

PLAN SUMMARY

Introduction

Master Plan Purpose

This Master Plan has been prepared in accordance with the New Jersey Municipal Land Use Law. The purpose of Cape May's Master Plan is to provide a guide to accomplish a coordinated and harmonious development of the City. It is based on an analysis of present and future needs. The Master Plan is designed to promote the health, safety, and general welfare, as well as efficiency and economy in the land development process, and the maintenance of property values.

Specifically, the Master Plan is to identify land use constraints and opportunities and serve as a formal statement of Cape May's policies regarding future land use and development while maintaining Cape May's historic character. The Plan is designed to encourage sound growth and redevelopment, to strengthen and sustain Cape May's economy, and to establish appropriate criteria for the location of housing, commerce and light industry coordinated with the protection and enhancement of existing natural resources.

The Master Plan serves as a basis for zoning as well as for reviewing development applications. It is a listing of priorities and preferences which, when instituted as an integral part of the decision-making process, can help to ensure sound, high-quality land use in Cape May. This report has been designed to meet the statutory provisions of the New Jersey Municipal Land Use Law (Chapter 291, Laws of New Jersey, 1975, as amended), and will provide Cape May with an up-to-date, meaningful planning program designed to permit orderly residential and non-residential development and redevelopment within the municipality.

This 2002 Master Plan represents a continuation of the City's planning efforts, which include the 1988 Land Use Element, the 1991 Harborfront Enhancement Master Plan and Historic Preservation Element, the 1994 Land Use Element, the 1995 Housing Plan and the 2000 Reexamination Report. These earlier plans and their background studies have been reviewed to put in perspective the historical pattern of planning and development policies in Cape May.

Regional Location

The City of Cape May is a 2.2 square mile community located at the southern end of New Jersey and Cape May County.

Cape May's southern shoreline is formed by wide, white sand beaches that border the Atlantic Ocean and the City is influenced by sensitive environmental features that are described below. Wetlands occur throughout all sections of the city and limit development on vacant lands, particularly near Cape May Harbor in the east end. Protection of fragile dunes is essential to protection of the valuable beach resources.

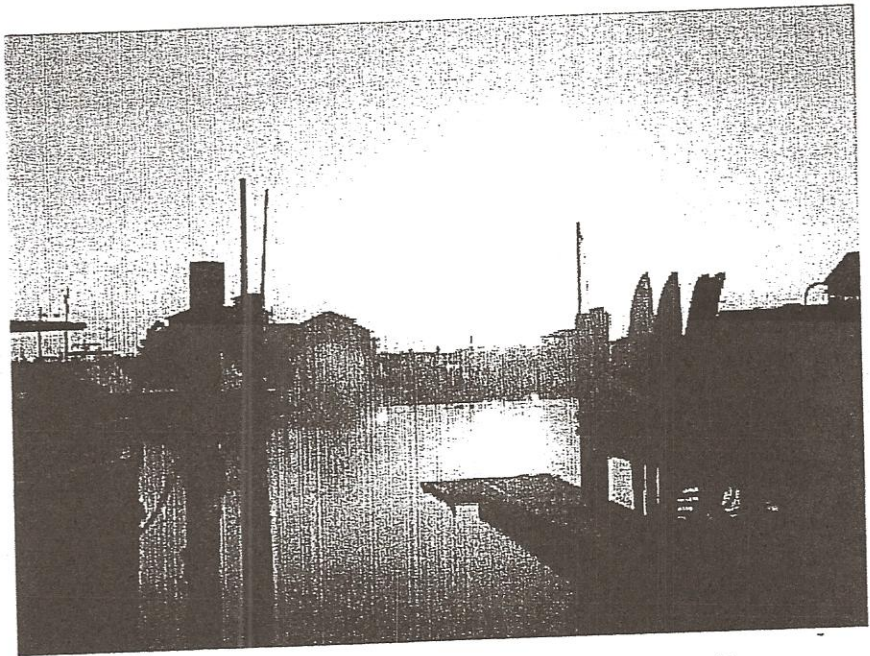
INTRODUCTION

Cape May considers itself to be America's first resort community. Settlement occurred in the early nineteenth century but few structures remain from that period. However, it is Cape May's extraordinary collection of late-nineteenth century Victorian architecture that has led to the City's designation as a National Historic Landmark. Summer remains Cape May's busiest season, with vacationers being attracted by a combination of its historic ambiance and its beachfront location. Although most of the New Jersey coast is occupied by resort communities, Cape May receives the second largest number of visitors, after Atlantic City. Unlike many other beachfront towns, a wide-range of activities have led to Cape May's emergence as a year-round resort.

Cape May benefits from its proximity to major population centers and visitor attractions in the Mid-Atlantic Region. It is approximately 50 miles south of Atlantic City, 80 miles southeast of Philadelphia and 150 miles south of New York City.

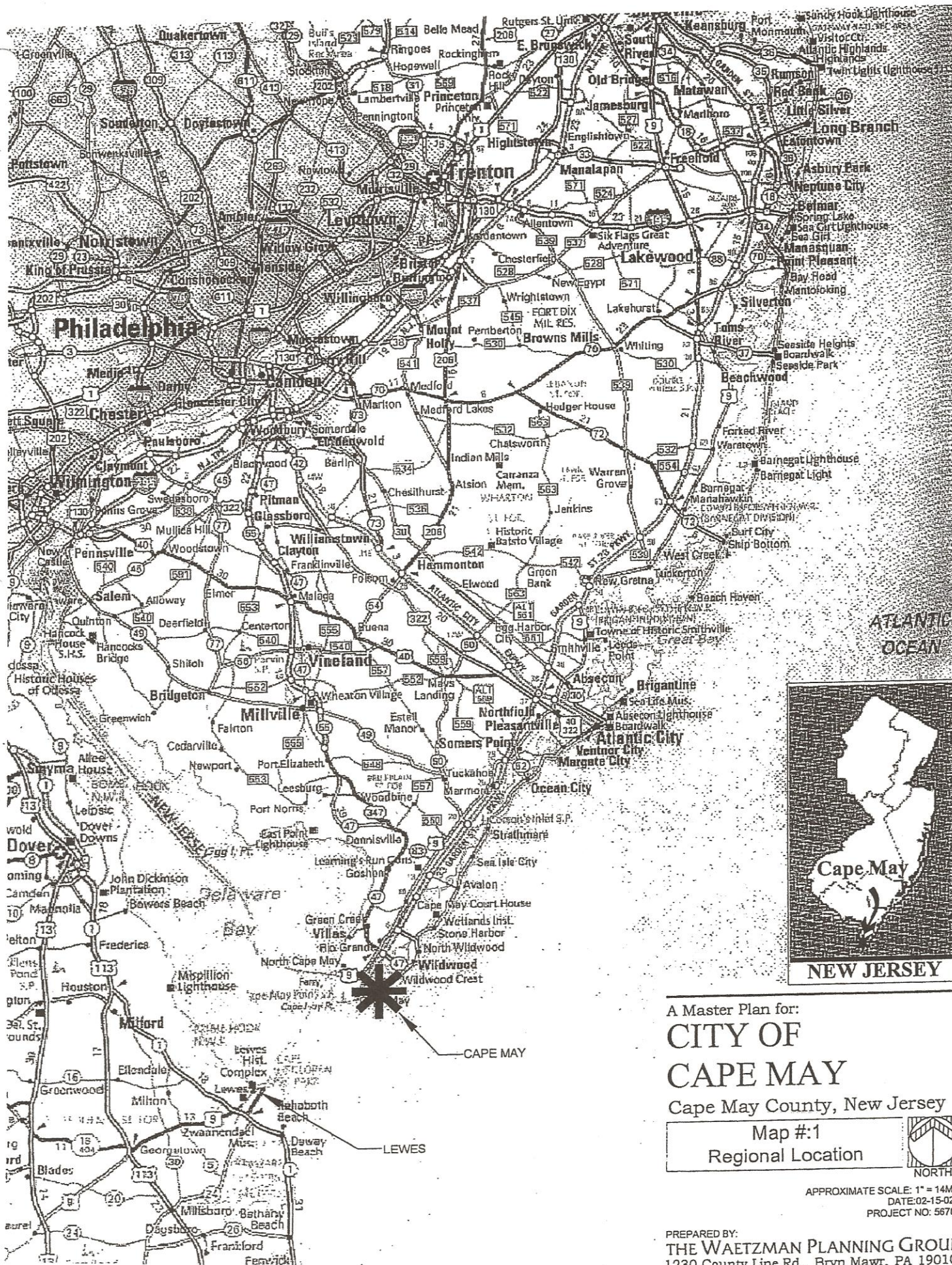
Both Route 9 and the Garden State Parkway terminate in Lower Township, near the Schellenger's Landing Bridge, which provides the main route for vehicular traffic approaching Cape May. A secondary street access is available via Seashore Road, through West Cape May.

The Cape May-Lewes Ferry, which provides service between the southern end of New Jersey and Lewes, Delaware, is located at the western end of the Cape May Canal. Buses connect the ferry with Cape May's Transportation Center, which is located near the City's main shopping district, the Washington Street Mall. The Transportation Center is also serviced by the Cape May Seashore Railroad, which provides service between the City and Cape May Court House, via the historic Cold Spring Village.



Cape May is separated from the New Jersey mainland by Cape May Harbor and the Cape Canal, which is part of the Intracoastal Waterway. This island is shared by the City of Cape May, the Boroughs of West Cape May and Cape May Point, and a portion of Lower Township. Cape May City shares municipal borders with the Borough of West Cape May and Lower Township. The eastern end of the city is occupied by a U.S. Coast Guard base, which occupies approximately 20% of the land area in the City.

Cape May's regional location is shown on Map 1.



A Master Plan for:
**CITY OF
CAPE MAY**
Cape May County, New Jersey
Map #1
Regional Location

APPROXIMATE SCALE: 1" = 14MI
DATE: 02-15-02
PROJECT NO: 5670

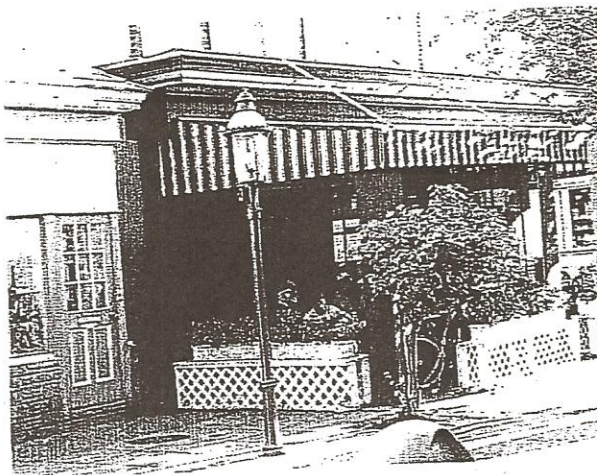
PREPARED BY:
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B. Enhance the City's economy and provide employment opportunities by encouraging appropriate commercial uses in commercial districts and other areas where appropriate access for such uses is available.

C. Promote varied and convenient shopping opportunities for residents and tourists, including appropriate design features to enhance access for the physically challenged.

D. Maintain the City's environmental and historic quality by control of commercial land use patterns and adoption of improved design and performance standards for land use in all of the areas regardless of whether they are in the historic district.

E. Support continued existence of the Coast Guard and fishing and tourism industries so as to enhance their important economic contributions.



Oceanfront and Harborfront Land Use

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

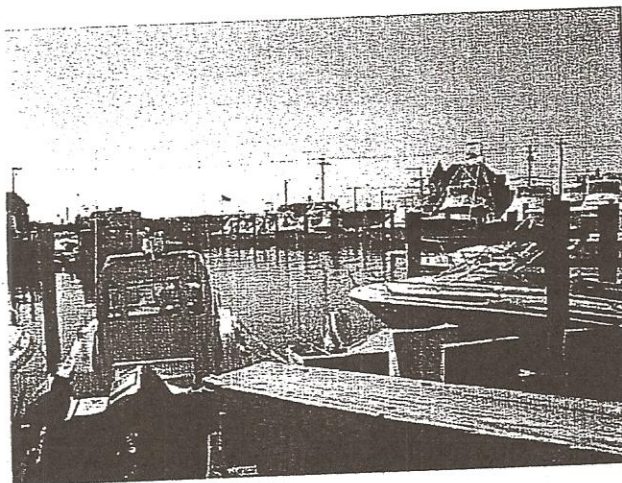
Objectives

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.

C. Improve access opportunities for the physically challenged.

D. Determine if uses permitted by zoning are appropriate considering the character of the area.



Recreation and Open Space

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.

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.

Environmental Protection

Goal -To protect the quality of the City of Cape May's natural and manmade environment in order to preserve the balance of its ecological systems and safeguard the future health and welfare of residents and visitors.

Objectives

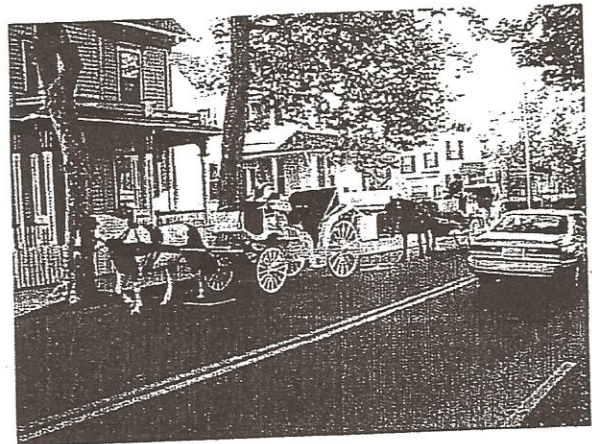
- A. Conserve and protect environmentally sensitive resources including natural, scenic and historic areas in the City by requiring that new land uses be subject to performance standards designed to minimize potential adverse impacts.
- B. Minimize negative effects of land use upon the City's built environment through evaluation and implementation of performance standards for environmentally sensitive lands.
- C. Encourage the preservation of environmentally sensitive lands in order to protect the environmental integrity of unique resources.
- D. Pursue the acquisition of wetlands by the City and a consortium of public and private environmental groups.
- E. Encourage recycling in order to meet the County's goal of recycling 65% of the total waste stream.

Historic Preservation

Goal - Maintain the City's National Historic Landmark status through preservation of historic and architecturally significant sites.

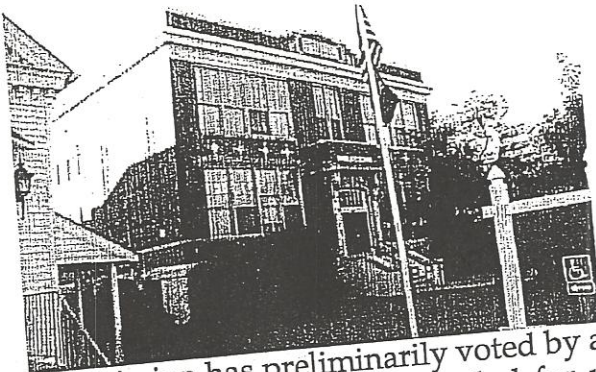
Objectives

- A. Investigate the possibility of revising area and bulk regulations for historic resources.



VI. Community Facilities and Recreation Element

The City of Cape May faces an unusual challenge. Its year-round population is just over 4,000 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 as its construction of the first water desalination plant in the Northeastern United States to provide an adequate supply of drinking water.



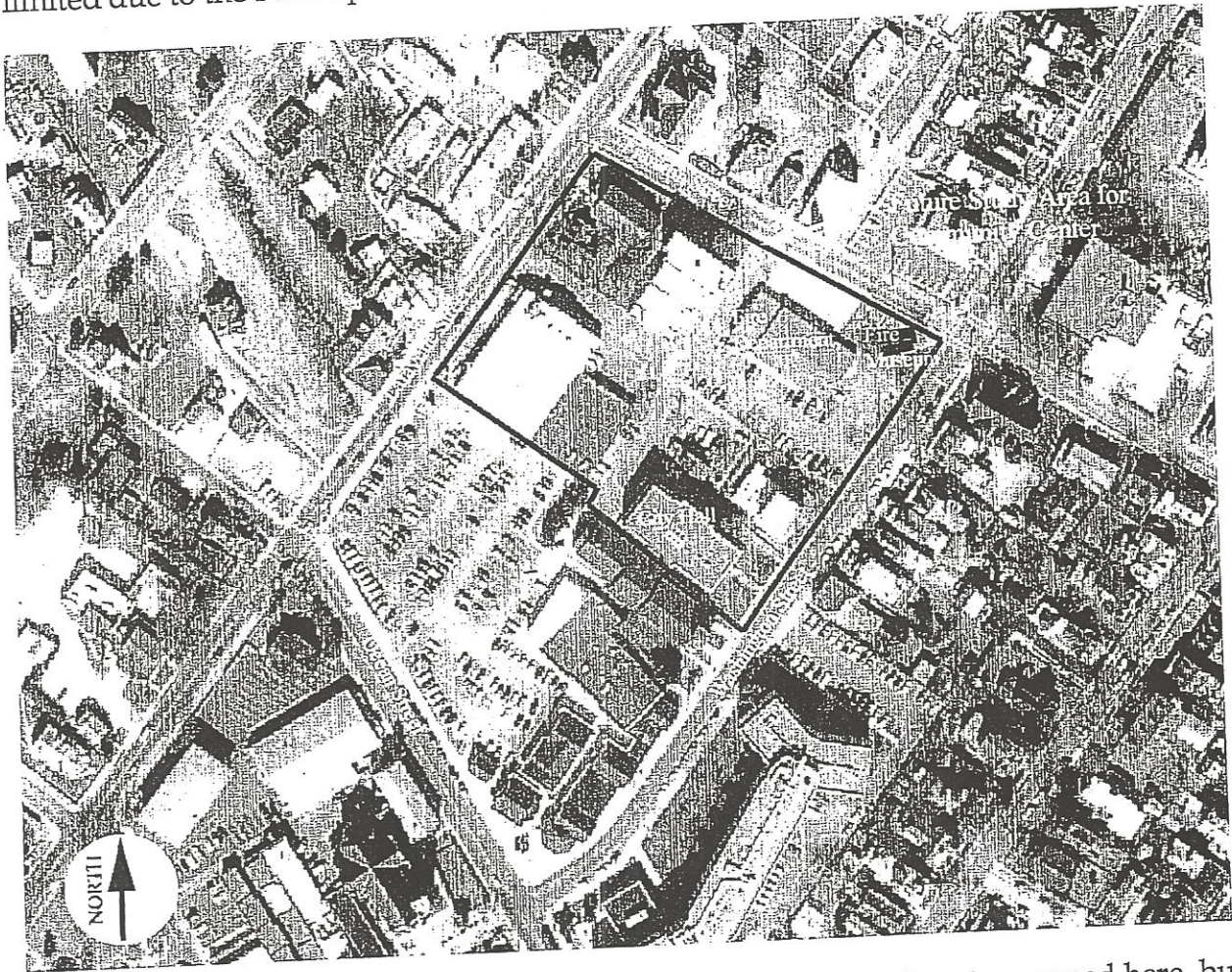
In 2001 Cape May's voters supported a government reform initiative that for the first time authorized the direct election of a Mayor for a full four-year term, to serve alongside a four-member City Council, whose members serve a three-year term. At the same time, the voters also elected a five-member 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 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 meetings, but its balcony separates sections of City Hall's second floor. It must be used as a passageway between various second floor offices.

Nonetheless, the current 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, and the former Franklin School. A City-owned parking lot connects these facilities. A

community-group has been given a 50-year lease on the Franklin 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 as well as a small fire museum. 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.

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.

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. Trips are also offered to local attractions such as the Cape May Nature Center, the Cape May Point State Park, and the Cape May County Zoo at Cape May Court House.

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.

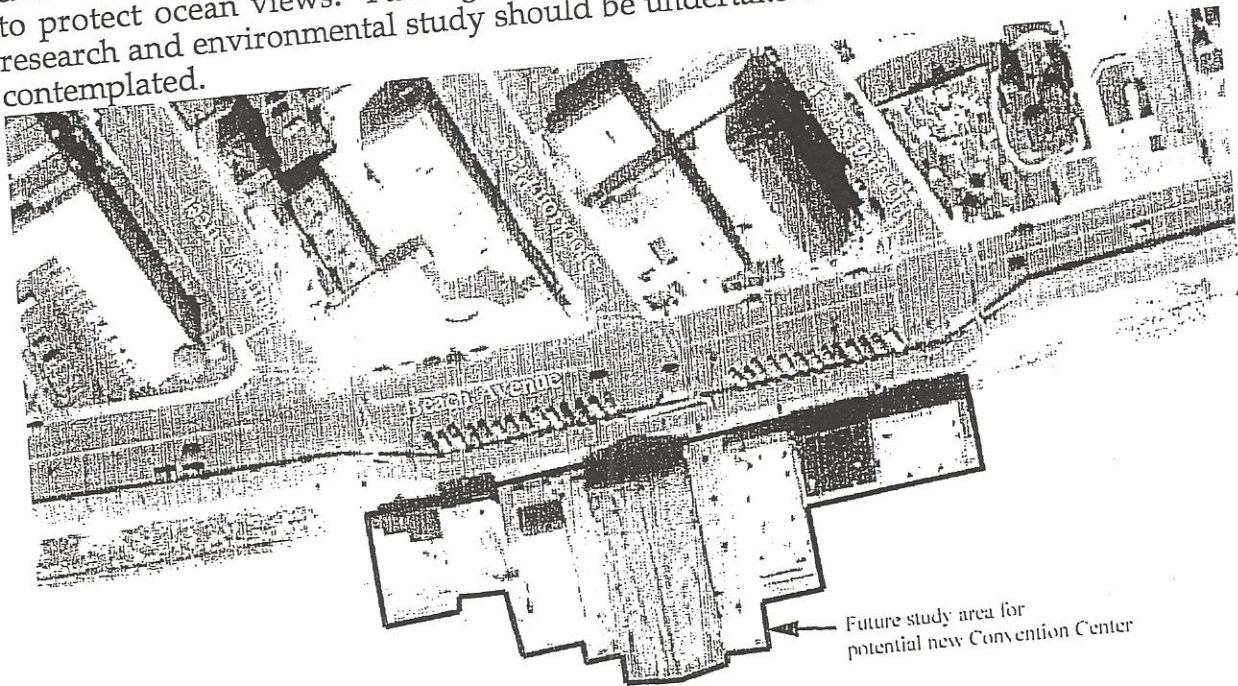


There is a question regarding the future of Cape May's Convention Hall. The current building was constructed in 1965 to replace an earlier historic convention center that was destroyed by a hurricane. The present building is in need of repair, but structural improvements have been programmed. Some local 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 the building provides the only significant publicly owned assembly area in Cape May, but its 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

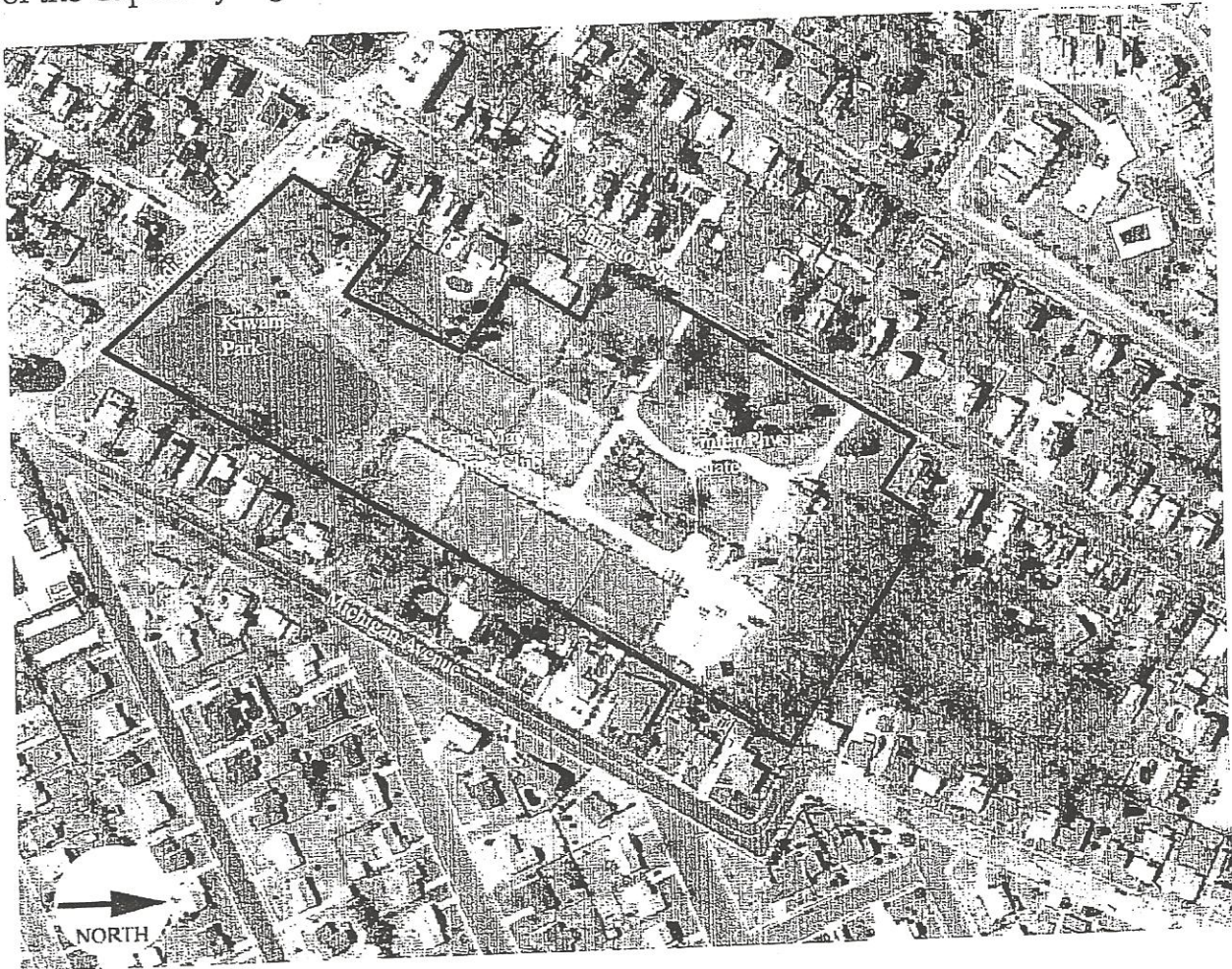
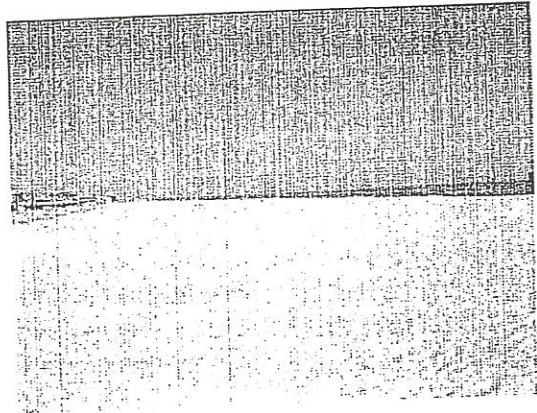
damage from future hurricanes and other severe storms and (2) new construction may not be permitted to extend southward beyond the limited footprint of the existing building. Careful future study is therefore needed before any decisions are made to replace the current facility. The City owns adjacent 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'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

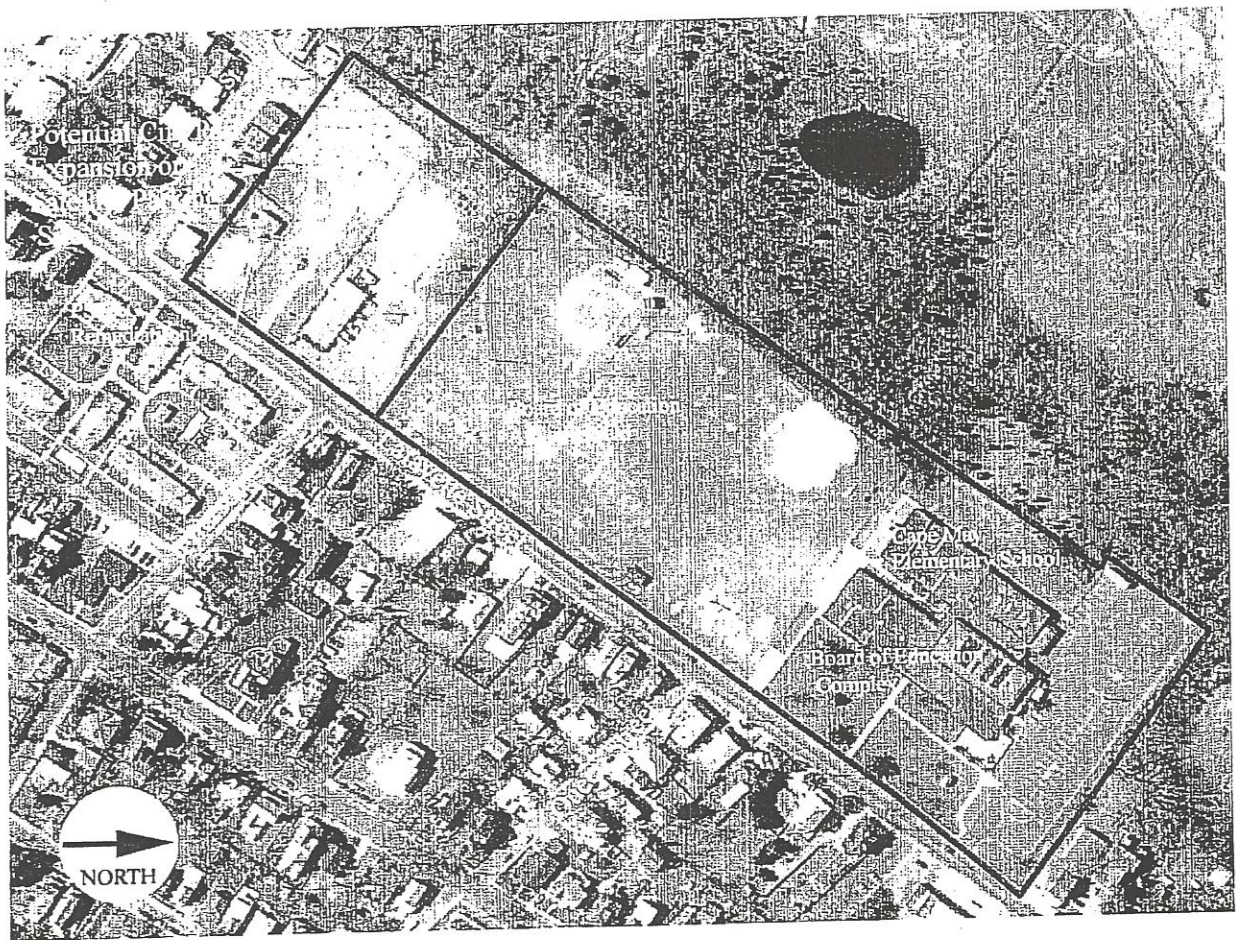
during summer months by lifeguards and the Beach Patrol has sand wheelchairs available to promote handicapped access. Ocean rescue is facilitated by motorized craft, a waverunner, and ten lifeboats.

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 and open to the public. 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 above.

The only other city owned outdoor active recreational facility is the 1.05-acre Wise-Anderson Park, located on Lafayette Street, west of Jefferson Street. The front of the site is developed as a picnic and sitting area, with basketball courts to the rear. However, the park has limited landscaping and its overall appearance of the park is unattractive and uninviting. This park needs attention.



Wise-Anderson Park is adjoined to the east by two parcels, Block 107, Lots 52 and 53, which total 1.7 acres of land. This site is principally occupied by a legal nonconforming use, Vance's Bar and Liquor Store. Further, Block 107, Lot 51 is a 0.25 acre parcel that is located in front of a portion of the basketball courts at Wise Anderson Park. This lot is occupied by a now-abandoned former dwelling, which previously experienced environmental contamination that is now being remediated by Public Service Electric and Gas (PSE&G). If these three lots were to be acquired by the City, the total area of

Wise-Anderson Park could be expanded to three acres. This could be used for an enhanced park site or, if found to be necessary, a portion could be used for additional satellite parking. This site would be approximately 1,000 feet closer to the downtown area than the existing school parking lot that is currently being used with limited effectiveness during the summer months. (See the Traffic and Parking Element.)

Moreover, acquisition of this land would make the expanded Wise-Anderson Park contiguous to the 35.2 acre holdings of the Cape May Board of Education. The Board of Education's land extends back to Cape Island Creek and much of the rear portion is unusable wetland. However, the area closer to Lafayette Street contains the elementary school, its parking lot, and extensive athletic fields. The combined area, as shown on the aerial photograph above, would make a significant community asset.

The importance of additional parkland acquisition is underscored by the fact that there are few other opportunities for active recreational plan development in Cape May. All other public recreational land is passive, including the 0.34 acre Fisherman's Memorial and the 1.27 acre Harbor View Park, both located in East Cape May. Dune stabilization areas and the potential acquisition of large wetland areas in East Cape May will serve to enhance passive recreation holdings but are unsuitable for active use. It is recommended that the City seek grant funding to expand Wise-Anderson Park while the opportunity exists.

Cape May's other community facility needs seem to be well provided for. The City has constructed a water desalination plant that provides an adequate supply of public water. This plant is operating effectively and currently insure that an adequate and safe supply of drinking water is available to the City's residents and visitors. Nonetheless, the plant is expensive to operate and water conservation efforts must continue to be encouraged.

The City provides sanitary sewer collection and treatment services to almost all residents and businesses. Although the system is old and maintenance remains a continual concern, the system is adequate to meet the needs of Cape May.