

# Higher seawall may be biggest change in 2034 Cape May

By JACK FICHTER  
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY — In the year 2034, this National Historic Landmark city probably will not look a lot different than it does today, other than having a higher seawall, a recreation area on Lafayette Street and a longer Promenade.

Mayor Edward Mahaney said that in 20 years, the city should have completed the necessary infrastructure improvements to protect it from water invasion with a higher seawall in the eastern end of town, including the installation of a boardwalk and construction of a bulkhead at Delaware Avenue to protect the roadway, the city and the U.S. Coast Guard base.

"I would look at structures in the town as they're renovated, since we're built out, to be built at a higher elevation to sustain the city against the oncoming tides of storms," he said.

Mahaney said beach replenishment would continue until at least 2040.

"Those factors together should make us sustainable physically from storm damage to the maximum extent possible," Mahaney said.

In 20 years, Cape May still would be a tourist-related town economically, he said.

"What we have to continue to extend is that economic prong to have the tourism be on a four-season basis," he said.

Maintenance of the Coast Guard base will be essential. He said he believes the base will still be operating here in 20 years.

Mahaney said he expects the Coast Guard will develop higher-tech rescue boats and cutters that will draw less water, "so that the harbor, with its continuing silt factor, will not impede them to the point where they will have to close that base."

Mahaney said he sees the commercial fishing industry continuing to prosper as the third prong in the city's economy and also to be Cape May's industrial employer. He said he believes the amount of seafood consumed will increase, partially due to economic factors worldwide.

"We've been the one country where management of fish supplies has been the most effective so that we continue to have supplies of all the species and to maintain them and to grow them," Mahaney said.

He cited the development of Cape May Salt Oysters and Cape May being the home of scallops around the world.

With initiatives in the public and private sectors, Mahaney said Cape May could establish enough units of affordable housing to recruit and keep younger families in order to have a diversity of population.

He said another factor is to keep the city's workforce

housing in town to keep the economy going on a year-round basis.

"That hopefully puts enough children in school, along with the Coast Guard, that we continue to have an educational program here," he said.

Mahaney said within 20 years, there may be an agreement to consolidate Cape May City Elementary and West Cape May Elementary schools. He said the city and the community are working well together to use the Cape May City Elementary School building on a full-day and year-round basis.

Mahaney said with the installation of a new swimming pool and a new Lafayette Street park, Cape May Elementary could become a 21st century school that has living classrooms on the playing field.

A higher seawall may also change the makeup of buildings on the Promenade, which

was built after the 1962 storm, he said. Convention Hall will still be open in 2034, with some buildings around it that support its operations, he said.

The core of Cape May, with its numerous historic homes, is not likely to change, he said.

"The architecture of our town is the second-most-noted reason after the beaches for coming to Cape May," he said.

Mahaney said he does not believe the number of year-round residents will increase unless there is a change economically in the world economy that gives Cape May County an edge in a non-manufacturing type industry. The city will continue to maintain its value as a premier tourist destination, he said.

"I see the population hopefully maintaining its current level," Mahaney said. "Our major task will be to maintain the scope of the socio-economic classes we have now and not become a reclusive com-

munity for wealthy people."

He said that is an easy road to follow but it would undermine the ability of the town to function as a comprehensive full-service city on a year-round basis that is the key to Cape May's survival economically.

Mahaney said the city is able to provide all the necessary services on a year-round basis. He said that is tied to having an economy that functions year round and having a population that lives in Cape May year round.

That population must be large enough to sustain that while using the tourist dollars to actually provide those extra services. He said visitor revenue is needed on a 10-and-a-half-month basis.

In 2012, Cape May achieved Plan Endorsement status from the state, which included a 20-year vision plan that focuses on the economy, housing, education and zoning.

## Forecast 2034

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A smaller population dominated by senior citizens and fewer schools may be in the forecast.

According to Perniciaro, Atlantic Cape Community College vice president of planning, research, facilities and executive support, Cape May County will be affected by a shrinking number of jobs in Atlantic City and the focus of the county may need to be on retired people.

"We need to embrace retirement as an actual industry because people come with pensions and Social Security checks, and it's a way to import money," Perniciaro said. "We

just have to face it that's what's going to come."

He said he believes the county's population will level off at where there is enough retail and other businesses to serve the second-home owners, retired residents and keep up the tourism in the summer.

"I think there is still a little bit of population to lose," Perniciaro said. "I still see the grammar schools shrinking. That means there are no young people coming in."

The county will have fewer schools by 2034, both in shore towns and on the mainland, he said.

Perniciaro said the county would settle into a retirement

community with a tourist industry similar to the Eastern Shore of Maryland. He said tourism would continue to be active two to three months of the year, which would keep the population from collapsing.

A population in the low 90,000 range is likely, with retirees counterbalancing the lack of young people here.

In 20 years, the job market will be similar to what is available today, such as working at a Wawa market or in the medical field to support the senior population, Perniciaro said.

While retirees may dominate the county, they may not stay here for the rest of their lives. He said after age 75, a

number of retirees move to live closer to their children or relocate to Florida or South Carolina, where property taxes are lower.

"We have benefited from people who came here as kids and liked being here, and that will wear out over time," Perniciaro said.

He said the cost of living in the county keeps it from becoming a haven for low-income retirees. The county has a very high income level compared with surrounding counties due to the retiree population, he said. That may continue to be a trend.

"Flood insurance is going to make the islands more expen-

sive for folks to inhabit, so it will attract people with a little more money. There will probably be a little less housing, but it will be people that can afford the combined mortgage and flood insurance numbers which could get fairly high," he said.

Perniciaro said it would get more expensive to live at the shore.

"If anything, the people that will be here 20 years from now will be a wealthier group than the ones that are here," he said.

With fewer young people living in the county in the future, the tourism industry could become more dependent on foreign J-1 workers, he said.

The dream of planners and

local officials is to attract business that would bring year-round jobs to the county.

"Whatever that comes in, it's not going to be somebody that brings 1,000 employees," he said. "They are going to be small companies that do not have to be near their customers, they can be remote, they can work through the Internet and they have to be fairly well paid."

He said New Jersey does not bring in low-wage businesses because it's a union state and the cost of living here is high.

The county needs to construct a building at the county airport as an incubator for new businesses, he said.

## Lower Twp. expects more seniors, businesses at the airport by 2034

By JACK FICHTER  
Cape May Star and Wave

VILLAS — Fast-forwarding 20 years into the future, Mayor Michael Beck sees a stable senior population in Lower Township and a number of

small businesses operating from the county airport.

Beck said he suspects the township will see a slight reduction in population, as will the other towns in the county, over the next 10 years. He attributed that to the worsening

state of the casino industry.

"To use an old saying, 'If Atlantic City sneezes, we catch cold,'" he said. "We have a significant amount of people that work up there, and for younger people that might be an issue."

He noted declining casino business has affected ridership on the Cape May-Lewes Ferry.

Beck said he sees the township continuing to partner with the Delaware River and Bay Authority and county to develop small businesses that have a specialty at the county airport. Those businesses would fit in with the tourist industry, he said.

"You're not going to get Boeing to relocate here and build a plant," Beck said.

He said the area has a slew of issues that would prohibit a large company from relocating here.

The township can use methods to attract small businesses that may not hire hundreds of people but combined may amount to hundreds of jobs, Beck said.

He said there is a perception that it is not economically advantageous for a pensioner to move here since taxes are lower in Southern states. He said Philadelphia has seen a significant exodus of residents over the past 25 to 30 years, with some relocating to the county.

"There's just not the same numbers fleeing the city as their used to be," Beck said.

He said the goal of government is to create the right environment for small businesses to succeed while trying to keep the local tax rate as low

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