

Lower Township Year in Review

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VILLAS — Residents raking leaves into the street or curb line for pick-up from a vacuum truck may be contributing to flooding in the township. Public Works Superintendent Gary Douglass told Township Council at a Jan. 17 meeting that leaves are clogging storm sewer grates. He said the township has a problem with leaves, not just on Roseann Avenue where the township spent more than \$8 million to replace a storm sewer main and construct a pump station. He said there had been a malfunction of the drainage system/pump station that serves the Roseann Avenue neighborhood, where the chamber that serves the 200-block clogged up with trash and manhole covers blew off. Douglass said he has talked with manufacturers of the pumps and the problem was rectified by removing trash racks from that chamber.

NORTH CAPE MAY — Commissioners adopted the DRBA's Capital Improvement Program (CIP) along with an authority-wide five-year strategic plan for the agency's airports and crossing facilities. The 2024 CIP of \$132.7 million is comprised of \$116.7 million in authority resources and nearly \$16 million in federal, state, and local grant funds. In Cape May County, projects included rehabilitation of approach roads, reconfigurations at the terminal entrance and replacement of Cape May highway signage at the ferry terminal in North Cape May.

VILLAS — At a Jan. 17 meeting, Lower Township Council approved an agreement with the state Department of Transportation (DOT) for installation of four flashing beacons with pedestrian push buttons on Route 109. While the total cost



Provided

Members of the Cape May County Board of County Commissioners and the U.S. Economic Development Administration toss ceremonial shovels of dirt April 23 at the site of the future Tech Village II building at the county airport.

is \$120,000, the state DOT proposed an agreement that the state would assume 75 percent and Lower Township would assume the remainder of the construction and installation costs, which would not exceed \$30,000.

ERMA — County Commission Director Leonard Desiderio received notification from the Economic Development Authority (EDA) that funding has been approved for construction of Cape May County Tech Hangars II at the county airport. The \$2.98 million EDA grant supports the construction of a two-story, 16,434-square-foot building across from the Cape May County Tech Hangar I, intended to recruit occupancy of technology-related companies/startups, like those currently leasing space in the County's Tech Hangar I.

FEBRUARY

VILLAS — A crowd filled Lower Township Hall on Feb. 8 for a meeting on the Higbee Beach Wildlife Management Area Tidal Marsh/Upland Restoration Project. The \$37 million project is intended to restore tidal flow to the marsh, enhancing a degraded upland area and the existing

wildlife habitat, as well as provide protection to freshwater resources and give an opportunity for the public to connect to those resources. The project area encompasses 260 acres of the 1,200-acre tract. Part of the property is the former magnesite factory site. The backbone of the project is restoring tidal flow from the bay to Pond Creek.

MARCH

VILLAS — Lower Township Council introduced its proposed 2024 budget with no tax rate increase and a tax levy increase of \$71,207 to \$23,092,558, attributable to insurance costs. The local purpose rate remained at 61.7 cents per \$100 of assessed value. The township's surplus increased \$490,000, 11.42 percent. Available surplus was \$9.7 million, up \$1.3 million from 2023. A total of \$4.8 million was being used to fund the 2024 budget.

APRIL

COLD SPRING — The Lower Township Elementary School District Board of Education approved its 2024-25 budget, which totals \$26.4 million, down \$357,973. More money was to be raised by the lo-

cal purpose tax, \$19.8 million, up from \$19.2 million last year. The local purpose tax rate was 53.3 cents per \$100 of assessed value, up 2 cents. The owner of a \$250,000 home in Lower Township saw a tax increase of \$21.33.

VILLAS — Lower Township Council approved a \$45,000 contract with ar-

chitect Michael Calafati for design services, bid and construction management for work at the Judge Nathaniel Foster House, one of the county's earlier known buildings. The home was constructed in about 1727, significant as an example of a well-preserved early heavy timber frame house, later remodeled around 1826 in the Federal style. Progress on restoring the historic home for public use stalled during the COVID pandemic.

MAY

ERMA — The county Board of County Commissioners and guests turned shovels of dirt in a ceremonial groundbreaking for Tech Village II at the county airport. The project is in partnership with the U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA). The expansion involves the construction of a 16,434-square-foot facility at an estimated cost of \$6.45 million. It is supported by nearly \$3 million in funding from the EDA.

ERMA — The Lower Cape May Regional School District Board of Education approved its 2024-25 budget that increases the tax levy by \$465,311, or 1.9 percent, over the current year. There was a slight increase in the tax rate for Lower Township, a decrease in West Cape May and no change in Cape May. Lower Township was funding 60.46 percent of the budget, up from 59.18 percent; Cape May was funding 31.76 percent, down from 32.28 percent; and West Cape May was funding 7.78 percent, down from 8.54 percent. The school tax rate for Lower Township was rising 1.8 cents from 39.2 cents per \$100 of assessed value to 40.8 cents.

VILLAS — Lower Township had more than a dozen projects in the works for improvements to streets, stormwater



Jack Fichter/CAPE MAY STAR AND WAVE

Chief Kevin Lewis, left, and Harry Delgado of the New Jersey Association of Chiefs of Police hold the certificate of reaccreditation, the Lower Township Police Department's fifth.

area — all Americans with Disabilities Act-compliant.

VILLAS — The Lower Township Police Department received its fifth reaccreditation, placing it in the top 3% of police departments in the state. At a May 20 Lower Township Council meeting, Harry Delgado, accreditation program director of the New Jersey Association of Chiefs of Police, said the department was one of the best in the state.

JUNE

ERMA — During April and May, the Lower Township Police Department investigated several reports of motor vehicle thefts and attempted thefts in and around North Cape May. During the course of the ensuing investigation, detectives from the agency developed a 13-year-old suspect. The investigation culminated in a search warrant being executed at the boy's residence, where evidence pertaining to the investigation was seized, according to authorities. As a result, the juvenile was charged with multiple counts of motor vehicle theft, criminal mischief and burglary, and released to his guardian, pending court proceedings.

ERMA — Effective Sept. 3, AtlantiCare began providing emergency medical services (EMS) to Lower Township, replacing Inspira. After being notified by Inspira in April that the hospital corporation did not wish to renew its contract with the township, Lower sought bids and received five proposals. At a June 17 meeting, Lower Township Council approved a five-year contract with AtlantiCare Regional Medical Center. As part of the agreement, the township will lease office and garage space at the Public Safety Building for \$1 per year.

VILLAS — Township Council introduced an ordinance to authorize \$2 million for the construction of a new Public Works building on Seashore Road. It authorizes a \$100,000 down payment and \$1.9 million in bond funding. The ordinance projects a lifespan of 30 years for the new building.

VILLAS — A boardwalk could connect the Cape May-Lewes Ferry terminal in North Cape May with a neighboring park. At a June 17 Township Council meeting, engineer Will Hanson presented an overview of capital projects. Proposed work at David C. Douglass Memorial Park includes reconstruction and expansion of the existing parking lot, relocation of the memorial, a decorative footpath along the canal and an observation deck. Hanson said the township was seeking to

fund the project through the county Open Space Program.

JULY

VILLAS — An ongoing effort by the state Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) to evict the Sunset Beach Sportsmen's Club from a small portion of land on the former magnesite factory property was stopped with a stay from Superior Court Judge Dean Marcolongo. The state signed a charter for the Sunset Beach Sportsmen's Club in 1949. The land on which the clubhouse is located was given to the club by the owners of the former magnesite factory, Harbison-Walker Refractories, more than 49 years ago.

DIAMOND BEACH — Pickleball seems to be sweeping the nation as an easy-to-play sport, and Lower Township's new Diamond Beach Park offers courts and other amenities. Township and county officials held a ribbon cutting for the park July 9. Last year, Township Council awarded a \$1.3 million construction contract for improvements to the park. The township received an \$846,289 county Open Space grant for the work, which included fencing, a shade structure, picnic table, a restroom building, exercise and playground equipment, an asphalt surface, pickleball courts, sidewalks, a drinking fountain, lighting and a bicycle repair station.

NORTH CAPE MAY — The county's second recreational cannabis dispensary held a grand opening July 10 at 3860 Bayshore Road in a shopping center that houses a post office and dollar store. The store has both retail and delivery licenses. The state Cannabis Regulatory Commission approved an annual license for Sea and Leaf LLC to operate an adult use cannabis dispensary in Lower Township in December 2023. The dispensary received a conditional license in September 2022.

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 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 re-

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Lower Township Council approved a contract for design services and construction management of renovations at the Judge Nathaniel Foster House.

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VILLAS — Lower Township Council approved a \$45,000 contract with ar-

drainage and upgrades to parks. At a May 20 Township Council meeting, engineer Will Hanson said improvements to Diamond Beach Park include new playground and fitness equipment, pickleball courts, a shade structure and a restroom building, which is under construction. A pickleball fence and curbing have been installed, he said. Renovations of Rotary Community Park on Bayshore Road include new playground equipment, a shade structure, a single-use restroom, a parking

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