



Girls lacrosse upsets Middle for historic win

Page B4



House of the week

B1



167th YEAR NO. 19 CAPE MAY, N.J. Serving America's National Historic Landmark City WEDNESDAY, MAY 12, 2021 \$1.00

Tax board says city turning into rental business

Points out loss of revenue under 2 percent room tax

By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY — Is the city a residential community or a big rental home business place?

Municipal Revenue and Taxation Advisory Committee (MTRAC) Chairman Dennis Crowley told City Council during a meeting May 5 that lasted just minutes short of four hours that Cape May is one large business.

"Lots of people live here but it is comprehensively a business," he said.

Crowley said the job of MTRAC is to look at revenue and needs and to identify places in which revenue can be increased to make city services better for all.

Data from the state Division of Taxation shows that Cape May had 507 businesses in 2019, generating \$17 million in state sales tax.

Crowley said none of that money stayed in Cape May. The gross receipts on which the sales tax was based was \$266 million, he said.

The city has 350 commercial ratables in its tax records and 377 commercial mercantile licenses. The city has 3,400 residential ratables, of which 464 received mercantile licenses to rent their properties, according to Crowley.

He said the master plan indicates that Cape May's average population is 46,400 persons during the tourist season.

"The population we need

'The previous three administrations didn't do it; I don't know why, and we don't know why, and I don't think we should spend a lot of time trying to figure out why. It's not going to keep people from coming to Cape May.'

—Dennis Crowley, chairman, Municipal Taxation and Revenue Advisory Committee

to serve is actually 46,000 people," Crowley said.

He said Cape May has a new identity.

"The fact of the matter is the commercial enterprise of Cape May is now subsuming larger and larger parts of our residential housing stock," he said. "It's become in effect a rental industry."

MTRAC has checked tax records and cross-referenced owners with the addresses and found that only 612 persons who own a house here live in the house, he said.

The city issued 464 rental mercantile licenses, leaving an unknown number of 2,379 residential ratables for which it is unknown how the homes are being used,

See Tax board, Page A2

City elementary adopts a budget with no tax hike

By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY — The city's elementary school approved its 2021-22 budget with no increase in the local purpose tax rate.

The school's tax levy totals \$1.8 million. The 2020-1 local tax rate was 6.1 cents per \$100 of assessed value. That drops to 5.8 cents per \$100 of assessed value for the 2021-2022 school year.

Business Administrator John Thomas said the tax rate went down because Cape May's ratables increased.

Enrollment in October 2020 was 125 students. Enrollment for October 2021 is projected to be 140 students.

State aid is down by \$62,727 with adjustment

aid falling \$115,235. A law passed in 2018 modifies school funding to eliminate adjustment aid and state aid growth limits and allows adjustments to tax levy growth limitation for certain school districts.

The school is anticipating receiving \$292,000 in federal COVID aid known as the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ESSER).

Expenditures for Cape May City Elementary School are 43 percent for instruction, 23 percent for benefits, 15 percent for facilities, 8 percent for administration and 6 percent for special education.

Instruction expense, which includes teacher sala-

See Elementary, Page A3



Jack Fichter/CAPE MAY STAR AND WAVE

Cape May's 1928 LaFrance firetruck has been restored and is about to be returned to the city, but the fire museum lacks the climate control and security needed for the vintage vehicle to be put on display. Plans call for the museum to be part of a new fire station but that likely will take as long as two years to complete.

Cape May's antique firetruck needs climate-controlled, secure location

By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY — When the city's 1928 LaFrance firetruck returns to the fire museum following an expensive restoration process, it will be returning to a building without climate control, a security system or smoke and fire detectors.

Jim Matthews, president of the Cape May Fire Department, told City Council on May 4 that the fire museum must be upgraded to protect the truck. He said he informed City Manager Mike Voll the restoration of the truck has been completed and it soon will be returned to the city.

"The fire department is putting approximately \$100,000 of money we've raised into that truck to restore

it," Matthews said. "That truck has never been anywhere else but the city of Cape May."

He said the fire museum was an issue in the last election.

Matthews said the front and back doors of the museum need to be replaced and the museum lacks heating and air conditioning, a security system, smoke or fire detectors and fire sprinkler system.

Soffit areas have rotted and the building needs regular maintenance and painting, Matthews said, adding that the past three administrations have ignored the museum.

Mayor Zack Mullock said City Council would support repairing the museum building in conjunction with construction of the new fire station.

"When this truck comes back, there needs to be an enclosure put around

it so that people can't touch this vehicle, whether it is tempered glass, plexiglass, something. It needs to be somewhat secure," Matthews said, adding that whatever work is done to the building must be done in such a manner as not to detract from the museum.

Therefore, he said, an HVAC system would need to be installed in the loft and not hung on an exterior wall.

Mullock said the city is exploring the possibility of sharing the air conditioning system from the new fire station when it is built.

Matthews said it would take as long as two years to complete the new fire station and the museum needs to be ready for the firetruck when it comes back this summer.

See Firetruck, Page A2

Bids sought for public transportation

Sheehan argues RFP too restrictive, wants items removed

By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY — The city is seeking bids to provide summer jitney service in open-air vehicles.

During a meeting May 4, City Council authorized competitive contracting to provide tourist transportation services until the end of the year by issuing a request for proposals (RFP).

Cost, experience, availability, compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act and environmental impact will all factor into the RFP.

Deputy Mayor Stacy Sheehan said the RFP is the same one used in the past and is too restrictive. "I think we want to open



Jack Fichter/CAPE MAY STAR AND WAVE

The Atlantic City Jitney Association provided vehicles that transported 50,000 people in summer 2019.

it up so we have more bids and not just one," she said. Sheehan questioned an

item in the RFP stating the transportation company must use green energy for

its vehicles and the bidders must be nonprofit entities.

City solicitor Chris Gillin-Schwartz said the RFP is only a draft that reflects the previous request for proposals that was geared toward jitneys.

"Obviously, since then we've had COVID-19 and maybe the thought would be that we want to open it up to more outdoor-oriented vehicles," he said.

Sheehan said the last time the city put out an RFP for transportation services, it received only one bid due to strict requirements. She suggested removing the requirement for zero emissions, vehicles powered by green technology

See Bids, Page A5

YOUR CONNECTION TO Sports Medicine AND Primary Care



Dr. Steven Cetel, DO, is Board Certified in Sports Medicine and Internal Medicine. He is now accepting new patients to its Margate and Northfield offices. In addition to primary care, Dr. Cetel is trained in diagnostic musculoskeletal ultrasound, as well as pain relief injections, osteoporosis management, and fracture management.

To schedule an appointment with Dr. Cetel, contact Shore Physicians Group's Margate office at 609-822-4800 or Northfield office at 609-365-5300 or visit shorephysiciansgroup.com

SHORE PHYSICIANS GROUP™
be well CONNECTED