

City of Cape May



Cape May County, New Jersey

Master Plan Reexamination

February 27, 2009 – Revised March 13, 2009



GOAL

Protect the environmental quality of the oceanfront and harborfront land while ~~encouraging~~ public access.

A review and update of the objectives stated (p. 21) in the 2003 Master Plan ~~was completed~~ and they are revised and added to this section as follows:

OBJECTIVES

- A. Preserve environmental integrity of natural resources in harborfront and ~~oceanfront area~~
- ~~B. Implement design guidelines for hotels, motels, and other uses in this area as permitted by zoning.~~
- B.C. Improve access opportunities for the physically challenged.
- ~~D. Determine if uses permitted by zoning are appropriate considering the ~~character of the~~ area.~~
- C. Maintain current beach replenishment and dune erosion protection measures as they are essential to safeguard oceanfront and harborfront land uses.
- D. Encourage water dependent uses that promote additional public access to the Cape May Harbor including Devil's Reach and Schellenger's Creek and Cape May Inlet.

**Recreation and Open Space**

A review and update of the objectives stated (pp. 20-21) in the 2003 Master Plan ~~was~~ completed and they remain valid as follows:

GOAL

Preserve and enhance the City's open space system and upgrade recreational land use ~~to protect~~ Cape May's environmental resources and meet the needs of residents and visitors.

A review and update of the objectives stated (pp. 20-21) in the 2003 Master Plan ~~was~~ completed and they remain valid and are updated as follows:

OBJECTIVES

- A. Continue to acquire open space, including private bathing beaches, to increase the amount of recreational space available for use by residents and visitors.
- B. Create an open space and pedestrian network that connects points of interest and encourages non-vehicular means of transportation.
- C. Continue to upgrade and diversify the recreational uses and facilities offered by municipal parks.
- D. Provide controlled access to wetland areas to promote environmental protection and public education.
- E. Improve access and maintenance of beach areas **and continue to construct accessible access compliant with ADA requirements.**
- F. **Acquire lands and consolidate ownership of the areas bordered by St. John Street, Lafayette and the Cape May Elementary School to facilitate an upgrade in active recreation. Playground equipment and playing field equipment needs upgrading.**
- G. **Acquire environmentally sensitive lands in east Cape May known as Sewell Point. Acquisition of the tract would ensure the area east of Pittsburgh Avenue would be retained as open space for passive environmental recreation.**

Community Services and Facilities

The 2003 Master contains the Community Facilities and Recreation Element in Section VI (pp. 91-97). The Goals and Objectives that are relative to this element are stated on Page 22 under the heading "Environmental Protection".

The following contains an update to the goals and objectives stated under the heading "Community Services and Facilities" (p. 19-20) and "Recreation and Open Space" (pp. 21-22) in the 2003 Master Plan as follows:

GOAL

Ensure the provision of an adequate range and availability of community services and infrastructure to accommodate existing and future City residents and visitors.

A review and update of the objectives stated (pp. 19-20) in the 2003 Master Plan was completed and they are updated as follows:

VI. Community Facilities and Recreation Element Reexamination

The 2003 Master contains the Community Facilities and Recreation Element in Section VI (pp. 91-97). The Goals and Objectives that are relative to this element are stated on Page 22 under the heading "Environmental Protection".

It is recommended that the following updates and revisions be included in Section VI of the Master Plan. This Element is revised and updated as follows:

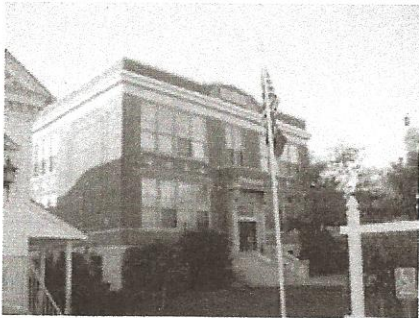
The City of Cape May faces an unusual challenge. Its year-round population is just ~~over 4,000~~ **under 3,800** people and yet it must provide a full range of municipal services to meet the needs of hundreds of thousands of seasonal visitors. The City has accomplished this mission through aggressive use of grant funding (facilitated by its designation as a "Center" in the State Plan); through a cooperative police service agreement with the adjacent municipalities of West Cape May and Cape May Point; and through innovative approaches to difficult problems, such its construction of the first water desalination plant in the Northeastern United States to provide an adequate supply of drinking water.

~~In 2001 Cape May's voters supported a government reform initiative that for the first time authorized the direct election of a Mayor for a full four year term, to serve alongside a four-member City Council, whose members serve a three year term. At the same time, the voters also elected a five member Government Study Commission that was charged with the task of reviewing other local government options. A final report has not been issued, but the Commission has preliminarily voted by a 3-2 margin to recommend a Council Manager form of government, as provided for under the Faulkner Act. The two dissenting members of the Commission voted to support a Mayor Council form of government. Once a final report is agreed to, it will be submitted to the City Clerk and a ballot question would be placed before the voters in 2003. Any approved changes would not become effective until 2004.~~

The City of Cape May changed to a Council/Manager form of government on July 1, 2004. A municipality operating under a council/manager plan is governed by a municipal council which is elected at large and chaired by the mayor. The Council, in the council/manager plan, exercises the legislative power of the municipality. The mayor, in the council/manager plan, is a member of the council. The mayor presides over the council and has a vote, but no administrative authority. In addition to the mayor, there are four (4) other members of Council. The council appoints the municipal clerk, the municipal attorney, the tax assessor, the tax collector, the treasurer, the municipal court judge, and such other boards and commissions as may be provided by the administrative code.

The city manager exercises all the executive power of the municipality. It is the duty of the manager to see that all laws and ordinances, in effect in the municipality, are observed. The

manager appoints all other officers and employees of the municipality, and all other employees if no other method of appointment is provided in the code, or by general law. The annual budget, of a municipality operating under the Council/Manager plan, is prepared by the Manager, with the assistance of the treasurer. It is presented to the Council, in January, who then modifies it as it sees fit, prior to adoption.



The City Government principally operates out of its City Hall, an older building at 643 Washington Street that was originally constructed as the local high school. As such, the building's design is inefficient for use as a modern government office building and it does not have adequate space to house all City functions. Police headquarters and most City administrative offices are located in City Hall, but the Recreation Department operates out of cramped quarters in Convention Hall and the offices of the Public Works Department are located at a separate complex, on Canning

House Lane. The former high school auditorium serves as a meeting room for City Council, the Planning and Zoning Boards, and other official ~~township~~ municipal meetings, but its balcony separates sections of City Hall's second floor. It must be used as a passageway between various second floor offices. **The Patrol Division and Detective Division of the Police Department are housed in a leased portion of the West Cape May Municipal Building.**

Nonetheless, the current ~~city hall~~ City Hall has the advantage of being centrally located at the edge of the downtown area. Further, it is located near a concentration of other public facilities, including the Fire Department building at Washington and Franklin Streets, **The Colonial House**, and the former Franklin Street School. A City-owned parking lot connects these facilities. A community-group has been given a ~~50-~~ multi-year lease on the Franklin Street School and is attempting to raise sufficient funds to renovate that building and to establish a Center for Community Arts. The Recreation Department continues to use the school's gym for its activities. The Fire Department building ~~is adequate for its current needs and~~ contains a public meeting room, equipment storage, bunk area (male only), office spaces including emergency management office space as well as a small fire museum. **Expansion of the Fire Department building may be required for a better utilization of existing space. The expansion could facilitate additional floor space that could be utilized for uses such as meeting area, training area, female bunk area office area.** Alternative sites are limited due to the built-up character of the City.

An immediate solution to the administrative needs of the City is not proposed here, but the City should remain alert to opportunities for future options, including the potential redevelopment of this entire complex of public buildings in the half-block bounded by Lafayette, Franklin and Washington Streets. This area of approximately two acres is shown in the accompanying aerial photograph. Other structures within the area include the headquarters of the Cape May Historical Society and two properties not now owned by the city: Alexander's Inn and the Macedonia Baptist Church. A number of the buildings in this area are historic and deserve careful future study. **Alternative sites for a new City Hall were explored by the City and it was**

determined that they were not feasible at this time due to prohibitive acquisition costs and environmental constraints.



The City's Recreation Department serves a number of users, both in the city and in surrounding communities, through fee-based programs. Discounts are offered to City residents, but all activities of the Recreation Department programs are self-sufficient and the department receives no budget from the City, though the City does provide for park maintenance and special events. The Recreation Department's year-round programs include youth sports, youth dance, adult softball leagues, youth soccer, ~~a martial arts program~~, aerobics, a swim team and an independent Little League program. Direct Users (individuals in unstructured programs) include those who avail themselves of open programs in the Elementary and Franklin School gymnasiums, and with swimming programs at the pool at the Elementary School and on the Coast Guard Base **for children, families, and senior citizens.**

An expanded program is offered to seasonal users. These activities are geared toward families and include a summer day camp and the children's playhouse. Special events, crafts festivals, and other attractions are conducted throughout the year. ~~, principally at Convention Hall. A Wednesday night concert series is held on summer evenings at the band shell at Rotary Park,~~

near the Washington Street Mall. A "Concerts in the Park" series is held Wednesdays through Sundays at 8:00PM in the Rotary Park on Lyle Lane behind the Washington Street Mall. Trips are also offered to local attractions such as the Cape May Nature Center, The Wetlands Institute, the Cape May Point State Park, and the Cape May County Zoo at Cape May Court House. Special events, including parades, craft shows, art shows, concerts, beach volleyball, a sand sculpture contest and movies on the beach are provided.

Because city-owned recreational land in Cape May is limited, the Department makes use of other nearby facilities. Athletic fields in Lower Township and at the Cape May Elementary School are used once school is out for summer recess. The swimming pool and fields at the Coast Guard Base are made available when they do not conflict with base activities. County softball fields and outings to the County Zoo are also utilized in the department's activities. There is no official relationship with the privately operated attractions such as the Cape May Environmental Center or the Cape May Bird Observatory.

There is a defined need to acquire lands and consolidate ownership of the areas bordered by St. John Street, Lafayette and the Cape May Elementary School to facilitate an upgrade in active recreation. Playground equipment and playing field equipment needs to be upgraded.

There is a question regarding the future of Cape May's Convention Hall. The current building was constructed in 1965 to replace an earlier historic convention center that was destroyed by a hurricane. The present building is in need of repair, but structural improvements have been programmed. Some local leaders have suggested rebuilding Convention Hall, but that decision should not be approached lightly.

The total interior floor area of Cape May's Convention Hall is 8,240 square feet, but most activities are limited to the 5,400 square foot area of the main wooden floor. The building provides the only significant publicly owned assembly area in Cape May, but it's limited floor area cannot compete for large conventions and other attractions with either the 500,000 square foot Atlantic City Convention Center or even the 72,000 square feet of exhibition space available at the new Wildwood Convention Center. Nor is the demand for a new facility clear at present. Smaller conference facilities are available at several local hotels: Congress Hall, the Marquis de Lafayette and the Grand Hotel.

Another issue is that Cape May's Convention Hall extends on piers over the beach, as shown in the photo below. This presents two problems: (1) it is highly susceptible to damage from future hurricanes and other severe storms and (2) new construction may not be permitted to extend southward beyond the limited footprint of the existing building. Careful future study is therefore needed before any decisions are made to replace the current facility. The City owns adjacent buildings west of Convention Hall that provide rental income. Other nearby privately owned buildings to the east could potentially be acquired. This would allow the provision of continued entertainment and restaurant uses along the Promenade and would supply rental income to help defray construction and maintenance costs for a new convention center. A second level exhibition hall could maximize the available assembly area, but care needs to be taken to protect

~~ocean views. Parking is also very limited in this area. Again, a market research and environmental study should be undertaken before any further actions are contemplated.~~

Cape May has recognized the power of arts, history and culture in transforming the landscape of the community. The City has adopted a program of public-private partnerships that have infused a progressive growth of Cape May's annual economy into a ten and a half month economy as opposed to the average 12 week season typical in most seashore resort communities.

This program facilitates the leasing of City-owned property on a long term basis for \$1.00 per year with non-profit organizations being responsible for the renovations, operations, and maintenance of the properties. This ensures that the City maintains a nurturing environment by providing the essential physical infrastructure so that fledgling, local, non-profit cultural, arts and historical organizations can flourish while benefiting the taxpayer by reducing costs associated with maintenance of the properties.

Currently, the City has seven (7) such agreements involving City-owned property and they are listed as follows:

- Emlen Physick Estate with Mid-Atlantic Center for the Arts
- Washington Street Mall Information Booth with the Mid-Atlantic Center for the Arts
- Franklin Street School with the Center for Community Arts
- The former Welcome Center with Cape May Stage
- The Nature Center with the New Jersey Audubon Society
- The Marine Research Facility with Rutgers University
- The Transportation Center/Welcome Center with the Chamber of Commerce of Greater Cape May

Through these public-private initiatives, tremendous opportunities have been presented and pursued to unify the business and residential segments of the City to achieve civic, social, cultural, arts, financial and tourism goals of the entire community. These partnerships have created employment opportunities that maintain the City's population base and solidify its economic viability. These non-profit organizations are staffed by a bank of volunteers who plan, develop and implement the vast array of programs, services and activities that are offered on a year round basis to residents and tourists alike. Without these partnerships, the comprehensive schedule of arts, history, cultural, social, environmental, educational, and recreational programs, services and activities could not be possibly funded and staffed by the City of Cape May without the dedication and commitment of these volunteers.

The City should maintain these private-public relationships and strive to investigate other opportunities that may present themselves in the future.

The City of Cape May also recognizes the importance of the convention hall facility's role in providing comprehensive services not only for residents, part time residents and tourists, but also for business and civic groups, musicians, theatre and community groups, and non-profit entities. A consensus building approach was implemented to recognize the needs of the entire community and establish design criteria for replacing the 1965 structure, identified in the 2003 Master Plan as being in need of replacement.

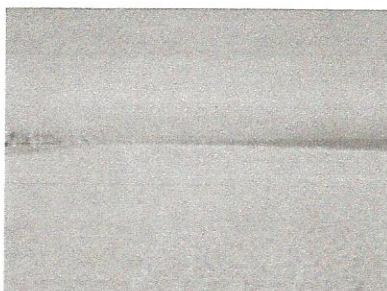
A Public Question was voted on November 4th, 2008. The binding referendum was for the approval of the bond ordinance and permit financing for a new Convention Hall facility in the amount not to exceed \$10,500,000 with the final cost as well as the size, design, features, content and location of the convention hall facility to be determined based upon the input received at public forums. For this Question, 76% of the electorate voted and the question was passed with 66% of the total votes. City Council pledged an "open and transparent" process by holding five town meetings to allow public input on location, uses, design and construction as well as cost.



Based upon input from the general public, the proposed convention hall will house the same uses and programs as the existing hall and will serve primarily as a community center. The new multipurpose state of the art hall will continue to host events that include roller skating, craft shows, general exhibitions, dances for children, teens and adults, concerts, theatrical performances, special events, Jazz Festival, MAC Music Festival and the Kiwanis Pancake Breakfast. In addition the hall will allow the City to explore new cultural events and exhibits to be hosted therein.

The proposed new hall is anticipated to be fully operational during the 2010 summer season. The first floor will include an informational booth, vestibule, restrooms, lobby/prefunction area, reception desk, catering kitchen, elevator and monumental stair, main hall with seating up to 1200 persons, stage wings, storage, and several retail stores/commercial restaurant shell spaces. The second floor has a balcony, restrooms, administrative suite and several community meeting rooms.

The proposed new convention hall will be located at the site of the existing hall and will require demolition of the existing hall. It is proposed that the solarium be relocated to another beach front location as it is in sound physical condition and has fully leased retail space.



Cape May's greatest recreational asset is its beach strand, which attracts thousands of visitors to the community on a year-round basis. The exact acreage of the beach is difficult to determine, because it varies based upon both tidal conditions and erosion. Nonetheless, the City offers its visitors more than two and a half linear miles of a broad white sand beach. This area is

exclusive of those portions of the beach that are protected as part of the dune stabilization effort or for which access is restricted because it occurs within the limits of the U.S. Coast Guard base. The City has entered into a 50- year contract with the State and the Army Corps of Engineers to replenish the beach on a biennial basis, thus safeguarding this principal resource. The beach is protected during summer months by lifeguards and the Beach Patrol has sand wheelchairs available to promote handicapped access. Ocean rescue is facilitated by ~~motorized craft, a two~~ waverunners, and ~~ten~~ twenty lifeboats.

Accessible improvements (ADA) include a \$382,000 grant for construction of new access ramps from the street to the beach promenade. A follow-up grant is sought to then extend the ramps to the high-water mark at the beach and provide accessible showers, decks, and tables. Improvements are initially proposed at a total of four (4) beaches. These beaches are located at Grant Street, Gurney Street, Trenton Avenue and Wilmington Avenue. Ultimately, a total of ten (10) beaches are targeted for accessible improvements.

Beyond the beach, the City's recreational assets are somewhat limited. The largest single tract of City-owned recreational land is approximately 9.5 acres of contiguous land that extends east of Madison Avenue, generally between Washington Street and Michigan Avenue. This site contains the historic and architecturally significant Emlen Physick Estate at 1048 Washington Street, which has been leased to the Mid-Atlantic Center for the Arts. In addition to conducting tours of the Physick Estate, the Mid-Atlantic Center conducts a number of other year-round tourist-based activities, including its operation of the Cape May Lighthouse (which is located outside of the city limits). A portion of this 9.5-acre site is also leased to a private tennis club. Active city-managed recreational use is limited to approximately three acres, which is developed as Kiwanis Park. This Madison Avenue park features a tot lot and an attractive sitting area with a Gazebo and small pond. The entire 9.5 area tract is shown on the aerial photograph below.