



HPC offers compromise on cedar shingles

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House of the week

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CMFD losing workers due to low wages

Rookies starting at \$12.36/hour, about 30% less than other towns

By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY — The city's fire department is losing personnel to departments in other towns that offer higher salaries. The city pays \$36,000 per year to new hires.

Lt. Edward Zebrowski said salaries were slashed during contract negotiations about 12 years ago and have stayed low under the last contract, signed in 2015. Both contracts were done under new interest arbitration rules.

Since the most recent contract, Cape May's Fire Department has seen a turnover of employees of about 20 percent, Zebrowski said.

"We've seen four firefighters leave the department since this last contract and we are expressing to the city that we are very concerned that if we continue this way, using our department as a steppingstone, that it will be very dangerous for not only ourselves but for the people of Cape May," he said.

The contract between the city and International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF) Local 3495 expired in December 2020. Negotiations have been under way since the end of February without much progress, Zebrowski said.

Firefighter/EMT Tim Durstewitz, vice president of IAFF Local 3495, said the department has an annual starting salary of \$36,000 which equates to a wage of \$12.36 per hour for new hires, working 2,912 hours per year.

He said the salaries from "top to bottom" are about 30 percent lower than other fire departments such as Wildwood, North

Cape May to rent space at West Cape May fire station during demolition, construction.
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Wildwood, Ocean City, Ventnor and Brigantine. Zebrowski said Cape May firefighters work more hours than other departments and that short-staffing has forced a lot of overtime.

"When you lose somebody, when they transfer to a different department or resign, it takes three to four months minimum before you can replace that person if they have already had all their training," Zebrowski said. "It can take upward to six months or a year before you have somebody that's fully qualified to replace that person."

When a firefighter leaves, the department is short-staffed and must pay overtime wages, he said.

Zebrowski said in the past, firefighters had to live in Cape May to be placed on the eligibility list. Currently no one is eligible that lives in Cape May, he said.

Using a county list of eligible perspective employees, many will decline an interview with Cape May due to the salaries and hours, he said.

"You start out at \$12.36 an hour and it takes 18 years to get to the top step of our salary guide and our top step is still 25 to 30

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Cape May revenue tops banner year of 2019, '20

By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY — The city's revenue has been on the upswing since May, even exceeding 2019 figures.

During a City Council meeting July 20, Chief Financial Officer Neil Young said revenue in May was healthy for the current fund in water/sewer utility and the beach utility. He said the tourism utility lags until room tax revenue is inserted later in the season.

Convention Hall was closed and recreation pro-

grams paused during the first three months of the year due to the COVID pandemic, Young said, adding that the city received a shuttered venue grant of \$176,000 for Convention Hall.

Young said there was a slight decrease of expenses for the police department due to the retirements of the chief and a sergeant with the positions filled by "lower-costing staff."

Fire department expenses are slightly reduced based on a retirement

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David Nahan
CAPE MAY STAR AND WAVE

CMBP women take second at O.C. invitational

Above, Cape May Beach Patrol lifeguard Kennedy Campbell runs out of the surf to win the paddleboard event during the Ocean City Beach Patrol Women's Lifeguard Invitational July 22 at 34th Street. Campbell and CMBP teammates finished second overall at the event. At right, Campbell leads the field to the middle marker in the race. See story and photos, page A8.



Consultant saves city \$3M. to replace well

By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY — The city dodged a \$3 million bullet when a consultant was able to restore the city's primary water supply well rather than replacing it.

The city hired Dennis Gaughan, owner of Clearwater Solutions, as a consultant after two wells failed.

"Dennis has kind of been like the town hero the past few weeks," Mayor Zack Mullock said during a City Council meeting July 20.

Gaughan said Well 6,

Cape May's primary well, was pumping up sand. He said Well 6 was developed by another firm, which was onsite when he arrived.

"If we did not correct this sand problem right here, a new well would have been bid at \$3 million or more," Gaughan said. "We went back to square one."

He said the pump was pulled out and swabbed, a test pump installed and the well surged.

Gaughan said if a pump normally pumps 900 gallons per minute, it is surged to 1,200 gallons per minute. He said he found two "red

flags" right away on the original installation of the pump.

"The company actually agreed to everything that we suggested," Gaughan said.

A redevelopment rig was brought in to clean sand out of the gravel bed of the well, he said.

"This well came back better than brand new when it was first re-drilled 20 years ago," Gaughan said.

The well will be operating this week, he said.

Mullock said the city debated with the engineer, the installer and the manu-

facturer regarding the warranty for 18 months. He said the well was offline for nearly a year.

Gaughan said the well should operate properly for 10 to 15 years. He said the other firm wanted to replace all the piping, which was 20 years old, but he advised them to leave it alone.

The well is 830 feet deep, according to Gaughan.

"I'm not the hero, I'm just giving you the opinion of what you should be doing," he said.

Mullock said Well 8 was also offline for a period of time.

DEP puts Lower on notice over catch basins

By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave

DIAMOND BEACH — Lower Township is in violation of state Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) regulations for catch basins full of sand on Richmond Avenue, which is causing street flooding.

During a Township Council meeting July 19, Richmond Avenue resi-

dent Susan Zumar complained about continuing flooding of the street due to catch basins (storm sewers) full of sand. She acknowledged she was aware of a meeting with the engineering firm of DeBlasio and Associates and Lower Township Public Works was scheduled for the following day.

"I had mosquito control come out and the catch basins are basically full to

the top," she said. "They treated them for larvae right now and I understand they were spraying all around the wetlands this week."

The DEP gave the township 30 days to address the problem or face fines of as much as \$50,000 for each violation.

"I would hope that Lower Township is proactive in doing something about this or it's going to cost a

lot of money," Zumar said.

Richmond Avenue resident Jim Pomponi said he has owned his property for 22 years and the flooding has been a constant issue. He said the township receives significant tax dollars from the residents of Diamond Beach. He said sand frequently blows down the street.

"You can go and dip

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