



Blessing of the Waters returns to Cape May Harbor

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House of the week

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168th YEAR NO. 11 CAPE MAY, N.J. Serving America's National Historic Landmark City WEDNESDAY, MARCH 16, 2022 \$1.00

Lower budget won't increase tax rate in '22

By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave

VILLAS — Lower Township Council introduced its 2022 municipal budget March 7 calling for no tax increase. The municipal budget totals \$30.6 million.

The local purpose tax of \$22 million is up from \$21.8 million last year, an increase of \$193,000. Ratables increased by \$26.2 million, allowing the increase in the budget without raising taxes, Township Manager Mike Laffey said.

The spending plan is below the state levy cap by \$190,678 and \$1.5 million below the state spending cap.

The township completed 2021 with a surplus of \$8.6 million, the highest year-end balance to date, Laffey said. Of that balance, \$4.5 million is being applied to this year's budget, leaving a balance of \$4 million.

"We feel confident using this amount of surplus because monies received from the American Rescue allocation in 2021 have restored the losses sus-

tained from 2020," he said. "We're expected to receive the second allocation of \$1,116,761 this year, which will be used to address drainage issues throughout the township."

The tax collection rate for 2021 was 99.38 percent compared with 98.99 percent in 2020, generating \$1.9 million more for the surplus and represents the highest collection rate to date. All revenue collections exceeded the projections for 2021 bringing in an additional \$1 million, Laffey said.

The total assessed value of real property upon which the tax rate is based is \$3.7 billion, so every \$370,060 of the amount to be raised by taxation equals one cent on the tax rate. The budget uses a 97.54 percent rate to compute the reserve for uncollected taxes in 2022.

Salaries and wages total \$11.5 million which includes \$4.9 million for the Department of Public Safety and \$2.8 million for the Department of Public

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Jack Fichter/CAPE MAY STAR AND WAVE

Sun sets late over Delaware Bay

The sun goes down an hour later than usual on the first day of daylight-saving time at Sunset Beach in Lower Township.

Planning, zoning board variances would expire under new rules in city

By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY — Variations granted by the planning and zoning board would expire after two years under an ordinance City Council introduced March 1.

Applicants would have to provide public notice of their intention to seek an extension of a project unless they had secured a building permit to commence construction within

two years of the date the resolution memorializing the variance was adopted. Applicants could apply for and a board may grant an extension either before or after the expiration date.

City solicitor Chris Gillin-Schwartz said Cape May did not have a provision in its code regarding expiration of variances. He said statutory expirations and extension provisions exist for site plans

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West Cape to set fees for cannabis shops

By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave

WEST CAPE MAY — A borough ordinance will need to be amended to include a requirement that retail cannabis businesses purchase a mercantile license.

At a March 9 meeting, Mayor Carol Sabo said she saw applications fees for mercantile licenses from other municipalities for cannabis businesses for as much as \$25,000.

"I know that your fee structure for mercantile licenses are supposed to be commensurate with the administrative costs," she said.

Borough solicitor Frank Corrado said mercantile licenses must be reasonably related to the administrative cost of the regulatory system. He said large mercantile fees for cannabis businesses are probably open to legal challenges.

Corrado said mercantile license

fees for cannabis businesses cannot be used as an additional revenue-raising measure.

"You're going to have to calibrate that amount, so it reasonably corresponds to the cost of regulating the licensing system," he said.

Sabo said charging an exorbitant mercantile license fee for cannabis businesses "flies in the face of the intent of the law."

Corrado said the state is imposing significant licensing fees on all cannabis-related businesses.

"The legislation does not contemplate municipalities sort of double dipping those fees as additional revenue-raising measures," he said.

Sabo suggested the mercantile fees for a retail cannabis business should be the same as any other retail outlet. She said there was no additional burden on the municipality in terms of the processing or paperwork.

The state Cannabis Regulatory

Commission began accepting applications for retail cannabis stores this week. She said she would like to have the fee structure in place within 90 days, which is the expected turnaround for approvals by the state. Borough Commission discussed and dismissed a suggestion of raising mercantile license fees.

For residential house rentals, the borough offers an early discount for purchasing a mercantile license early in the year, Sabo said. The standard fee is \$100 for the mercantile license but is discounted to \$50 for early payment, she said.

West Cape May's standard fee is higher than the city of Cape May's, according to the mayor, but less than Cape May Point's and Lower Township's.

Deputy Mayor Peter Burke said the borough's mercantile fee for restaurants was about the same as Cape May's fee.



Richard Gibbs collection

The Cape May boardwalk, circa 1910. City Councilwoman Lorraine Baldwin has suggested the city erect arches again over the Promenade.

Baldwin proposes Promenade arches

By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY — At one time in the past, the city's Promenade, then a boardwalk, had arches overhead. Now City Council is discussing the idea of installing some decorative arches over a section of the Promenade.

At a March 1 meeting, Councilwoman Lorraine Baldwin said she is working on the project with a few volunteers. She said the concept was not ready for presentation at this time.

"We secured an architect who is working gratis for the city," she said. "At this point, we're going to do some sketches. Once that is completed, we'll have some kind of estimated costs and at that point it will be ready to come to council,

if it's a project that we're going to continue with."

Deputy Mayor Stacy Sheehan asked where the arches would be located and of what material would they be constructed.

"I feel like I'm in the dark," she said. "Are they the whole length of the boardwalk, it is just a couple?"

Sheehan said she did not want anyone "going off on their own doing projects." She said council should decide which projects it wished to undertake and to prioritize the projects.

Mayor Zack Mullock said he was approached by Baldwin and no money was spent on the concept. He said council should wait until Baldwin makes a full presentation on the arches.

"At this point, there are other organizations that are possibly look-

ing at funding it," Baldwin said.

Sheehan complained other organizations were getting information on the project before council was informed.

Baldwin said it was unknown at this time how many arches would be constructed. She said the arches would probably be installed between Mermaid's Restaurant and Primal Restaurant.

The arches must be viewed sequentially, Baldwin said, adding the architect has a map showing where the original arches were located.

Sheehan said the original arches were used for lighting for the boardwalk. Mullock said the concept looked like a beautiful idea and merits further investigation.

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