

Panel: Change Lower's name to Cape May Township

By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave

VILLAS — What's in a name? Plenty, according to Lower Township's Economic Development Advisory Committee, which voted unanimously to recommend Lower Township research the possibility of changing its name to Cape May Township.

At a Dec. 15 Township Council meeting, Deputy Mayor Norris Clark, chairman of the committee, presented the final report of the advisory group, which is dissolving. The committee tasked with finding ways to improve the local economy was set up to cease operations after two years.

"We should consider researching the cost and the benefits of having a new name for Lower Township with a referendum," he said.

Ryan Krill, owner and co-founder of Cape May Brewery Co., said he supported investigating changing the name to Cape May Township "or something that kind of blends with the brand of Cape May." He said neighborhoods in New York City such as Soho and Tribeca were renamed to make them more appealing and add value.

Krill said when he moved here from West Chester, Pa., he was shocked to learn landmarks in the area that are

associated with Cape May are not located in Cape May. As examples, he cited The Lobster House, Lucky Bones restaurant, Cape May-Lewes Ferry, Cape May Winery, all located in Lower Township.

"Why are they not Lower Township Winery, Lower Township Brewery?" asked Krill. "It's because it really doesn't have the appeal and the brand that Cape May does."

Committee member Ernie Utsch said the names of Cape May County's townships were originally set up to reflect religious affiliations.

"They came up with Upper, Middle and Lower, some where the Methodists lived, some where the Quakers lived, some where the Presbyterians lived," Utsch said.

He said the names of the townships had no connotations attached to them at that time.

"They could have just as well been named 'Start,' 'Half Way' and 'Finished,' or 'First,' 'Second' and 'Third,' or 'Beginning,' 'Mid-Point' and 'End,'" Utsch said.

He said we live in a world today in which the name of a business may need to reflect its location. Utsch said a number of businesses in Lower Township use Cape May in their name because it "tells people how to get there."

"People don't know where Lower Township is," Utsch

said. "If you're not native to our area, it really doesn't have any meaning, it doesn't have any value."

The feeling of the committee was to adopt a name that would tell the people where the township is located without having to research it, he said. Utsch said it was up to the residents to make the choice of changing the name of the township.

Clark said business owners were willing to contribute financially to research a name change.

Mayor Michael Beck said a name change is a "big-ticket item," not something that could be accomplished overnight. He said he saw the point of changing the name of the township but also the point of those who stand on tradition.

"I personally feel we should allow this committee to look at it and then present some kind of a report as to what the options are," he said.

The township's future tax base, employment of young people and prosperity depends on economic development, Clark said.

Challenges that face Cape May County outlined by the committee: second-highest unemployment rate in the state, 16th out of 21 counties for median income, in the bottom half of children living in poverty and 18th of 21 counties for girls 10 to 19 years of age giving birth.

Clark said an improved economic base had to build on its natural assets: the beaches, the harbors, the ocean, great sunsets and things that attract visitors, combined with technology.



Jack Fichter/CAPE MAY STAR AND WAVE
Lower Township Deputy Mayor Norris Clark, left, listens as Economic Advisory Committee member Ernie Utsch explains why the panel thinks it is important to change the township's name.

"Our strength is leisure and tourism, we all know that," he said. "Then we have to remember that's followed by fishing, agriculture and then, of course, this is a wonderful place to retire and all of the health care programs that go with retirement are down here as well."

He said the only way jobs would grow for young people and wages increase was to "do something or make something people want." Clark said the township would have fewer people and higher taxes if it did not expand its ratables and the number of people who have jobs, can buy homes and

pay taxes. The committee gathered the smartest people it could find from all sectors of the economy and society, he said. Members of the committee included Councilman Erik Simonsen, former councilman Glenn Douglass, Curtis Bashaw, David Craig, Jay Spurl, Ernie Utsch, Keith Laudeman, Rick Weber, Mary Stewart, Daniel Cohen, John McNulty and Larry Hume.

"We couldn't think about economic development without thinking about the next generation," Clark said.

He said the technology that combines with the natural

assets to make an economy comes from the ingenuity of young people that are coming out of school. Clark said the township's educational institutions have to be supported and upheld.

The committee also focused on developing opportunities at the county airport.

Clark said the committee looked at Rutgers Aquaculture facility, which is growing oysters and horseshoe crabs. The oysters are transplanted into the bay and harvested, he said. With enough promotion, local oyster production could increase jobs from 10 to 100 workers, Clark said.

Dredging local harbors is essential and finding places to store the silt removed in the process is a continuing challenge.

Jeff Reichle, of Lund's Fisheries, said winter flounder are caught north of Cape May and very seldom seen here. He said Cape May Harbor and waters north of here are considered winter flounder essential habitat.

"We've been mapped as an area where winter flounder come and lay eggs during the winter, so therefore, we can't dredge during the winter," he said.

Reichle said recreational fisheries here are mostly summertime businesses, so marinas cannot be dredged when customers want to put their boats in slips.

"We're forced to do all these things during our high season, which is expensive," he said.

There is a lack of equipment to do all the dredging at the same time, Reichle said.

He said recreational and commercial fisheries are working together to get this area remapped to not be winter flounder essential habitat. Reichle asked council for a letter of support to the National Marine Fisheries Service.

Voters reject withdrawal

Continued from Page A1

successful in withdrawing from the regional school district, property taxes in the borough would increase by \$62,000 per year, or about \$550 annually on a \$400,000 home.

In Lower Township, Mayor Michael Beck told voters earlier in the month that if Cape May withdrew, the average homeowner would see an annual tax increase of \$427.

On the other side of the coin, at a Nov. 21 special meeting sponsored by the Taxpayers Association of Cape May, Deputy Mayor Jack Wichterman

said for every \$1 million the city saved toward the annual \$6.5 million it pays the Lower Cape May Regional School District, the average Cape May household would save \$179 per year in property taxes.

Following the balloting, Wichterman said he was "extremely encouraged" by the results.

"In the two elections, on both questions we received 70 percent affirmative votes, the election in November and this election," he said. "As far as I'm concerned, that's a mandate for the new council to continue this."

In January, Jerry Inderwies Jr., Bea Pessagno and Shaine Meier will take their seats on City Council. Wichterman and Councilman William Murray did not seek re-election.

Cape May initiated two ballot questions, one on whether the regional school-funding formula should be changed and the second on the with-

drawal. The next step is to take the matter to court, Wichterman said.

He said he is serving on the city's Finance Committee working on the 2015 municipal budget and that he favors earmarking \$75,000 for legal costs.

"Our next move is to go into the court system and get this ridiculous funding thing straightened out," he said. "Hopefully I'm going to stay involved in this facet of government, because although I won't be on council anymore, since I got this thing started, I'm hoping there's a way I can still participate with council on this and guide it along."

Wichterman said he would like to be permitted to attend closed sessions of council on the matter after he leaves office.

Beck said he was pleased with the election results.

"This should be game, set, match," he said. "I think it's time to mend fences and to work toward maintaining the quality education we have, to recognize that we are only feeding lawyers."

"This lawsuit has caused damage both financially and as far as the relationship between their council and our town," he continued.

Beck said Lower Township Council has no problem with the residents of Cape May but does have a concern with Cape May City Council because it caused the township to spend \$60,000 on legal bills and studies.

Beck said he wished to express his gratitude to West Cape May Commission and the Taxpayers Association of Lower Township for encouraging residents to cast a "no" vote on the ballot question and township residents for heeding the "clarion call" and going to the polls in inclement weather.

He said he hoped Cape May would recognize the "symbiotic relationship" with Lower Township.

"We're the people that feed their meters, that lay on their beaches during the summer, that bring their relatives over for dinner. We're the ones that work in their stores, work in their government," Beck said.

He said Cape May City Council needs to "declare a victory and let it go." Beck said it is an incorrect assumption that the school district would not be affected by Cape May withdrawing.

"If you take \$5 million out of the stream, the township cannot make that up. So you would see a dramatic increase in taxes, but at the same time you would see a lessening of the quality of education for these kids, and that cannot be tolerated," Beck said.

Lower Cape May Regional Superintendent Chris Kobik said 92 percent of voters apparently want Cape May to remain in the district.

"Let's get on with the business of educating kids," he said.

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**Annie PG 1:50, 4:30, 7:10, 9:45
**Exodus: Gods & Kings PG13 3:10, 6:55, 9:55
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