuttle service, Mayor Adam Schneider said he is concerned about the route and whether the city has the ability to change the stops if they are not being used.

James Aaron, city attorney, said that changes could be made, but it would be a time-consuming process.

"The problem is the process and the time it would take to establish this via an agreement," he said. "You are going to go back and try to amend the agreement you'd have to pass through with cooperation [from Meadowlink]."

He added that once the season concludes, and if the council decides to proceed with the service, then the routes will be evaluated.

According to the resolution, any amendment to the agreement would have to be agreed upon by all parties.

According to Woolley, the city may have an advantage over other towns that use the shuttle service because the city has agreement with NJ Transit that allows riders to purchase beach tickets on the train, and that option has taken off.

"We get a lot of people who buy a combo ticket from NJ Transit," he said. "These other towns don't have as many because you have to switch and get onto another train if you are going down to Belmar.

"The train wasn't as big a part of their system as it is for ours," he added. "One thing I'm pleased about is we met with NJ Transit and they are going to advertise it and put it on their website and have placards on the stations." Woolley also explained that the city would likely utilize the train station parking lot for the shuttle, but he expects to have conversations with Monmouth Medical Center and the Long Branch School District about using parking lots at the high school and middle school.