

# Year in Review

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Program, a state Small Cities grant and the township.

**VILLAS** — Lower Township approved its \$30.6 million municipal budget with no tax increase. The local purpose tax totals \$22 million, up from \$21.8 million the prior year, an increase of \$193,000. Ratables increased by \$26.2 million, allowing the increase in the budget without increased taxation.

**VILLAS** — A change to the Civil Service Act that allows the hiring of police officers who have not taken the Civil Service examination but have completed basic training at a police academy required all municipalities to pass an ordinance noting the exception. Lower Township Council introduced its ordinance April 18. Mayor Frank Sippel said if approved, the ordinance would allow the chief of police more ways to hire new officers.

**ERMA** — The Lower Cape May Regional Board of Education approved the school district's 2022-23 budget April 28, which will bring Cape May a decrease in its share of funding the regional schools while Lower Township and West Cape May will see a slight increase. The local tax levy was rising 2 percent from \$22.6 million to \$23.1 million. The total budget was decreasing to \$38.4 million for 2022-23.

## MAY

**VILLAS** — Lower Township Council turned down a shared service agreement for its annual summer concert series with the Delaware River and Bay Authority (DRBA), breaking a 10-year run of shows at the ferry terminal. Township officials said they did not agree with certain restrictions placed on residents attending the concerts, which led to their decision. While the terms of the agreement could not be settled, the DRBA decided to move forward with the concert series without financial support from Lower Township.

**COLD SPRING** — Lower Township Elementary School Board of Education approved the district's 2022-2023 budget with a 1.3-cent increase in the local purpose tax rate. The amount to be raised by taxes was up \$367,380 for a total of \$18.7

million plus \$620,000 as a debt service levy. The budget totals \$25.8 million, down \$1.1 million from the previous year. State aid decreased \$1.3 million to \$4.6 million. The local purpose tax rate was 51.6 cents per \$100 of assessed property value, up from 50.3 cents last year.

## JUNE

**NORTH CAPE MAY** — A participant in the Escape the Cape Triathlon died after he was spotted in distress by lifeguards near the finish line of the swimming portion of the event. A man from Wilmington, Del., described in a news release from the Delaware River and Bay Authority as "70 plus" was participating in the Open Water Classic Competition at about 8:30 a.m. June 12 when he began having difficulties.

## JULY

**SUNSET BEACH** — Lower Township Council renewed the liquor license of the Sunset Beach Sportsmen's Club despite an ongoing effort by the state Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) to evict the club from a small portion of the former magnesite factory property. The state signed a charter for the Sunset Beach Sportsmen's Club in 1949. The land on which its clubhouse is located was given to the club by the owners of the former magnesite factory, Harbison-Walker Refractories, almost 50 years ago. The state purchased the magnesite factory site in 1999 to restore the environmentally damaged land. The club contends a lease of the land for the clubhouse been in effect since 1982.

## AUGUST

**TRENTON** — The state Cannabis Regulatory Commission (CRC) approved home delivery here and curbside pickup of medicinal cannabis items on a permanent basis. Curbside pickup has been in temporary operation since March 2020 due to COVID restrictions. The Botanist, a dispensary located in Egg Harbor Township, will deliver medical cannabis to Cape May County Tuesdays and Wednesdays. During a meeting July 28, CRC Chairwoman Dianna Houenou said draft rules for

consumption areas and edible cannabis products would be forthcoming.

**VILLAS** — Lower Township Council approved an agreement with Cape Regional Medical Center Cape Addiction Recovery Services (CARES), which operates a mobile response team to visit persons who suffer drug overdoses within 24 hours of the incident. CARES provides recovery information and services. The memorandum of agreement notes an opioid epidemic is taking place through the nation.

**COLD SPRING** — After three years of COVID precautions and mandates, Lower Township elementary schools were mostly back to normal. Superintendent Jeff Samaniego said the school district developed what it considers the least-restrictive plan in which masks are optional. Students and staff were being asked to wash their hands multiple times per day, Samaniego said. He said if an individual was COVID-positive, he or she must quarantine for five days and when they return to school on day six, a mask was still optional.

**VILLAS** — Work was under way to alleviate flooding at Evergreen, Cloverdale and Spruce avenues through Lower Township Council awarded a \$321,261 contract to Fred Schiavone Construction for the project. On Aug. 15, Township Council approved a change order for \$31,000 for additional drainage work. The township received a \$400,000 state grant for the project.

## SEPTEMBER

**VILLAS** — With the proliferation of short-term house rentals through Airbnb and VRBO, Lower Township introduced an ordinance Sept. 7 to levy a 3 percent occupancy tax on hotel/motel rooms and transient accommodations. In 2019, the state enacted legislation allowing municipalities to impose an accommodations tax not to exceed 3 percent. Township Manager Mike Laffey projected the tax could generate \$750,000 to \$1.2 million per year.

**VILLAS** — Town Bank and Cape May Beach property owners were asking the township to repair and improve beach access paths

owned by the Property Owners Association of Cape May Beach. Dean Umscheid, president of the organization, addressed Township Council on Sept. 19, saying a severe safety issue exists due to the condition of the beach accessways.

## OCTOBER

**ERMA** — The Lower Township Police Department conducted a study in 2021 into the potential use of drones. According to a news release, the department contacted several vendors to explore the capabilities of different brands and their strengths and weaknesses. Officers attended training with the Gloucester Township Police Department who already has an established program with multiple UAS platforms. Lt. Brian McEwing holds an FAA Part 107 license authorizing him to fly missions beyond recreational use.

**VILLAS** — Township Committee approved an ordinance to levy a 3 percent occupancy tax on hotel/motel rooms and transient accommodations effective Jan. 1. The tax is projected to generate \$750,000 to \$1.2 million next year.

**ERMA** — Lower Cape May Regional High School went into shelter-in-place mode Oct. 14 after the school received a phone call reporting an active shooter on campus, authorities said. Police searched the school and deemed the call a hoax. Route 9 was temporarily shut down between Tabernacle Road and Route 109. Students were dismissed an hour earlier than usual. State Police deemed the incident "swatting," a fake call made to 911 to draw a large police presence to a location. Similar calls were made Oct. 14 to schools in Middle Township, Jackson Township, Toms River, Hamilton Township, Barnegat Township, Newark, East Brunswick and Vineland.

## NOVEMBER

**VILLAS** — Some residents of Holly Estates, a North Cape May subdivision off Sheriff Taylor Boulevard, approached Lower Township Council on Nov. 7 with complaints about the behavior of juveniles in their neighborhood since last summer.

Mayor Frank Sippel said council was aware of the situation. He said he discussed the matter with the chief of police.

**VILLAS** — Township Council introduced an ordinance that would require owners of short-term rental properties to buy a mercantile license by March 15 each year. Existing regulations require those engaged in the business, including through Airbnb and VRBO, to purchase a mercantile license on or before July 15. The township determined the purchase of a license should occur before the start of the summer season. The cost of a license would increase depending on the number of people the property can accommodate.

## DECEMBER

**VILLAS** — Council introduced an ordinance that would create an overlay zone to confine cannabis

retail stores and offices of cannabis delivery services to a specific section in the General Business Zone. In 2021, council adopted an ordinance that amended the land development code and authorized the issuance of no more than two Class 5 cannabis retail licenses and no more than two Class 6 cannabis delivery licenses in the township's GB-1 and I (Industrial) zoning districts. The Cannabis Overlay Zone would be located within the GB-1 zone and confined to the shopping center in North Cape May that houses the Acme market and the shopping center across the street that houses the post office and Dollar Store. Breakwater Plaza is not included in the cannabis business overlay. Township Manager Mike Laffey said the change in the ordinance would keep cannabis businesses away from residences. He said there are parcels in the GB-1 zone that are close to homes.

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Reopening January 14th

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**TIDES: Dec. 28, 2022-Jan. 4, 2023**

DATE	HIGH		LOW	
	A.M.	P.M.	A.M.	P.M.
28	11:56		5:25	6:13
29	12:41	12:57	6:31	7:09
30	1:45	1:59	7:39	8:05
31	2:48	3:01	8:46	8:55
1	3:42	3:57	9:47	9:47
2	4:35	4:52	10:45	10:36
3	5:23	5:42	11:37	11:22
4	6:06	6:28		

**MOON PHASES**  
First quarter, Dec. 30 • full moon, Jan. 6

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Meet Jane Eremus-Foster, an advanced practice nurse at AtlantiCare Physician Group Primary Care Plus. She is board certified as an Adult-Gerontology Primary Care Nurse Practitioner, and has worked in medical-surgical, post-critical care, occupational therapy, urgent care and telemedicine. Her experience is deep and varied, but her heart has always been in primary care by treating patients holistically from head to toe, working together to meet health challenges and improving life.

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