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## Long Branch meeting taped for broadcast -- along with an argument

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Critics got what they have long sought -- the City Council meeting was professionally videotaped for broadcast on the city's cable channel -- and officials got what they have long predicted would happen if the meeting were ever broadcast: a performance.

During a public hearing about whether the city should bond \$1 million to pay for preliminary design and engineering work for a new oceanfront pier -- one that would include ferry service, educational, cultural and recreational uses -- frequent critic Vincent LePore came to the microphone.

(The Cable Commission had authorized the taping of the meeting in preparing for a special City Council meeting next week to consider renewal of the city's contract with Comcast. Council members are divided over whether the council meetings should be broadcast, balancing transparency issues with what they suspect will be partisan behavior from partisans.)

LePore asked a question or two of City Business Administrator Howard H. Woolley Jr. regarding a previous pier feasibility study undertaken by the city to determine whether it was used as a basis to seek the new bond.

Woolley replied the earlier feasibility study was "one of the" documents the city relied on. LePore then began another question, this time asking about the "economic" viability of this recreational pier."

"It is not a recreational pier," Mayor Adam Schneider quietly responded.

In a voice that began to rise, LePore pointed out the question was not addressed to Schneider and so the mayor should not answer it.

LePore then turned to Public Safety Director William A. Richards and said, "He is out of order and if he continues to be out of order, I would like him to be removed."

"Excuse me?" the head of the city's police department replied. Richards has on rare occasions removed a person causing a disturbance at a meeting, and has even occasionally spoken with LePore about his decorum but has never had to remove the mayor before.

LePore continued to question officials about the pier, noting the \$4.5 million it paid to the previous owner was a far cry from the \$89 million officials said the pier would be worth if developed today.

Woolley turned to Schneider who invited him to answer the question if he could make sense of it.

"It would be comparing apples to bull elephants," said Woolley, reminding listeners that when the city took the property, there was really no structure, and the city was paying to remove a few pilings and for the riparian rights.

"Basically ... there was no structure there," explained Woolley.

LePore then turned to Schneider and said the mayor was not permitted to answer LePore's questions

because LePore did not consider the mayor to have credibility.

"Mr. Schneider, you were out of order," LePore said. "I do not want you interrupting me again and I want that in the public record."

"You are now out of order," said Council President Michael DeStefano. "Does anyone else have any demands?"

A few minutes later, when the public comment section of the meeting was about to begin, DeStefano reminded speakers, as he typically does, of the ground rules: five minute limit per speaker, for example.

"You don't always get to choose who answers your question," said DeStefano. "The best person will answer your question." DeStefano added wistfully, "As always, it is my dream that we treat each other with respect."

LePore has taken issue with other members of council, most memorably calling Councilman David G. Brown an "Uncle Tom" for his position regarding the use of eminent domain.

Although LePore was called upon by several people to apologize -- including the head of the local NAACP -- he refused to do so.

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