



## NOAA boosts hurricane outlook to 'above normal'

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## House of the Week

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169th YEAR NO. 33 CAPE MAY, N.J. Serving America's National Historic Landmark City WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 16, 2023 \$1.00

# Jitney service fails to meet needs of mall workers

Fare-free transportation hours not in sync with employee schedules; changes planned for next year

By JACK FICHTER  
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY — The city's free jitney service, which was instituted to try to relieve the dearth of public parking in the most heavily trafficked areas, is not serving a key group: workers.

City officials are considering changes to the program but nothing can be done until at least next summer.

For now, the hours the jitney operates are not favorable for

Washington Street Mall employees, who may as a result park at a meter, taking a valuable spot away from a potential customer.

Richard Meyers, of the Washington Street Mall Business Improvement District, discussed parking with members of the Municipal Taxation and Revenue Advisory Committee (MTRAC) at an Aug. 10 meeting. He said the jitney service is underutilized.

The jitney operates from 4 to

10 p.m., but Meyers said none of the employees are coming or going during those times.

"So, you have employees parking and paying the meter when you could have them off the mall area if they had a reliable service that would be there to get them to work by 10 (a.m.) and take them back at 10 (p.m.) when most places close," he said.

MTRAC member Russ Dickhart said the jitney service would work better if riders

could depend on the shuttle service picking them up from a remote parking site without a long wait.

City Councilwoman Maureen McDade said there are issues with the jitney concerning advertising, hours of operation and consistency of service. She said discussions are under way for changes but the issues would not be addressed this summer.

"In advance of next season, we certainly want to be able to

take a look at something that's a little bit more forward-thinking and little bit more hard-wired into the operations of the city," McDade said.

Meyers said most mall businesses are open from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m., so the last shuttle to serve employees would need to leave the mall around 10:30 p.m. He said the first jitney for mall employees should begin operating at 9:30 a.m.

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## Cape May man, 45, killed in boat crash

CAPE MAY — A boater was killed after striking a loose pipe from a dredge in the darkness of night Aug 9 in Cape May Harbor.

State Police troopers responded to a vessel crash at 2:21 a.m.

Based on a preliminary investigation, Christopher W. Heitman, 45, was operating a 17-foot Sea Hunt boat with one occupant.

A dredge pipe broke free from its mooring and entered the channel. The vessel struck the pipe, and the operator and occupant were ejected. The occupant was able to return to the vessel.

Heitman was later recovered unresponsive and pronounced deceased. The crash remains under investigation.

## City short-term rental property licenses up 22%

Renewals down about 100; officials plan to investigate

By JACK FICHTER  
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY — The number of residential short-term rental properties has skyrocketed in Cape May, increasing 22 percent over last year.

In 2022, the city had 911 properties for which owners obtained a mercantile license. That number increased by 201 to 1,112 units in 2023.

During a meeting of the Municipal Taxation and Revenue Advisory Committee on Aug. 10, MTRAC member Martin Van Walsum said more people are putting their homes into the residential rental market and some properties may have changed ownership from 2022 to 2023.

"There were 10.2 percent of the people that had licenses in 2022 that didn't get a license in 2023," Van Walsum said. "It's about 100 people that either took their homes off the market or didn't get a license or the property could be changing hands."

He said the Ohana Beach Club at 933 Beach Ave. went from being a "condotel" to a hotel, which represented six units. Van Walsum said he believed some rental property owners discovered their neighbors were not applying for a mercantile license and

did the same.

Chairman Dennis Crowley said the city registered eight rentals houses last year of 5,000 or more square feet but only seven this year.

Crowley said Airbnb and VRBO will provide the city with a limited data set of how much money they collected and distributed but won't provide a list of properties by address. He said there is a commercial firm that tracks residential short-term rentals.

"They come in and basically take over your whole data collection, which I think would relieve our clerk's office of a lot of stuff," Crowley said.

He said city Chief Financial Officer Kevin Hanie would meet with the firm.

"They will also take over notification of homeowners on behalf of the city," Crowley said.

Van Walsum said if the city picked up 10 percent of the unregistered short-term rental properties, it would add \$75,000 to the city's coffers. He said he would send City Clerk Erin Burke a list of 100 properties that did not apply for rental licenses this year after having one last year.

"It is widely known among the residential property renters there are

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Jack Fichter/CAPE MAY STAR AND WAVE

## At the end of the day

The sun sets over boats in Cape Island Creek at Schellenger's Landing in Lower Township.

At right, members of the Cape May Police Department were honored to be invited by Carol Boyd, who requested their presence at the Sunset Beach flag-lowering ceremony Aug. 11 for her late husband, former police chief Robert L. Boyd.

Chief Boyd's military flag was flown from sunrise to sunset.



## City tables off-site affordable housing approval

By JACK FICHTER  
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY — City Council tabled a resolution that would authorize a 30-year deed restriction between 1134 Lafayette Street LLC and the city for an offsite affordable housing obligation at a new 13-home development on Pittsburgh Avenue.

In March, the city's Planning Board approved two affordable housing units required for a 13-lot subdivision off Pittsburgh Avenue, known as Cape May Cove, could be provided offsite in an existing house at 1134 Lafayette St.

The Planning Board's approval was an amendment to a condition placed on prior approvals based on a change in the law. A developer has the discretion of placing affordable housing units on or offsite.

The issue for Cape May Cove

dates to 2010 and includes 10 years of litigation with a preliminary subdivision approval granted by the Planning Board in 2018. A requirement under Cape May's fair share housing ordinance is that when five or more units are built, the development must include low- and moderate-income units.

In preliminary approval, the Planning Board required two affordable housing units be provided on site. Ten months later, the Planning Board adopted a new fair share housing ordinance that allowed for low- and moderate-income units to be provided offsite.

The offsite units on Lafayette Street would be a two-bedroom and a three-bedroom apartment.

The applicant received building permits from the city for interior renovations to 1134 Lafayette St. to convert the structure into a

two-bedroom rental unit available to very low-income families and a three-bedroom rental unit available to low-income families.

Since 2018, no affordable housing units have been made available in Cape May.

At an Aug. 1 council meeting, former councilwoman Stacy Sheehan said the developer, Thomas DiDonato, initially received Planning Board approval to reserve two units in the development for affordable housing but returned to the board and asked to move the affordable housing to a house on Lafayette Street.

"These houses were worth, I'm saying upwards of \$3 million apiece, and we've got a property that's probably worth less than \$2 million versus \$6 million," she said.

Sheehan said the city lost the op-

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