



## Cape May Point wary of DEP flood zone rules

Page A3



## House of the Week

B1



170th YEAR NO. 30 CAPE MAY, N.J. Serving America's National Historic Landmark City WEDNESDAY, JULY 24, 2024 \$1.00



Jerry Meyers/Special to the STAR AND WAVE

### Porpoises at play

Dolphins frolic in the ocean last week off Wildwood Crest.

## Lightning damages City Hall systems

By JACK FICHTER  
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY — Lightning struck City Hall about 8:20 a.m. July 12, shearing off a VHF radio antenna on a mast and sending a surge through the building that forced City Hall to close for the day.

City Manager Paul Dietrich said the actual lightning strike may have been on the center of Ocean Street. A surge followed a microwave network antenna cable into City Hall,

he said.

"When it entered City Hall, it blew off the plate," Dietrich said.

City Hall was also struck by lightning in July 2021, destroying the police department's radio dispatching equipment. Following the incident, the city signed a contract with the county to provide 911 dispatching services and the city installed uninterruptible power supplies on most of its computers, he said.

At a July 17 council

meeting, several destroyed computers and uninterruptible power supplies were displayed on the auditorium's stage apron.

Dietrich said the lightning surge traveled through City Hall's networking system and destroyed network cards in computers and disrupted the phone system.

A coaxial cable in Dietrich's office was not attached to any device and it discharged and seared the wall. City Hall reopened July 15 with some staff us-

ing laptops connected to Wi-Fi.

The Department of Public Works called eight vendors to inspect wiring, a generator, HVAC and the alarm system. An inspector from the city's insurance carrier, the Atlantic County Joint Insurance Fund (JIF), was on site July 12, he said.

The city made emergency purchases of computers and arranged overnight delivery, Dietrich said.

See **Lightning**, Page A3

## DEP proposal would expand flood zones to 67% of Lower

By JACK FICHTER  
Cape May Star and Wave

VILLAS — Lower Township has a total land area of 17,184 acres, about 7,000 acres of which will be inundated by water by the year 2100.

That equates to 40% of land in the township, according to a panel from Rutgers University. The state wishes to address such challenges with proposed stricter regulations of flood zones and first-floor building heights.

Environmental planner Peter Lomax, of the Lomax Consulting Group, presented an hour of charts and maps to Lower Township Council and the public at a July 15 council meeting. He said proposed rule changes from the state Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) fill a 1,000-page report.

"People who live and work in the coastal zone and rely on the coastal zone for their livelihood need to be aware of this regulation," Lomax said.

He said the township currently has 7,253 acres in the flood zone, which under proposed regulations would increase to 11,546 acres, putting 67% of the township in the flood zone, an increase of about 25%.

New stricter regulations proposed by the DEP to combat expected sea level rise would require homes to be built higher. In addition, some residents may

find their homes that were not previously in a flood zone given that designation.

Gov. Phil Murphy and DEP Commissioner Shawn M. LaTourette stated the intent was to modernize a suite of DEP regulations to better protect New Jersey communities from coastal flooding, sea-level rise and other public health and safety risks that are increasing due to climate change.

Lomax said the proposed rules update existing ones, infusing those standards into other pieces of regulation.

"DEP has gone through a process of evaluating its regulations, evaluating existing technical and climate science information to go through a process to arrive at this rule proposal, which is the Resilient Environment and Landscapes rule with the acronym REAL," Lomax said.

He said the state's intent is to begin to adapt how residents live, work and have means of transportation in the coastal zone amid the ongoing threat of sea level rise and climate change. Lomax said he was not a climate scientist.

The proposed regulations are scheduled to be published in the New Jersey Register in August. That would be followed by a 90-day public comment period including three pub-

DEP proposal, Page A2

## AME Church restoration will not include old pews

Residents question fund source, historical significance of effort

By JACK FICHTER  
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY — Will the pews removed from the city-owned Allen AME Church be reinstalled as part of its restoration? Former councilwoman Stacy Sheehan posed that question to City Council on July 16.

"I think we all wanted the restoration of the church to reflect the church of its time," she said.

City Manager Paul Dietrich said the pews would not be returned to the church at this time.

"So, we're restoring the church but not really as a church?" she asked.

"Correct," Dietrich replied.

Resident Jules Rauch said he supported the restoration of the AME Church and he wanted to

see it restored as closely as possible to the original intent of the building.

Council approved making application to the National Park Service's African American Civil Rights Grants Program, which makes funding available from \$75,000 to \$750,000 for preservation projects for historic sites.

Rauch asked how the city would use the funds.

Dietrich said the city is still evaluating the final grant application. Rauch asked why the pews were not being reinstalled.

"It's just not part of the adaptive reuse for the project that we're anticipating needing them," Dietrich replied.

The pews were a historic part of the AME Church, Rauch said.

Mayor Zack Mullock said the topic has been dis-



Jack Fichter/CAPE MAY STAR AND WAVE

The pews will not be returned to the Allen AME Church when its restoration is complete. East Lynne Theater Company plans to convert the building into a theater.

cussed at multiple council meetings. He said what was most important was preserving the building and ensuring "it doesn't fall to the ground."

"The building needs to have some flexibility," Mullock said. "We've heard from multiple people they want it to be a community

center, they want it to be a museum, they want it to be a theater. We can do all those things, and that is the plan, but you can't have inflexibility in your seating and a good theater has to have good seating."

AME Church, Page A8

## Digital tax map sign revaluation in works

By JACK FICHTER  
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY — City Council approved a special emergency appropriation of \$250,000 for preparation of an approved digital tax map in anticipation of a revaluation of properties.

At a July 2 meeting, City Manager Paul Dietrich said any time a municipality has been ordered to conduct a revaluation, the state Division of Taxation requires a town, if they have not already done so, to upgrade their tax map to a digital format.

"Some towns have already started that process, but a lot of towns wait until they're ordered to do the revaluation," he said, noting they anticipate a revaluation within the next year.

"In anticipation of having that map ready, when the order does come in, we're ready to move forward. We're going to start this process."

Dietrich said a digital map can tie into the city's graphic information system to better serve residents with online applications from a land use perspective.

Creating a digital tax map includes aerial photography and some ground reconnaissance, he said. Tax maps are not the same as a survey but are the best representation of where properties are located, Dietrich said.

He said when taking old paper tax maps compiled 30 or 40 years ago to produce a digital map, they don't always fit together like a "perfect puzzle."

A new digital map is a base map that all the city's land use elements can use, Dietrich said.

A revaluation does not mean an automatic property tax increase for property owners since one-third of properties stay at the same value, one-third increase and one third decrease.

# HIGH TIDE HAPPY HOUR

EVERY Monday-Friday from 3pm-5pm.

Score Big on weekdays at the Rusty Nail with \$4 Pacifico Draft, \$8 Shack Margarita, \$8 Fishers Island Lemonade, \$8 Dip Trio and \$10 Buffalo Chicken Dip!

205 BEACH AVE, CAPE MAY • RUSTYNAILCAPEMAY.COM • WALK-INS WELCOME

