



## City again tables short-term rental ordinance

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## House of the week

Real Estate Resource



167th YEAR NO. 51 CAPE MAY, N.J. Serving America's National Historic Landmark City WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 22, 2021 \$1.00

# Testa touts natural immunity over vaccine

## Bill: Confirmation of antibodies as good as proof of vaccination

**By JACK FICHTER**  
Cape May Star and Wave

TRENTON — Republican state Sens. Mike Testa and Joe Pennacchio introduced a bill that would allow schools, workplaces, restaurants and other businesses and venues to accept an individual's verbal confirmation that they have natural immunity due to a prior COVID-19 infection and in theory

now carry strong antibodies exempting them from providing proof of receiving the vaccines. The bill states some studies have suggested that people with COVID antibodies, a sign of a prior COVID infection, are at lower risk for future infection and that antibodies offer a degree of protection against being reinfected. It notes proof of vaccination against COVID is

becoming a requirement for many workplaces and public venues and the vaccination requirements typically bar individuals from participating in many social and economic activities unless the individual receives the vaccine. "Although many of these requirements allow routine testing for COVID-19 as an alternative to vac-

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## Medical experts dispute claims supporting measure in Senate

**By JACK FICHTER**  
Cape May Star and Wave

A number of medical professionals and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention do not agree with assertions made during a livestream event last week organized by state Republican senators Mike Testa and Joe Pennacchio, who have introduced a bill that would not require proof of vaccination from those who

have had COVID, claiming natural immunity is sufficient. Dr. Nicole Iovine, M.D., program director, clinical professor and a hospital epidemiologist at the University of Florida Division of Infectious Diseases and Global Medicine, told the Star and Wave new cases in our area are likely to be the Omicron variant since New York and New Jersey have a 13 percent rate of infection

of Omicron while the rest of the nation has a rate of 3 percent, she said. "We've known for quite some time now that people that have had natural infection are not as protected against another infection compared to people who have been vaccinated," Iovine said. She said Omicron is expected to overtake the Delta

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# Year in Review: Lower Township 2021

## JANUARY

Township Council approved Lower Township Municipal Utilities Authority issuing \$18 million in project notes to finance installation of a vacuum sanitary sewer collection system in Erma in areas within the existing county Water Quality Management Plan.

Lower Township was the first community in the state to report more than 1,000 cases of COVID since the pandemic began in New Jersey as of Jan. 3.

Beachgoers on May 29, 2019, were stunned to see a small plane skimming along the top of the ocean a few hundred yards offshore when it rose and then nosedived into the ocean near the World War II bunker. A National Transportation Safety Board final report has ruled the crash a suicide. The body of the pilot of the rented Mooney M20J single-engine plane, Lawrence Klimek, 58, of Howell, was recovered by divers from the State Police.

## FEBRUARY

As of Feb. 5, the number of active COVID-19 cases has fallen in Cape May County over the previous week and close to 14,000 vaccinations had been administered. Officials said studies showed Cape May County has the lowest number of coronavirus cases per capita and the best vaccination rate by population. There were 405 active cases countywide.

Township Council authorized competitive contracting for emergency medical services that could open the door to an agreement with Wildwood Crest Rescue Squad to provide EMS services to Diamond Beach. The resolution stated the township had identified a need to contract with a third-party vendor to provide EMS and basic life-support services. At a January council meeting, Councilman Tom Conrad, who served as captain with the Lower Township Rescue Squad, responded to claims of slow response time to emergency calls in Diamond Beach. Resident James Sanford, stated an 80-year-old resident died while waiting for Lower Township Rescue Squad to respond.

## MARCH

Township Council approved an ordinance eliminating the requirement for volunteer firefighters to live in the township. The ordinance stated the Villas Volunteer Fire Company, Town Bank Volunteer



Frank Sippel is sworn in as mayor of Lower Township during the reorganization meeting at Lower Cape May Regional High School. Sippel was appointed to the position in 2020 and then won re-election in November. With Sippel are his grandchildren, Colin and Ava.

Fire Company and Erma Volunteer Fire Company have been staffed by township residents and to bolster their ranks, the residency requirement has been dropped, allowing residents of immediately adjacent municipalities to join.

Township Council introduced its 2021 proposed budget featuring a 2-cent increase in the local purpose tax rate. Township Manager Mike Laffey said the tax levy was \$22.1 million compared to last year's \$21.3 million, an increase of \$855,770. The amount of surplus supporting this year's budget decreased from 2020 by \$186,359, or 4.45 percent. Laffey said the township follows a policy of utilizing only as much surplus as can be replenished during the budget year.

The Lower Cape May Regional High School Mock Trial team won the championship of the New Jersey State Bar Association Foundation's Vincent J. Apruzzese Mock Trial Competition for 2020-2021. On March 18, they bested West Morris Mendham High School of Morris County. A total of 180 teams participated in the competition which was virtual due to the COVID pandemic.

West Morris Mendham was the top-ranked team in the state and has won the championship four of the past eight years.

Township Council approved a \$26,136 contract with Granicus LLC to identify owners of short-term rental properties who have not purchased mercantile licenses. Township Manager Mike Laffey said Granicus would identify the owners and locations and provide a "snapshot" of how large a home was being offered for short-term rental whether a two-bedroom cottage or a five-bedroom house on the beach.

The Delaware River and Bay Authority (DRBA) announced it had begun planning for the construction of new ferry vessel. DRBA officials stated they had retained the Elliot Bay Design Group of Seattle, Wash., to lead the planning and design process that will lead to the design concept for a new vessel.

As of March 28, the county had 354 active cases of COVID-19. The county Health Department announced 35,208 county residents had received a least one dose of vaccine and 22,434 had been fully

vaccinated.

## APRIL

Lower Township Council introduced an ordinance to amend its smoking ordinance to prohibit the smoking and vaping of marijuana in public places. The ordinance states the smoking or vaping of marijuana in public places would impact the health and safety of residents. The measure does not cover privately owned beaches or outdoor smoking areas of restaurants.

The Lower Cape May Regional School District announced it would remain on a hybrid schedule for the remainder of the school year due to social distancing requirements and a recent increase in COVID cases in the middle school and high school.

## MAY

Lower Township Elementary School Board of Education approved its 2021-2022 budget featuring a .8-cent increase in the local purpose tax rate. The local tax levy was \$18.3 million, up \$360,000 from last year. The district was continuing under severe budget cuts from

state legislation for funding formulas, phasing out state adjustment aid to many schools in the county, creating large deficits in operating funds and sending more money to districts where state aid has not kept up with increasing enrollment.

Township Council approved a \$36,000 contract with Inspira Medical Services to provide supplemental emergency medical services beginning June 1. During a meeting May 17, Mayor Frank Sippel said Inspira has the expertise, command structure, state-of-the-art equipment and more than 350 employees to raise the level of care to the township.

## JUNE

Lower Township Council introduced an ordinance to allow retail marijuana businesses and cannabis delivery services to operate in the township's industrial and General Business 1 zone (GB1). The township would allow one retail marijuana operation in the GB1 zone and one in the industrial zone. The ordinance states licensing retail and delivery would be conditional uses. The township would permit two marijuana delivery services, one each in the industrial and GB1 zones. The GB1 zone is spread throughout the township, while the industrial zone includes the Cape May County Airport and Fulling Mill Road at the border with Middle.

Township Council approved its 2021 municipal budget, passing an amendment to cut an earlier proposed tax increase in half by using \$2.2 million in federal COVID stimulus money. Council delayed approving the budget in April because the state had not established rules of how municipalities could apply federal COVID stimulus money. Township Council introduced its 2021 proposed budget on March 1 featuring a 2-cent local purpose tax increase.

Lower Township Rescue Squad ceased operations June 19. Inspira took over emergency medical and ambulance services. The squad has operated as a nonprofit organization since 1950. The rescue squad's financial condition has been deteriorating for years and the COVID pandemic contributed to its demise. Township Manager Mike Laffey said Inspira originally was set to take over EMS Sept. 1. Early in the year, the township issued a request for proposals for EMS and received no response, Laffey said. The RFP

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