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Section: LIFE

Long Branch councilman wants city teens to get on beach for free

CAROL GORGA WILLIAMS

Asbury Park Press

By CAROL GORGA WILLIAMS

STAFF WRITER

A deal to approve the city's budget has resulted in the likelihood that teens — at least those under 18 — will get on city beaches for free this year.

Freshman City Councilman Brian A. **Unger** said that in exchange for his vote in favor of the city's budget — which requires the equivalent of a 7-cent increase in municipal taxes — he wanted the council to support his proposal to eliminate beach-badge fees for some teens.

After some wrangling, the council approved its \$41.8 million municipal budget unanimously while introducing a measure for **Unger's** beach-fee proposal.

But **Unger's** plan did not have unilateral support. Council members Mary Jane Celli and David G. Brown opposed it, saying it was too costly or could set a bad precedent.

The measure is scheduled for a public hearing 8 p.m. Tuesday, about two weeks after beaches open.

The new plan means everyone ages 17 and younger get on the beach for free. Previously, only younger children were allowed on the beach without paying.

Those age 18 to 61 will pay \$35 for seasonal passes and \$5 for daily admission. Those 62 and older already get on the beach for free, provided they have proof of their age as do the physically and mentally disabled. Military veterans who live in the city also have long been allowed free beach admission.

Unger said at a recent council meeting that the city earned \$61,000 on the sale of beach badges last year. He said his measure would not impact the tax increase because city employees had told him they could hold back the hiring of additional workers, which would make up the difference.

Brown said the city is struggling with its expenses and should not be in the process of turning down revenues.

"I don't believe, at this time, we should give anything away without due compensation," Brown said.

Celli also expressed concern about the cost of the proposal.

In the wake of an increasing burden on city taxpayers, **Unger** said, officials could make a gesture to give

something back. He said he had recently toured some public housing developments in the city and young people do not have the money to get on the beach.

"If it cost me an extra \$1 a year (in taxes), I can support it," **Unger** said.

Sale of seasonal beach passes are being conducted at the Long Branch Recreation Office, 3 Bay Ave., 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Mondays through Fridays, and on weekends. Badges also will be available at the beach office on North Bath Avenue and the boardwalk from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. beginning June 16.

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