



HOUSE OF THE WEEK

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MOSAIC ARTIST FEATURED IN FEBRUARY

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City proposes .7-cent property tax increase

By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY — City Manager Bruce MacLeod's proposed city budget for 2016, now before City Council for their consideration and suggestions, proposes a .7-cent increase in the property tax rate. If approved, the local purpose tax rate would increase from 33.9 cents per \$100 of assessed value to 34.6 cents.

The owner of a property with an assessed value of \$500,000 would pay an additional \$35 for the year in local purpose tax.

At a Jan. 15 special council meeting, Mayor Edward Mahaney said he would work toward a zero tax increase. He said with a nice blend of combining other revenue sources, looking at some of the city's expenditures and "touching the fund balance a little," the tax increase could be eliminated. Mahaney said the city needed to be cognizant of residents on fixed incomes.

"The overall economy is not as strong as some people lead you to believe. I think everybody in the city knows that," he said. "It's considered a wealthy city, but by

demographic standards we're not. We have a lot of people who work very hard to make ends meet."

The mayor asked that before council considered the over \$4 million in capital requests in the budget, department heads submit a one-paragraph explanation on each individual request to explain what the item is in layman's language, why it is needed, its purpose, what need it would fulfill and how high a priority it is. He said it was council's responsibility to prioritize the items.

Mahaney said he realized \$1 million was for the restoration

of the elementary school's swimming pool and another \$850,000 to \$1 million to "temporarily change the beach slope."

The proposed city budget totals \$27.8 million, with \$17.3 million earmarked for the current fund, \$2.4 million for the beach utility, \$1.5 million for the tourism utility and \$6.8 million for the water sewer utility. MacLeod said the total budget of all four categories increased by not quite \$700,000.

Of the current fund budget, \$6.6 million is salaries and wages, up \$205,725 from last year. The budget includes the hiring of three

full-time firefighters and one seasonal position. Salaries and wages are showing a 3 percent increase.

MacLeod said the city's employment population is generally mature in its years of service and equivalent pay grades. He said the city budget would benefit from retirements and resignations by replacing senior staff with entry-level employees.

"Other Expenses" in the current fund total \$10.7 million, which includes debt service, pensions, payroll taxes, insur-

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John Cooke/Special to the CAPE MAY STAR AND WAVE

Just enough to make it pretty

The Washington Street Mall in Cape May received only a dusting of snow Sunday, Jan. 17, while Lower Township and other parts of the county got an inch or more of snowfall. Forecasters are watching for the possibility of heavier snow Jan. 22-23.

Divided decision on pretrial issues in winery lawsuit

By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave

WEST CAPE MAY — In the ongoing legal battle between Willow Creek Winery and the borough, U.S. District Court Judge Noel L. Hillman ruled on four issues Dec. 30, granting summary judgment on some and denying others.

Willow Creek and its president, Barbara Bray Wilde, filed a complaint against the borough and Mayor Pam Kaithern asserting claims under 42 U.S.C. 1983-civil action for deprivation of rights and New Jersey law. Before U.S. District Court-District of New Jersey was the defendants (West Cape May-Kaithern) motion for summary judgment on all claims, which the plaintiffs (Willow Creek) opposed.

Summary judgment is a court order that no factual

issues remain to be tried and therefore a cause of action in a complaint can be decided upon certain facts without a trial, according to dictionarylaw.com. A summary judgment is based upon a motion by one of the parties that contends all factual issues are settled or so one-side that they need not be tried. It is a pretrial remedy.

In 2005, Wilde began to develop Willow Creek Winery on 50 acres she owned in West Cape May designated as commercial farmland under the state Right to Farm Act. According to court documents, beginning in 2006, Willow Creek sought to obtain the necessary approval for construction of a 12,000-square-foot building to "host vintner's dinners, wine tasting events,

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Students to lose playground, field use during park project

By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY — The Cape May City Elementary School Board of Education discussed the loss of its playground and field when phase one of construction the city's new Lafayette Street Park begins in March.

At a Jan. 14 meeting, Superintendent Victoria Zelenak said she, physical education teacher Tom Holden and Director of Elementary Education Anne Berger met to determine where the school could relocate recess and gym classes while construction is under way.

Peak times for construction would be March, April and May, Zelenak said, just when the weather is getting nicer.

"We're looking at using the front lawns and seeing if

Students to turn public lavatory into laboratory, art gallery.
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the city, since it's their project, would be able to give us any money for equipment, because the kids won't have any playground whether we do it out front or in the back," she said.

Zelenak said the school's playground would be disassembled and placed in the new park when it is completed. She noted the open area behind the school was not level.

Three ideas are under
See Playground, Page A2

Voices from past recall segregation

By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY — The history of African Americans in Cape May, told by those who lived and breathed it, was brought to life through audio and video Monday in celebration of Martin Luther King Jr. Day.

The Center for Community Arts (CCA), in association with the Mid-Atlantic Center for the Arts and Humanities (MAC), opened its annual exhibit in the Carroll Gallery at the Emlen Physick Estate to a standing-room-only audience.

The exhibit — "History Speaks, From the Underground Railroad to Segregated Schools to Urban Renewal-Hear the Voices of Cape May's African-American Community"

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Jack Fichter/CAPE MAY STAR AND WAVE
Videographer Henrie Washington and Emily Dempsey at the grand opening of the Center for Community Arts exhibit Monday in Cape May.

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