



HOUSE OF THE WEEK

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Freeholder on State of County: State should thank us for tax revenues

By KRISTEN KELLEHER
Cape May Star and Wave

OCEAN CITY – A U.S. Coast Guard Training Center, a burgeoning drone industry and a robust tourism industry are all found in Cape May County.

Freeholder Director Gerald Thornton discussed all of these things, as well as infrastructure, security, and the 2017 budget, on

Thursday, April 20, when he gave his annual State of the County address at a Cape May County Chamber of Commerce luncheon at the Port-O-Call Hotel in Ocean City.

Thornton opened with the numbers.

The 2017 county budget is \$146.3 million, he said, several million below 2016's \$151.2 million budget.

The \$5 million disparity came from an accounting change regarding mental health and hospital appropriations.

Thornton said the county used to send this funding to the state, and the money would be sent back to the county around June of each year to be appropriated.

Cape May County has the second lowest tax rate in the state, Thornton said, second to Cumber-

land County.

He said for about 17 or 18 years, Cape May County had the lowest tax rate.

The 2017 tax rate will be \$218 per \$100,000 of assessed value, Thornton said.

He said many of the county's labor contracts have not increased more than 2 percent.

Thirty-nine million dollars in grants and anticipated revenue

offset the budget. The amount to be raised by property taxes is \$106 million.

About \$20 million of the budget is state and federal funds for roads and bridges.

"We've got 210 miles of roads in the County of Cape May that we're responsible for and we've got 27 bridges," he said.

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City nixes outdoor seating fee

Charging per seat put the parking burden on hotels, bars, restaurants

By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY – City Council amended an ordinance to regulate temporary outdoor seating at bars, restaurants and hotels April 18 by removing a fee for each temporary outdoor seat that ranged from \$150 to \$300 per seat annually.

Instead, a \$25 surcharge would be placed on each mercantile license issued by the city for all businesses to bolster a parking trust fund. City Solicitor Frank Corrado said he revised the ordinance to address complaints from restaurant owners at a previous meeting.

Corrado said the revision "decoupled" the parking burden generated by all businesses in Cape May to just eating establishments.

"I'm suggesting that you can generate pretty much the same amount of money, maybe not quite as much but at least a sufficient amount money that will build up your parking fund by simply levying a \$25 surcharge on every mercantile license," he said.

The surcharge would not be implemented until 2018, Corrado said.

He said the ordinance would require establishments with outdoor seats to submit an outdoor seating plan to the city engineer, city solicitor and other city professionals. The ordinance requires a certain distance between seats, pedestrian passage and adherence to the city's noise regulations.

Corrado said the required seating plan portion of the ordinance would be implemented this summer, 20 days following approval of the ordinance by council.

"People would then be required to start coming in with seating plans immediately," he said.

Seating approved on the temporary outdoor seating plan would be subject to mercantile license fees, Corrado said.

"When they apply for their mercantile license, those seats will be counted as restaurant seats because that's what they are," he said.

Mayor Chuck Lear said applicants would pay a one-time application fee of \$250 and place \$500 in escrow until

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Jack Fichter/CAPE MAY STAR AND WAVE

E-1 Matthew Temple, of Coast Guard Aids to Navigation, instructed Mid Atlantic Center for the Arts and Humanities lighthouse keepers April 24 on the specifications of a new beacon installed earlier this year in the Cape May Lighthouse. Below, the light-changing mechanism.

Coast Guardsman explains new lighthouse beacon to keepers; this is the fourth system

By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave

LOWER TOWNSHIP – Over the years, the Cape May Lighthouse has had four lens and beacon systems starting with a first order Fresnel lens made in 1857 that currently is on display at the Museum of Cape May County.

In 1945, the huge lens was replaced with a DCB-36, a 36-inch rotating aero-beacon lens equipped with a 1,000-watt bulb. In 2002, a more modern system with two rotating beacons was installed known as a DCB-224. It failed last summer and was replaced with a temporary strobe light.

Last month, the Coast Guard installed a Vega VRB-25 rotating marine beacon, the most compact rotating system to ever light the Cape May Lighthouse.

Visitors to the lighthouse operated by Mid-Atlantic Center for the Arts and Humanities (MAC) often ask tour guides, referred to as lighthouse keepers, how the beacon operates.

On April 24, E1 Matthew Temple, of the Coast Guard's Cape May Aids to Navigation unit, instructed the keepers on the new beacon with some learning in a classroom and some climbing up to the lantern room at the very top of the lighthouse. Visitors are never permitted in the lantern room with its narrow catwalk. It offers an unparalleled view of Cape May Point and the ocean.



He said the Carlisle and Finch DCB-224 failed when seals broke, oil leaked and gears seized that turned the twin beacons.

"They don't make them anymore, they only repair them and they don't have any parts, they don't have any gears," Temple said.

The "new" VRB-25 beacon was manufactured in 1993 and has been updated.

"The new light is by far better than the old light," he said. "It covers the same distance, 24 nautical miles."

Temple said the VRB-25 was designed to operate from batteries but a power supply has been installed in the Cape May Lighthouse to convert power from 120 volts AC to 12 volts DC. The assembly contains six bulbs, when one fails, another bulb slides into place. It has replaced the

DCB-224's 1,000-watt bulb with a single 110-watt incandescent bulb, according to Temple.

He said the VRB-25 has six Fresnel lens panels that rotate continuously while the bulb stays in one position, producing a flash every 15 seconds, which identifies the Cape May Lighthouse. Temple said the light would only need to be serviced once a year as opposed to four times per year in the past.

It is necessary for a lighthouse beacon to spin continuously or sunlight shining through a lens could melt the lamp mechanism, he said. Temple provided a blanket to the MAC lighthouse keepers to cover the beacon in case it should ever stop rotating.

Temple said from a technical standpoint, the lighthouse could be replaced with a buoy.

"With radar, how well it's advanced and GPS, you almost don't need the buoys anymore," he said.

Temple said the consequences of failure of GPS and radar are great and lighthouses and buoys are still necessary. He said the Coast Guard did not have many lighthouse technicians. Training is held in Virginia for about seven Coast Guardsmen per year, Temple said.

"This has a fulfilling edge, the light is on when I'm done," he said. "We save lives differently, this light gets people home."

Big fee for LT vacant homes

Council wants to guarantee their upkeep, register them

By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave

VILLAS – Lower Township Council introduced an ordinance April 12 to require registration of vacant and abandoned structures and to impose a \$500 fee for that registration. Owners who do not maintain structures would also be subject to fines from \$100 to \$1,000.

The ordinance notes the township contains structures that are vacant and in many cases the owners of the structures neglect them, do not adequately maintain or secure them and do not take steps to restore them to public use.

"Vacant and abandoned structures harm the health, safety and general welfare of the community by diminishing property values and increasing the risk of fire, criminal activity and threats to the public health and the township incurs disproportionate costs to deal with the problems of vacant and abandoned structures..." states the ordinance.

According to the ordinance, the owner of any vacant property must within 30 days after the building becomes vacant or within 30 calendar days after assuming ownership of the vacant property, whichever is later; or within 10 calendar days of receipt of notice by the municipality, file a registration statement for such vacant property with the township clerk's office.

The registration statement would include the

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