



## Summer concert series returning to ferry terminal

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## House of the Week

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170th YEAR NO. 17 CAPE MAY, N.J. Serving America's National Historic Landmark City WEDNESDAY, APRIL 24, 2024 \$1.00

# Critic: City premature on police station contract

## Rauch argues Cape May does not hold title to the property and needs permits

By JACK FICHTER  
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY — City Council authorized architect Robert Conley to proceed on the remaining phases of a contract with the city for designing a \$5 million police station as he sees necessary for timely advancement of the project.

During public comment at an April 16 meeting, Jules Rauch, former president of the Taxpayers Association of Cape May,

questioned why council was advancing the project before all government approvals were received.

In September 2022, council voted 4-1 to approve a contract with Conley for initial design services for a police station with an amount not to exceed \$80,000. The city has not locked down a location for the facility.

City Council applied to the state Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) for a land swap to use 0.14 of acre

of Lafayette Street Park for the building. As compensation, Cape May proposes dedicating as parkland about 5 acres of city-owned land in the Sewell Tract.

Rauch said he supports the Cape May Police Department and its need for a new police station, asking if Jersey Central Power & Light (JCP&L) turned over a piece of land to the city located on a portion of the future site of Lafayette Street Park.

City solicitor Chris Gillin-Schwartz said that had not yet taken place. He said the city has the right to purchase the lots for \$1 upon the issuance of a letter from JCP&L stating they no longer need the property for remediation purposes, after all permitting has been resolved.

"They are still in the process along with the Housing Authority right now of effectuating that approval," he said.

The city fully intends to purchase the properties after a re-

lease for deed notices has been signed, according to Gillin-Schwartz.

City Manager Paul Dietrich said the first phase of the project was approved by the city's Historic Preservation Commission and forwarded to the state Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) for its approval.

He said the project approval for Conley to move forward was put on hold while details were

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# Robust revenue keeps taxes low for land owners

## Cape May funds 40% of budget with levy; county highest at 72%

By JACK FICHTER  
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY — While spending is up in the 2024 municipal budget, so is expected revenue in a city with relatively low dependence on property taxes to pay the bills.

At an April 11 Municipal Taxation and Revenue Advisory Committee (MTRAC) meeting, city CFO Kevin Hanie provided a summary of appropriations, revenues and surplus. He said at the start of the year, the city had \$14.6 million of surplus funds, of which \$5.9 million is being used in this year's municipal budget.

"This is a jump over the amount we used last year, \$4.1 million," Hanie said. "The biggest increase in that jump is about \$1.1 million that we are using at the moment to fund capital projects throughout the city, so that we don't have to go out to bond for them in the future. Instead we're just using cash on hand to pay for them because we can."

He said the city has regenerated about \$6 million in surplus for the past three years.

Revenue from fees and permits is anticipated to increase this year from \$240,000 to \$400,000, parking meter revenue is anticipated to jump from \$1.8 million to \$2 million, interest on investments increasing from \$60,000 to \$400,000 and occupancy tax anticipated to increase from \$2.6 million to \$3 million in the current fund portion of the budget, with additional funds going into the tourism utility.

Under appropriations, the city is budgeting about \$9 million for salaries and wages, an increase of \$600,000 over 2023, Hanie said, due to salary increases in labor union agreements, cost of living increases for non-union employees and the hiring of three new full-time employees and some additional seasonal workers for the Department of Public Works.

City Manager Paul Dietrich said a deputy city manager has also been added to the staff.

Hanie said operating expenses remain relatively flat, with an increase of \$160,000. He said the

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Jack Fichter/CAPE MAY STAR AND WAVE

## A cheering section

Volunteers from the Cape May County Coast Guard Community Foundation gather weekly at the corner of Pennsylvania and Pittsburgh avenues to offer congratulations to graduating recruits from Training Center Cape May as they drive by following their graduation ceremony. On April 19, volunteers waved, saluted and yelled congratulations to recruits from Delta 205 Company.

# HPC grants conceptual approval to LaMer expansion

By JACK FICHTER  
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY — The city's Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) granted conceptual approval for LaMer Beachfront Resort to construct a new wing for the hotel and a banquet facility.

In March, the commission approved demolition of the south wing of the hotel and an adjacent beach house but tabled conceptual approval of an application to build the additions, which would allow for banquet space and provide 51 modern hotel rooms.

The addition would have a 30-foot setback from New Jersey

Avenue. Two driveways would be removed and much of the former beach house space would become a garden and a landscaped buffer.

Two banquet rooms would each have a capacity of about 110 guests. The facility would primarily be used as a wedding venue, based on testimony from two previous hearings before the HPC. The banquet facility would not be used during the busy summer season.

At an April 15 HPC meeting, architect Bill McLees said after two previous meetings with the HPC, a newer design articulates the façade on both the hotel and

loading wing with the loading wing set back 20 feet farther and the banquet space set back 75 feet from the property line.

The last section of the new wing now steps down toward New Jersey Avenue, he said, approaching the dimensions and proportions of the beach house currently on the property using decks, sliding door and columns with bracketing. In a loading area, an overhead door was split into two doors with a carriage house look and a pent roof over the doors.

McLees said he listened to the HPC's concerns with massing and streetscape. The design uses

shutters where possible and an additional pent roof. A cantilevered sliding gate with a trellis above would be located in front of the loading area doors to provide an additional buffer for the street, he said.

The applicant is proposing a 30-inch-high iron picket fence through the landscape buffer. Any trees removed would be replaced with mature trees, McLees said, adding he believes the design reinforces the streetscape pattern that exists on the block.

A buffer of trees along New Jersey Avenue would undulate from 10 feet to 30 feet deep.

HPC Commissioner Jim Testa said it is difficult to keep landscaping alive in a salty environment on the beach block and the trees that have survived along New Jersey Avenue are mainly non-deciduous. McLees said the landscaping plan includes both evergreens and deciduous trees.

"I don't want to have a situation where we find that this is an acceptable landscaping plan and then five years from now, it's not," Testa said.

There is an obligation to maintain the landscaping plan for two years, said Keith Davis, attorney

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## SPRING FARM-TO-TABLE DINNERS

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