



City to phase out coin-operated parking meters

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House of the Week

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170th YEAR NO. 15 CAPE MAY, N.J. Serving America's National Historic Landmark City WEDNESDAY, APRIL 10, 2024 \$1.00

Cape May plans major Promenade upgrades

City to repair surface, widen parts and add ADA ramps with \$6.7 million grant

'The thought would be to have phase one designed over the summertime and to have construction maybe over two seasons, phase 1A in the fall/winter upcoming and then the second one during the 2025-25 winter season.'

—Paul Dietrich,
Cape May City Manager

By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY — City Council has accepted a \$6.7 million state Boardwalk Preservation Grant, a byproduct of the federal American Rescue Plan, for repairing and rehabilitating the city's beachfront Promenade and adding Americans with Disabilities-compliant ramps where steps only exist. At an April 2 City Council meeting, City Manager Paul

Dietrich discussed how the city would prioritize spending the grant. He said the funding would be used to preserve the existing Promenade, not construct the proposed seawall expansion at the east end, which is tied to a \$25 million Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) grant. The grant covers the existing Promenade from just east of Madison Avenue to the cove pavilion. Dietrich said an assessment from Colliers Engi-

neering covered each of the access point locations, graded each for overall condition and looked at ADA access. "If you really look, some of the grades were overall 'A' to 'B' but some of the condition areas were 'Ds' or an 'F' for failing just based on the condition and cracking," Dietrich said. The Promenade at Madison Avenue, Howard Street and Queen Street earned a grade of "D." Queen Street offers no

ADA access and has deterioration of the revetment wall. "Congress Street has an overall 'C' where the ADA access was good but has some deterioration along some of the other areas of the concrete," Dietrich said. The assessment grades all the access points. "There is a lot of work that needs to be done," Dietrich

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Jack Fichter/CAPE MAY STAR AND WAVE

Members of the clergy offer prayers during the Blessing of the Waters ceremony April 6 at the Fisherman's Memorial on Cape May Harbor. Below, Kevin Vrieze blows a conch shell in a Hawaiian/Polynesian water blessing.

Blessing of the Waters in Cape May

Somber ceremony honors fishermen lost at sea



By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY — A crowd gathered April 6 on a rare sunny day of late at the Fisherman's Memorial to remember those who lost their lives at sea in the commercial fishing industry.

The ceremony was led by Cape May Star and Wave columnist Mark Allen next to a memorial statue of a woman and her children looking out to sea for a lost family member and a wall of names of lost fishermen.

Kevin Vrieze blew a conch shell for a Hawaiian/Polynesian water blessing accompanied by a Native American melody played on flute by Joseph Oliver.

Allen said the ceremony started in 2008 as part of the former Harborfest celebration. He noted six fishermen from Cape May lost their

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Firms gathering data for beach safety study

By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY — Cape May hired coastal engineering firms to examine the problem of the sharp drop-off on the beaches that has caused injuries to some swimmers and to find a solution.

At a March 25 meeting of the Beach Safety Committee, Junetta Dix, environmental director of ACT Engineers, said there was a history of permits

over the years received from the Army Corps of Engineers as well as beach profile information compiled by the Stockton University Coastal Research Center.

"We're shaking loose that data, compiling it into a data base. We can at least attempt to see trends and the beach profiles," Dix said.

ACT then will present that information in draft form and then get more input from the city delivering a re-

port that will summarize and propose some recommendations on what, if anything, can be done to improve the beach profile.

"Our understanding is it's dangerous, it's a pretty sharp drop-off unlike other profiles up and down the Jersey shore," she said.

Taylor Engineering is also working

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City introduces budget with no hike in tax rate

By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY — City Council introduced its 2024 municipal budget April 2 with no tax increase for the fifth consecutive year. The local purpose tax rate will remain 36.1 cents per \$100 of assessed value.

Current fund appropriations total \$26.8 million. The city has more than \$14 million in its surplus account, with \$5.9 million being applied to the 2024 budget. Almost \$1.1 million is dedicated to help pay for future capital projects.

Auditor Leon Costello, of Ford, Scott and Associates, said the budget was well within the state levy cap and spending cap.

"You actually could raise \$4.8 million more in taxes if you wanted to, but I know you don't want to," he said. "There's no gimmicks in here, there's no one time revenues, there's nothing in here that's out of the ordinary; it's a straight-up budget. It provides for ev-

everything that you've been accustomed to: all three utilities are in balance, all three utilities have adequate fund balances."

"The property values went up \$35 million this year, a sizable increase for Cape May that helps with no tax increase, obviously. Your fund balance went up and we used a lot of that fund balance for debt service to pay off and fund projects that were previously unfunded, so that when those projects go away, the revenue does not have to be there," Costello said.

A public hearing for the budget is scheduled for May 5. The city is allowed to self-examine its budget this year rather than submit it for state approval, he said.

Costello complimented Chief Financial Officer Kevin Hanie for his work.

Deputy Mayor Lorraine Baldwin said all members of council met with Hanie and City Manager Paul Dietrich to discuss the budget.

Lower Twp. OKs budget with zero tax rate increase

By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave

VILLAS — Lower Township Council approved its 2024 municipal budget with no tax increase.

At an April 1 meeting, auditor Leon Costello, of Ford, Scott and Associates, said the township was so far under both the legal levy cap and the legal spending cap that it is "amazing." He said the township is in great financial shape.

The proposed 2024 tax levy is \$23,092,558, up \$71,207 from \$23,021,351, was attributed to rising health insurance costs.

The township completed 2023 with a surplus of \$9.7 million, the highest in

township history. The surplus increase is largely due to new revenues generated through occupancy taxes and interest earnings.

The tax collection rate for 2023 was 99.06 percent, which helped add more than \$1.4 million to the surplus. All other revenue collections exceeded projections and brought in an additional \$1.4 million.

The budget uses \$4.8 million from the surplus fund to keep the tax rate level.

"We're still dealing with inflation out there," Mayor Frank Sippel said. "For us to come in with a zero percent increase with no tax increase is remarkable."

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