

# Cape May Star and Wave

154th YEAR NO. 14 CAPE MAY, N.J. SERVING AMERICA'S NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK CITY THURSDAY, APRIL 10, 2008

50¢

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HIGH	LOW	am	pm
am	pm	am	pm
4/10 12:10	6:00	5:53	
4/11 12:33	1:15	7:03	6:57
4/12 1:40	2:28	8:11	8:08
4/13 2:52	3:41	9:18	9:20
4/14 4:03	4:48	10:21	10:29
4/15 5:06	5:45	11:16	11:29
4/16 6:00	6:33		12:05

**LT council agrees to take another look at budget**

By CHRISTOPHER SOUTH  
Cape May Star and Wave

VILLAS - After a public hearing, Monday, on the 2008 municipal budget, Lower Township Council agreed to go back and see what could be cut from the \$23.3 million budget.

The township's auditor Leon Costello gave a brief presentation on the township budget, which calls for a 2.5-cent increase in the tax rate. He said most municipalities in Cape May County are seeing at least a 3-cent tax increase, with some municipalities going up by 5 or 6 cents.

Costello said the increase was predictable, given the pension costs that have been building from zero to \$1 million dollars. He said there are also normal salary increases, healthcare costs, utility increases; but the township is also experiencing a reduction in state aid. He said the township is losing \$120,000 in state aid that was in the 2007 budget. Council had to pass an amendment, Monday night to reflect the elimination of state aid.

But members of the public, including Lower Township Taxpayers Association members, told township council they wanted to see more cuts in township spending.

"There seems to be so much movement and confusion in this (budget)," Ed Butler said. "There is a problem."

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## Convention Hall fails inspection: Sign reads 'closed'

Shut down leaves groups scrambling for new venues

By CHRISTOPHER SOUTH  
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY - City manager Lou Corea said he didn't think there would be enough information before next week to say whether the city would repair Convention Hall in order to be able to use it through the tourist season.

Last Friday, April 4, city officials made the decision to close Convention Hall to the public on the recommendation of an engineering firm hired to perform a structural analysis.

Pennoni Associates Inc., of Bethlehem, Pa., performed the analysis and found the building to be structurally unsound.

"Due to the amount of deterioration observed, the structural integrity of the floor framing is severely compromised. It is our professional

opinion that this building be closed to public use until repairs can be performed..." the report says.

"We are still getting information," Corea said. "We're going to get estimates from firms for remediation, but not much before next week."

Corea said the firms would come up with estimates regarding probability, cost and time frames.

"Probability of being able to do what is required to make safe it safe enough to open," he said. "That would involve shoring up the entire bottom of the building."

Corea said although the city has been regularly monitoring the condition of Convention Hall, it was a bit of a surprise to learn it had deteriorated so much in the past year.

"We were told it had another year or two before significant remediation had to be done. But as part of our due diligence, we had an inspection done again and there was significantly more deterioration," he said. "It's not in the public safety realm to keep it open."

Last year the city reinforced a portion of the building, putting an additional I-

beam under Convention Hall for floor support. In 2006 there was a different I-beam added and some shoring up.

Corea said 25 or 30 years of salt water running up under Convention Hall has taken its toll on the substructure of the building. Beach replenishment eliminated that problem, but the salt has already had an effect on the concrete.

Convention Hall was shut down once in 1992 when it was found the piers were corroding. Corea said excavation was done around the footings, sleeves put in and concrete poured to shore up the footings. He said any mitigation work to reopen Convention Hall for the short term

depends on if it is economically feasible.

"If it costs half a million it's improbable the city would go forward," he said. "It's unlikely we would want to spend a lot for five to seven months use."

Corea said city council had reconsidered delaying the demolition of Convention Hall until December 2009.

Corea said there has been no discussion of a range of spending city council would consider for repairing Convention Hall, and he is fairly certain no work would happen before the end of May, meaning all use of the building is prohibited for the foreseeable future. Corea

said the city was advising individuals and groups Convention Hall was not available and was trying to recommend alternate venues, such as the schools or the Kiwanis hall, which that organization has offered to rent. He said the Jazz Festival events scheduled for Convention Hall have been moved to the auditorium at Lower Cape May Regional High School.

In the meantime, the city is refunding lease payments for Convention Hall.

Corea dispensed with rumors saying the state had come in a shut down

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Jennifer Kopp/Cape May Star and Wave

### Convention Fall

After engineering firm Pennoni Associates, Inc. performed a structural analysis of Convention Hall, deeming it structurally unsound, the City of Cape May closed the building. The functions listed on the marquee, at left, have all been cancelled.

## Van Drew's abandoned boat bill passes Senate

By CHRISTOPHER SOUTH  
Cape May Star and Wave

TRENTON - Abandoned boats were being removed from Cape May Harbor two days after legislation sponsored by Sen. Jeff Van Drew, authorizing their impound, passed the New Jersey Senate.

On Monday, Senate Bill S-1390, passed the Senate 37-0, which would give municipalities the authority to impound abandoned ships, boats or other watercraft.

The timing of the cleanup of Cape May Harbor was not related to the passage of S-1390 by the Senate. SeaTow owner Phil Risko said in January plans were being made to remove abandoned vessels from Cape May Harbor in preparation for Harborfest, which is going to be held the third weekend of June.

The Van Drew bill amends existing current law to prohibit anyone from abandoning a vessel on any municipal waterway or upon any municipally owned land. The owner of the abandoned vessel would have to pay the cost of the impound, including the cost of raising, recovering, towing, removal, storage, destruction and disposal of the vessel. The owner would also be liable for a civil penalty of not more than \$1,000 for each day the violation continues.

Costello said the increase was predictable, given the pension costs that have been building from zero to \$1 million dollars. He said there are also normal salary increases, healthcare costs, utility increases; but the township is also experiencing a reduction in state aid. He said the township is losing \$120,000 in state aid that was in the 2007 budget. Council had to pass an amendment, Monday night to reflect the elimination of state aid.

But members of the public, including Lower Township Taxpayers Association members, told township council they wanted to see more cuts in township spending.

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By CHRISTOPHER SOUTH  
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY - It's high noon. And a lone, feral cat meanders through the dunes near the piping plover nesting area, thinking about a snack. The cat notices a strange-looking contraption and decides to investigate. Inside there is something that smells like it could be a quick meal, so the cat steps inside and "SNAP!" the door closes behind him.

A short time later, a tall man with a brush moustache saunters up, stops and goes down on one knee beside the live trap.

Sorantino said summons for code violations have been

hazards. Previous bills have been introduced by expired with the end of legislative sessions.

"Starting with this new legislative session, this year's (bill) has moved at lightening speed. In three months we got it through the Senate, and we will try to get it as rapidly through the Assembly," Van Drew said. "It was one of our goals for this year, and I believe it will get done."

Van Drew said there had been some difficulty getting an abandoned boats bill passed on the Senate side in the past, but he is now sitting on the Transportation Committee and he thinks that has helped.

"I've been working with the chairman, the Attorney General and the Administrative Office of the Courts to make sure it was done legally and appropriately," Van Drew said.

Van Drew expects the companion bill to pass through the Assembly.

"We got it through once. I don't see why we couldn't get it through again," he said.

Currently there is no law against abandoning vessels in public waters or on public lands, but abandoned and sunken vessels have been a growing problem for coastal communities. Van Drew said these boats are not only an eyesore, but are a source of pollution and are navigational

hazards. Previously there has been no way for municipalities or the U.S. Coast Guard to recover the costs of removing an abandoned vessel. Often these boats were left alone unless they posed an environmental hazard. Holding owners accountable for recovering and towing their abandoned boats would make it financially viable for shore communities to remove these

vessels.

Other elements of the new legislation include:

- The bill would authorize a municipality or harbor com

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Jennifer Kopp/Cape May Star and Wave  
The first of the three abandoned boats in Cape May Harbor was removed Wednesday morning by Sea Tow. As of press time, the second boat, located near the Corinthian Yacht Club of Cape May, was being lifted out of the water after sinking three years ago.

## Hey cats! Watch out, there's a new sheriff in town

trapped feral cat. "Yer busted."

Policing feral cats is now under the jurisdiction of the police department, since Cape May City Council decided to move animal control and code enforcement to that department.

Police Chief Diane Sorantino said those offices have not gone away, but the three employees are now civilian employees of the police department.

However, Sorantino, people can now call the Cape May Police Department non-emergency line at 609-884-9500 to report code violations or animal control problems.

Sorantino said summonses for code violations have been

on the rise since the animal control and code enforcement offices were under the authority of the police department. Sorantino said the number of warnings and summonses have doubled or tripled from this time last year.

Sorantino said she wants residents to know the Police Department is handling animal control and code enforcement duties, and citizens should call the police to report violations. She said the three civilian employees can issue summonses with the authority of court.

Technically, the civilian employees write the summonses, which are then sworn to by the court administrator, who is the issuing authority on the summonses.

Cape May City Council made the change by ordinance on Feb. 19, with an effective date of March 10.

Sorantino said she was told there needed to be more consistent enforcement of city codes, and council thought it would be better suited to place code enforcement under police control.

Sorantino said she wants residents to know the Police Department is handling animal control and code enforcement duties, and citizens should call the police to report violations. She said the three civilian employees can issue summonses with the authority of court.

"They had the authority to enforce code violations, but they were normally overlooked because it wasn't their job. Now that won't happen," she said.

Sorantino said people could expect more uniform enforcement, lacking the past, in areas like regulating contractors, checking building permits, regulating landscapers and vendors.

"It's going to be a little tighter on the mall, regulating trash, and so forth; when recyclables can be put out, when trash can be put out for pick up," Sorantino said.

Sorantino said the police department is also the place to call for animal control - including the policing of feral cats.

"We have to comply with the beach management plan," she said.

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