

Caper Tigers hoops teams head into Group II playoffs

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House of the Week

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MTRAC looks at shared services

Finds some deals cost the city more than it gets back

By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY — The city's Municipal Taxation and Revenue Advisory Committee (MTRAC) has been examining shared service agreements with West Cape May and Cape May Point for such items as police protection, municipal court and construction office services.

At a Feb. 6 City Council meeting, MTRAC member Martin Van Walsum said the committee was asked last year to examine the agreements and critique them for effectiveness in terms of how they are being administered and the efficiency in terms of replacement of the costs for the city.

Many of the city's agreements have been in effect for an extended period of time and predate the current city administration, he said. He said an agreement to provide municipal court for Cape May Point was signed in 2011. "These are not one-way, the municipalities that we provide services to benefit because it would not be cost effective for them to provide their own services and the city of Cape May benefits because it allows us to be able to have some of the cost to running these functions shared by the other municipalities," Van Walsum said.

He said MTRAC believes the current agreements are "fair or close to fair." Van Walsum said West Cape May and Cape May Point often have different requirements for the same services such as law enforcement.

A weak point of long shared service agreements is a changing economy and increased costs, he said.

Van Walsum said the city's

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Jack Fichter/CAPE MAY STAR AND WAVE

This entrance to Pond Creek from Delaware Bay will be cleared to help restore tidal flow as part of a \$37 million project to boost the local ecosystem through rehabilitation of the marsh, uplands and other wildlife habitat in the Higbee Beach Wildlife Management Area of Lower Township.

Restoring tidal flow

Higbee Beach project expected to cost \$37 million, provide public access to wildlife management area

By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave

VILLAS — A crowd filled Lower Township Hall on Feb. 8 for a meeting on the Higbee Beach Wildlife Management Area Tidal Marsh/Upland Restoration Project.

The \$37 million project is intended to restore tidal flow to the marsh, enhancing a degraded upland area and the existing wildlife habitat, as well as provide protection to freshwater resources and give an opportunity for the public to connect to those resources.

Dave Golden, assistant commissioner for the state Division of Fish and Wildlife, said the project area encompasses 260 acres of the 1,200-acre tract. Part of the property is the former magnesite factory site.

He said the backbone of the project is restoring tidal flow from the bay to Pond Creek.

"We are trying to restore this area to something that it once was," Golden said.

In 1910, tidal flow was cut off through a sand mining operation followed by the magnesite factory opening on the site 30 years later, he said. The project



Jack Fichter/CAPE MAY STAR AND WAVE

Matt Holthaus of WSP USA, project manager and engineer for the project, said the 'ghost tracks' would be disturbed only at Pond Creek and that section would be cut and stored for interpretive use in the future.

has been in the works for a very long time, Golden said, noting some earlier participants have retired from the agency.

He said the project was designed to give the public access to the site and to view the wildlife. Davey's Lake will be preserved as part of the project. Golden said the lake is inundat-

ed with saltwater during some storms. The lake is protected by a thin berm that will be reinforced during the project.

Matt Holthaus of WSP USA, project manager and engineer of record for the project, said he spent 10 years designing the

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CFO: City still owes \$3.5M. on hall bond

MTRAC urges city enact targeted tax

By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY — The city's Municipal Taxation and Revenue Advisory Committee (MTRAC) reported Feb. 8 that Cape May still owes \$3.5 million on a bond issued in 2013 for construction of Convention Hall.

Chief Financial Officer Kevin Hanie found an issue with the bonding, and MTRAC is suggesting the city add a 1 percent local tax to cover the debt.

MTRAC Chairman Dennis Crowley said the state ruled in 1947 that as a fourth-class city, Cape May has the right to add 1 percent on sales tax to various commodities such as drinks, accommodations, beach chairs and admissions to theaters and public performances.

He said that in 1982, the state ruled the tax could be enacted to pay for any deficiencies between operating expenses and anticipated operating revenues for a convention hall.

In 2011, the city created a tourism utility to operate Convention Hall and, to the extent available, transfer surplus funds to the current fund to contribute to the debt service of the building.

"That has never happened. No transfer of funds has ever been accomplished to cover that debt service," Crowley said.

The bond for Convention Hall issued in 2013 for \$10.7 million was attributed to construction of the hall.

"It was a general belief that bond has been paid off; it has not been paid off," he said. "It won't be paid off until the year 2027, so what's remaining in 2023 is the reality that we have about \$3.5 million that we still have to pay between principal and interest."

He said the debt is a good reason the city should be looking at the convention center clause of the state statute to raise the sales tax to cover the remaining costs.

"Given the fact that the city of Cape May has already committed to raising revenues to fund the operation of the hall and the debt

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LTPD calls for service drop more than 7 percent

Department achieves seven significant professional milestones in 2023

By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave

ERMA — The Lower Township Police Department answered more than 47,000 calls for service in 2023, according to its recently released annual report.

Chief Kevin Lewis stated in the report that the LTPD is comprised of 49 full-time dedicated sworn men and women, one Special Law Enforcement Officer (SLEO) Class II, three academy recruits and six civilian employees who provide administrative/logistical support as well as a

wide range of services to the community.

In 2023, the police department accomplished seven significant professional milestones:

- Underwent triennial re-accreditation on-site assessment and recommendation achieved

- Fully integrated Axon Fleet 3 MVR Automated License Plate Readers (ALPRs) with New Jersey Motor Vehicle Commission and NJ SNAP in each patrol vehicle

- Procured and fielded stationary ALPR units throughout the Township

- Procured and fielded Axon Taser 7s, replacing end of life X2 Tasers

- Promoted the first Deputy Police Chief

- Expanded Unmanned Aerial Systems (UAS) program, licensed multiple FAA certified pilots and attended/participated in an advanced UAS training program

- Purchased and implemented Axon Signal Sidearm and Auto-Tagging software and hardware

In 2023, the department answered 47,647 calls for service, down from 51,412 in 2022, or 7.3

percent. A total of 29,103 officer-initiated calls were answered, up from 28,086 the previous year.

Investigation reports completed by officers totaled 632, while supplemental investigations or follow up reports completed totaled 391.

Officers arrested 303 individuals. It should be noted that most times multiple charges are filed against a single individual. The numbers do not reflect a tabulation of multiple charges filed against an individual.

Thirty juvenile arrests were made, according to the report.

Indictable complaints sent by the Lower Township Police Department to the county Prosecutor's Office for 2023 totaled 175.

Of the calls for service: 1,884 medical calls, 111 fire calls, 358 animal complaints, 586 burglar, fire or medical alarm calls, 39 death investigations, 520 disorderly conduct incidents, 27 missing persons and runaways, 205 calls assisting other agencies, 29,717 residential and commercial property checks and 116 community policing calls.

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