

Year-round rentals rare in Cape May housing market

By LYNN MARTENSTEIN
Special to the Star and Wave

CAPE MAY — Tracy Aungst received notice from her landlord last month that, effective May 15, he was raising the rent on her apartment \$400 a month and implementing a no-pets policy in advance of selling the property — an older home converted into four rental units.

Unfortunately for Aungst, she owns three cats so the edict seemed more like an eviction notice. Two of the property's other tenants, fellow pet-owners, must also find new digs or part with their pets.

Searching for a year-round rental in Cape May is not for the faint-hearted. Properties are scarce, competition is fierce and prices are starting to inch up beyond some renters' means.

"I really wanted to stay

on the island but I wasn't able to find anything year-round in my price range," said Aungst, whose family and job at Cape Resorts are in Cape May. "I ended up driving all around West Cape May, North Cape May, the Villas, Erma, Del Haven, Cape May Court House and Wildwood Crest, and hardly found anything. I finally found a place in Wildwood Crest."

"The year-round rental market in Cape May is non-existent," said Gail Wilsey-Morrison, real estate broker at Long & Foster. "People are always looking to rent in Cape May. They work here and, understandably, want to live here. The problem is real estate has become so valuable in this area that affordable year-round rentals just aren't available anymore."

Wilsey-Morrison estimates she gets one inquiry

a week from people interested in renting year-round locally.

"We take people's names and numbers just in case we get something but typically owners don't need our help with year-round rentals. Demand is so high they can rent them on their own," she said.

From the rental owners' perspective, the economics of renting short-term versus long-term highly favor shorter rentals.

"Owners can do just as well or better renting out their properties 10 weeks in summer than renting them year-round," said Chris Clemans, broker-owner at Chris Clemans Sotheby's International Realty. "Most are second-home owners who want to use the property in the off-season and recoup some of their costs."

The city of Cape May lists nearly 1,300 houses,

condos, apartments and duplexes as rental properties or "non-transient residential rentals" in its tax records, according to City Tax Assessor Lou Belasco. Hotels, motels and B&Bs are not included in the count.

"The vast majority of those 1,300 properties are seasonal rentals, meaning they rent for less than 12 months a year," he said. "That can be a week, month or entire season."

The size of Cape May's rental market has been fairly stable in recent years, Belasco explained.

"What we're seeing changing are the types of leases being offered. We get a lot more tourist-based rentals now. They're shorter stays, and they're replacing longer seasonal rentals," he said.

Belasco is a year-round renter himself, just not in

the city that employs him. With three young children, he had hoped to find a rental home close to his job, but not finding anything suitable, settled in North Wildwood.

Year-round rental properties are more plentiful inland, said Bill Bezaire, co-owner at Coldwell Banker Sol Needles.

"Home values inshore in the township, for example, aren't what they are on the barrier islands. Neither are owners' opportunities to do summer rentals. People don't rent off-shore in the summer — they want to be close to the water — so owners are going to do much better renting year-round than in summer," he said.

While a boon to the local economy, large employers on the island such as the U.S. Coast Guard put further pressure on year-round rental availability.

Between military housing on Delaware and Pennsylvania avenues and barracks on the base, Training Center Cape May provides living quarters for nearly 300 officers and enlisted men and women. Unfortunately, other personnel, such as those with larger families, must fend for themselves for long-term rentals.

"If their circumstances warrant it, some people are allowed to live 'on the economy' or away from the base," Chief Warrant Officer John Edwards said. "They're given 10 days of 'permissive' or house-hunting leave but otherwise they're on their own and have to rely on the same resources as everyone else looking to rent year-round."

"It's a challenge," Edwards said, speaking from experience. He rents in Mays Landing.

Beach paths

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to Fernwood and outfall pipe replacement at Washington Boulevard from Beach Drive to the outfall replaced in January 2013. Curb and handicap ramp improvements would be made on the east side of Beach Drive from Whittier to Emerson.

He said rumors and misleading information was being disseminated by individuals and organizations on the project. Conrad said plans for the project have been available for the public to review in the township clerk's office since May 2013. Not one person has reviewed the plans, he said.

"That means all the people and organizations that have been starting rumors or providing misleading information have not even bothered to look at or study the project they are opposing," Conrad said.

He said there are no amusement rides, piers,

parking lots, lifeguard stands, new lighting or commercial buildings in the project.

"The dunes are being strengthened and/or rebuilt in certain places," Conrad said. "This will allow the road to be repaired."

On the southern end of the project, where part of the dunes will be shifted from the east side to the west side, the township would possibly be looking at shifting the same dunes to keep them off the street where they are already encroaching without the sidewalk project.

Conrad said new crosswalks, signage and repairs would make the area safer for residents and visitors. The township has a CAFRA (Coastal Area Facilities Review Act) permit and the work was approved by the state Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) which offered suggestions on how to undertake a portion of the project, he said.

"DEP made sure the project was environmentally safe and friendly," Conrad said. "We are replanting native dune vegetation to restore any dunes disturbed and hopefully strengthen and further grow our dunes."

He said a lawsuit the township is exploring against the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) over V zones has nothing to do with the sidewalk project. Conrad said the project simply added an ADA (American with Disabilities Act) compliant sidewalk to a section of the township that during certain times of the year sees a large amount of pedestrian, bicycle and motor vehicles "attempting to share the same small road."

Conrad said the township was trying to mitigate the problem and reduce the chance of accidents and/or injuries from occurring. He noted the project also repaired Beach Drive, adding or repairing storm water



Jack Fichter/CAPE MAY STAR AND WAVE

The Lower Township Department of Public Works constructed 33 beach-access paths, including this one at Pinetree Drive in Villas, to improve access to the beach. Now some residents are complaining that they are causing sand to blow into the streets.

systems which would also help protect dunes from erosion.

"All this was to be done in a way as to not upset the natural beauty or affect the views of the bay, beaches and sunsets as much as possible and certain people are against it, I cannot figure why," Conrad said.

Two police chiefs have said the area is a safety hazard, he said. Conrad said the project would reduce the township's liabilities. The project is not on the beach or dunes but on the existing road and right of way, he said.

Township Manager Jim

Ridgway said some residents complained they did not receive written notice of the application for a CAFRA permit for the project. He said the CAFRA permit checklist states that individual notice to property owners, including easements located within 200 feet of the site, is not required at the time the application is submitted to the DEP. Ridgway said an ad was published in the Star and Wave to notify the public of the CAFRA application.

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20	3:14	3:55	9:33	9:38
21	4:15	4:53	10:26	10:40
22	5:12	5:45	11:17	11:37
23	6:04	6:33		12:04
24	6:54	7:20	12:31	12:50
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