



Lower Cape May Regional High sports roundup

Page A2



House of the week

B1



168th YEAR NO. 3 CAPE MAY, N.J. Serving America's National Historic Landmark City WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 19, 2022 \$1.00

Stranding Center: Stay away from beached seals

Pups moving through region on way to warmer southern waters

By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave

BRIGANTINE — If you see a seal lying on the beach, leave it alone. That's the advice of Bob Schoelkopf, director of the Marine Mammal Stranding Center.

The center currently is posting signs in coastal towns that read, "Give seals space, stay 150 feet away, seals rest on our beaches, stay back and give them space. Report injured, sick or dead seals to (609) 266-0538."

Cape May Point is preparing to install one on its beach.

Schoelkopf said the sign project is a collaboration with the National Marine Fisheries Service to make the public more aware of the fact that seals do visit New Jersey beaches and are federally protected. He said a whale-watching group from northern New Jersey sponsored the cost of some of the signs.

He said the signs are being distributed by volunteers. Schoelkopf encouraged those who find a seal

on the beach to take a photo of it from a distance and email it to the center.

"We can look at that photo and see the posture of the seal, the way it's lying there, what condition it's in, what species it is, what size it is," he said. "That's a lot of information that can be gained from a cell phone."

Do not touch or try to pet a seal. "First of all, it's a wild animal. They will bite, and the bite of a seal is very infectious, almost within 24 hours you'll be infected

from a seal bite," Schoelkopf said. "They are also federally protected, and you can be fined several thousand dollars if you take it upon yourself to go up and try to pet it, and chasing it back into the water is considered harassment."

He said if a seal wants to go back into the water, it will do so on its own. Seals are usually on the beach because they are trying to rest, warm up and dry out, Schoelkopf said.

Seals feed in the water and when they are finished, they haul

out and need to rest.

"In their feeding behavior, they use up blood oxygen from diving for the fish," he said. "They need to recoup that oxygen level in their blood by resting on the beach and going to sleep and drying out."

All species of seal will beach themselves. Schoelkopf said warmer weather in the early part of this winter kept seals north of this area.

"Right about now, the gray seal

See **Beached seals**, Page A5

New residential rental rules link fee to unit's size

Public hearing set for Feb. 1

By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY — City Council introduced an ordinance that would require registration of all residential rental properties and increase mercantile fees for such rentals based on square footage.

The proposed ordinance notes Cape May is the second-most-searched destination through transient marketplaces such as Airbnb.

Last year, the city's Municipal Taxation and Revenue Advisory Committee (MTRAC) noted Cape May had issued 513 mercantile licenses for whole house rentals from a total of 3,400 residences in the city, but U.S. Census data stated 70 percent of the houses in Cape May are listed as vacant, perhaps indicating many unlicensed rental properties.

"I can't tell you that's an accurate number because we keep no data on how many of these residential properties are actually rental units," MTRAC Chairman Dennis Crowley told council.

During a virtual meeting Jan. 11, Deputy Mayor Stacy Sheehan said the current fee for mercantile licenses for residential rental properties of \$75 had not been increased in 15 years.

"Obviously, rental prices have gone up since that time," she said.

Sheehan suggested the mercantile license fee for residential rentals be raised to \$100 annually for residential rental properties of 1,000 square feet and less. Council amended the ordinance to include the fee increase.

City solicitor Chris Gillin-Schwartz said he eliminated excess language from the ordinance.

"It makes sense. It reflects what we currently have in place, which is a mercantile license and inspection process, and if people do not abide by that, they're subject to very reasonable penalties," he said. "I've

eliminated some of the quote 'scary language' in this, but it still has teeth, people need to get fire inspected and remain in compliance."

Gillin-Schwartz said if the fire inspector issues comments or any things need to be addressed, the city has the ability to enforce it. He said code enforcement, the fire prevention bureau and municipal court would handle violations.

The new ordinance updates the mercantile license structure to a more equitable framework based on square footage, Gillin-Schwartz said.

"You also cement what you currently have in place and I think strengthen that rather than create a new world order within the city," he said. "We have a process that is in place and this code reflects that."

Mayor Zack Mullock said changes were made to the original version of the ordinance to build consensus on council. He said he believed the changes to the ordinance are positive.

The ordinance proposes an annual mercantile license fee for residential rentals of \$125 for properties of 1,001 to 2,000 square feet, \$175 for properties of 2,001 to 3,000 square feet, \$300 for properties of 3,001 to 4,000 square feet, \$400 for properties of 4,001 to 5,000 and \$500 for properties of 5,000 feet or more.

Condotels, in which units are individually owned but rented similar to a commercial hotel operation with centralized booking or front desk service, would be subject to the same \$32 per rental unit as hotels and motels.

If a condominium unit owner does not rent through a centralized booking service and instead rents directly to consumers through a licensed real estate agent or transient space marketplace, the owner shall comply with the residential rental requirements based on square footage.

Residential, Page A4



Jack Fichter/CAPE MAY STAR AND WAVE

Sailors abandon ship

Boats continue to be abandoned at Cape May Harbor despite a state law prohibiting doing so. Find out more in **The Other Side** column on A6.

City on solid financial ground despite COVID

By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY — Mayor Zack Mullock in his annual State of the City Address called 2021 a year when the Cape May community came together, a year City Council put the city's finances in order and a year when the city took on the challenges to complete and start a number of important projects.

During a virtual City Council meeting held with

council members on Zoom and the public watching on the city's new YouTube platform Jan. 11, Mullock said the city was financially strong with Cape May seeing increased revenue from room tax, beach tag sales and parking meters. He said the tax collection rate was 99.12 percent.

Mullock said the city saved \$1.8 million by refinancing capital project bonds which took seven years off its debt schedule. The city also tripled the in-

terest rate it receives from banks for its accounts, Mullock said.

He said the interest rate on bonding for the city's new firehouse came in a 1.59 percent.

The city made major capital expenditures including new radios for the police and fire departments and body cameras for police, Mullock said.

Brick on City Hall was repointed to remedy years of water leaks, he said. The mayor noted the

city preserved the Sewell Tract and renewed a long-term lease with New Jersey Audubon for the Nature Center of Cape May.

"It is a year that we preserved our history through the efforts of the Historic Preservation Commission, and the purchase of the AME Church," Mullock said.

He said the city has applied for multiple grants to receive hundred of thou-

See **Solid**, Page A3

HPC approves renovations at contributing home

By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY — The city's Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) granted final approval for renovations at a circa 1900 building at 1152-1154 Washington St., where the applicants plan to pull away from the house due to settlement of the brick piers.

A local carpenter suggested stripping the pine deck boards, leveling the existing structure, possibly add structural brackets to anchor the existing beams back to the house and leveling the house with a

forward pitch, Zehander said. The front line of the porch is about 2 to 3 inches below the finished floor height at the back of the porch, he said.

Deck boards will be replaced with mahogany and five porch posts will be replaced to address rotted turn spindles in at least two locations. Zehander proposed replacing the existing square spindle railing system with sawn balusters with a height of 30 inches above the floor.

He said trim would be added at the eave line of the porch in the form of a sprung arch type of drapery and some brackets. Screens would be rebuilt that fit in below the brick piers, Zehander said.

The roofline of the house has simple sawn brackets, some of which are missing due to damage over the years. He said John Hassay, of Cape Island Wood Work-

Renovations, Page A4



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