

Cape May Star and Wave

161ST YEAR NO. 13 CAPE MAY, N.J. SERVING AMERICA'S NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK CITY WEDNESDAY, MARCH 25, 2015 75¢



HOUSE OF THE WEEK
Real Estate Resource



'CONNECTICUT YANKEE' IN WEST CAPE MAY
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Lower Twp. seeks MUA funds to pay new police officers

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

'I believe this is a win-win for everybody.'
—Councilman Erik Simonsen

VILLAS — In a 3-2 vote split along party lines, Lower Township Council voted Monday to ask the Lower Township Municipal Utilities Authority (MUA) for \$205,000 from its budget to pay the salaries of four new police officers being hired this year.

Republican Councilmen Erik Simonsen, David Perry and Tom Conrad voted in favor of

asking the MUA for money from its surplus account, while independents Mayor Michael Beck and Deputy Mayor Norris Clark voted against the resolution.

The township will add four officers to the Lower Township Police Department this year at an approximate cost of \$205,000. Simonsen, who came up with idea to ask the MUA for the funds, said it was a method to keep the anticipated tax-rate increase to a minimum

and have a safer town. The proposed 2015 township budget currently calls for a 2.5-cent tax-rate increase.

"I believe this is a win-win for everybody," Simonsen said. He said officers are retiring from the Police Department, which would cover the \$205,000 cost next year.

Conrad compared using money from the MUA to accepting a grant. He said the township would not have needed the \$205,000 if it had not had extra

spending last year "for things that were not popular and not supported."

Conrad said state statutes allow an MUA to grant as much as 5 percent of its surplus to a municipality.

Clark said he wished the matter had been handled in a regularly scheduled meeting at night rather than a special meeting at 4 p.m. with a nearly empty meeting room.

'You can argue it reduces the tax rate, but reality is it's shifting from one pocket to the other.'
—Mayor Michael Beck

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Mayor Edward Mahaney



City Manager Bruce MacLeod



Solicitor Tony Monzo

Van Drew: Towns on Del. Bay must band together for shore protection

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

DENNISVILLE — State Sen. Jeff Van Drew held an organizational meeting March 19 to determine what direction towns along Delaware Bay should take to receive sand replenishment or a break from Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) maps that predict flood zones based on ocean wave modeling.

The meeting was attended by representatives of the state Department of Environmental Protection, USDA, Sen. Corey Booker's office, Army Corps of Engineers, Lower and Middle townships, Downe Township in southern Cumberland County, Cape May County, New Jersey Audubon, American Littoral Society, Bayshore Center-Bivalve, Delaware Bay Shellfish Council, Stockton University Coastal Research Center, Fairfield Township, Department of Community Affairs, Pierce's Point and Maurice River Township.

He said the purpose of the

meeting was to develop an action plan.

"We have problems. Some of these problems are not being addressed. To some degree, they're not addressed because it's the Delaware Bay shore," Van Drew said. "The Delaware Bay is very often forgotten about."

He said he hoped the meeting would be the first step through thick layers of bureaucracy. Van Drew suggested a joint letter from the participants and resolutions from municipalities to federal legislators and DEP outlining the challenges of Delaware Bay communities and requesting a 20-year-old ecosystem restoration beach project be recrafted to include shore protection.

Lower Township Mayor Michael Beck said most of the township's bayfront was placed in a V zone by FEMA.

FEMA has determined the V zone extends to the landward side of the first dune on

See **Protection**, Page A3

Monzo requests retraction from Prosecutor's Office

Solicitor says 'criminal investigation' of Sheehan not his words

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

CAPE MAY — City Solicitor Tony Monzo is asking for a retraction of a statement from county Prosecutor Robert Taylor accusing him of "cherry picking" a statement from a letter from his office concerning an investigation of acting Police Chief Robert Sheehan, making it sound as if the chief was the target of a criminal investigation.

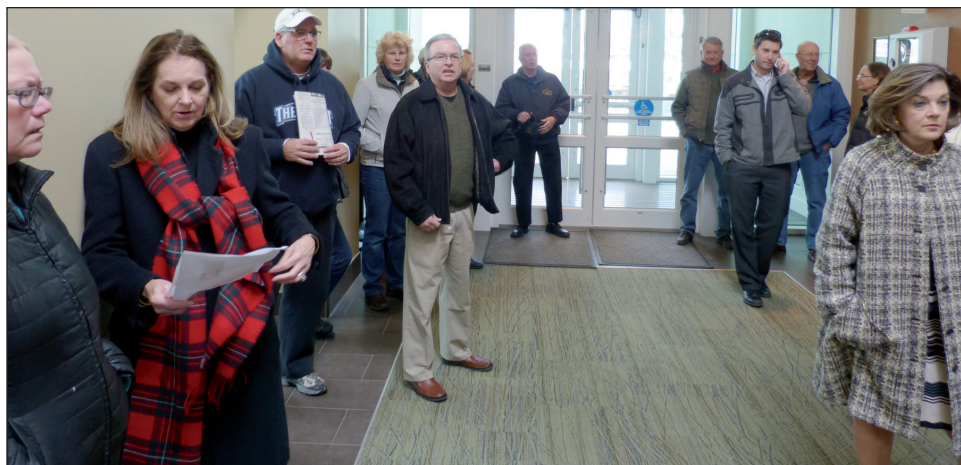
Monzo, Mayor Edward Mahaney and City Manager Bruce MacLeod addressed the media at a news conference March 19 that was billed as providing additional information on a recent Cape May Police Department investigation.

Monzo reviewed events that took place during a March 3 City Council meeting that resulted in council rescinding Sheehan's position as chief and caused Councilman Jerry Inderwies to resign in protest of the action. Handling of an investigation of alleged comp time abuse by Lt. Chuck Lear is allegedly at the forefront of the matter.

Mahaney said the city initially limited releasing information following a March 3 City Council meeting in which Sheehan's contract was not renewed based on concerns the county Prosecutor's Office was conducting a criminal investigation.

"The Prosecutor's Office has now indicated that its investigation into the city's Police Department is administrative in nature and the city has had the opportunity to consult with its labor counsel concerning the impact of releasing information and what impact that would have on any future disciplinary hearings," he said.

The mayor said the city was protecting additional information subject to



Jack Fichter/CAPE MAY STAR AND WAVE

While a news conference for members of the media was being held March 12 at Cape May Convention Hall, about a dozen members of the public and one City Council member were standing in the building's lobby complaining they were not admitted to the event.

privacy considerations or required to be confidential.

Mahaney said Sheehan accepted the position as chief of police with a one-year contract with a probationary period that allowed council to rescind the appointment before the end.

He said four months into that period, the use of compensatory time by Lear came to the attention of Sheehan. Mahaney said a March 2 letter from First Assistant Prosecutor Rob Johnson stated a criminal investigation would include a review of the actions of Sheehan.

The mayor said that contradicted statements made by the Prosecutor's Office since March 3.

Mahaney said the city has always tried

to cooperate with the prosecutor.

"However, there is tremendous difference and contradiction in what was in that March 2 letter to City Council and what was said by the prosecutor otherwise," he said.

He said council's decision was based on facts and not on any concerns that were created by the city attorney or anyone else.

MacLeod offered a timeline of events starting with July 10, 2014, when a letter was delivered to his office written by an attorney representing the Police Benevolent Association (PBA), the union that represents the city's police officers. He

See **Monzo**, Page A2

No oil leasing off N.J., but proposal still draws criticism

By **ERIC AVEDISSIAN**
Cape May Star and Wave

ATLANTIC CITY — The Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) held a public presentation at the Sheraton Hotel here on March 18 to present a federal plan for leasing areas off the coastal United States for oil drilling.

In January, the Obama Administration opened oil and gas drilling off the southeastern United States and sections of Alaska.

BOEM identified eight plan-

ning areas offshore for possible inclusion in the 2017-2022 Outer Continental Shelf Oil and Gas Leasing Program.

A lease sale is when BOEM transfers the right to explore and develop mineral resources in a designated area. The BOEM would review any requests under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) to ensure compliance with environmental laws and safety regulations.

The draft proposed program

See **Oil leasing**, Page A5



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