

Cape May City

Vision Statement

Summary Report

June 2011



City of Cape May Vision Statement

City of Cape May, County of Cape May, New Jersey

Acknowledgements:

Cape May Plan Endorsement Advisory Committee

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The original of this report was signed and sealed in accordance with N.J.S.A
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Introduction

Plan Endorsement is a voluntary process developed by the State Planning Commission to provide technical assistance and coordination of the State for municipalities to meet the goals of the State Planning Act and State Development and Redevelopment Plan. The City of Cape May has undertaken the Plan Endorsement process to increase the degree of consistency among municipal, county, regional and state agency plans with each other and with the State Plan and expand upon the principles of the Municipal Land Use Law to aid the City's plan for a sustainable future.

As part of the Plan Endorsement process, Cape May conducted Community Visioning which is a participatory process that engages local residents, business persons and other interested stakeholders in developing a consensus on what they want their community to be, identify where their community seems to be heading and what has to be done to correct any undesired trends to achieve the desired common vision. The Community Visioning process was conducted to develop a community vision with a twenty year planning horizon. The vision shall provide for sustainable growth, recognize fiscal constraints, housing needs and protection of natural, historical and community resources.

To develop this community vision, Cape May, with the aid of the NJ Office for Planning Advocacy, held a series of interactive discussions with residents and other community stakeholders to identify the community's purpose, core values, and vision of the future which will be utilized to determine the community goals and action plan.

The Mayor of Cape May has appointed a municipal Plan Endorsement Advisory Committee (PEAC) to facilitate this process. as required by the Plan Endorsement guidelines, the PEAC prepared a Municipal Self Assessment Report. The Municipal Self Assessment Report was completed and submitted to the State Planning Commission in June 2009. Following the office of Smart Growth prepared an Opportunities and Constraints Analysis, which was sent to the

Township in December 2009. The City then held three workshops at the City Hall Building. This report, or Vision Statement, summarizes the results of those three sessions and provides an account of the myriad of issues and ideas that were discussed and put forward as part of the Cape May City Vision Sessions. This Vision Statement will be submitted to the State Planning Commission as part of Cape May City's petition for Plan Endorsement.

Vision Sessions

In order to complete the Visioning Step of Plan Endorsement, Cape May City held three public sessions to discuss the vision for the future of the City. The first two sessions were workshop style sessions held on May 12, 2011 and May 19, 2011. Both sessions were well attended with residents participating from the City and several local, state and federal officials representing their respective agencies. The sessions were advertised in the two papers of record for the City and letters to the editor were written soliciting public involvement. Personal invitations and surveys were sent to all stakeholders including business owners in the City. The Taxpayer's Association mailed approximately 2500 invites and surveys to individual property owners. County agencies were also invited. Representatives from several agencies invited did attend at least one of the two sessions. A third session which summarized the findings of both sessions was also held at which members of the public had an opportunity to comment on the findings of both sessions and provide feedback on a draft Vision Statement. The Draft Vision Statement was revised and adopted at the third session.

Thursday, May 12, 2011 – Visioning Session #1

The first Vision Session focused on an introduction to the plan endorsement, the visioning process and key issues facing in the City. The session was well attended with approximately 40 residents attending and 25 residents participating in public comment. The session began with an opening by Co-Chairperson Dennis Crowley and a welcome from the PEAC. Following Craig R. Hurless, P.P., gave an introduction and background on Plan Endorsement and why the City was undertaking visioning at this time. A power point presentation was prepared and shown by Craig R. Hurless, PP to outline the parameters that would be utilized in developing the City's Vision Statement. Attendees were given an opportunity to comment and voice their opinion on their vision and nineteen people participated. A mapping exercise in which participants drew and commented on various maps was utilized to solicit comments and identify planning issues within the City and region.

Thursday, May 19, 2011 - Visioning Session #2

The second Vision Session focused on quick introduction to the plan endorsement, the visioning process and key issues facing in the City for new citizens in attendance. The session was attended with approximately 15 residents participating with approximately 12 residents commenting. The session began with an opening by Co-Chairperson Dennis Crowley and a welcome from the PEAC. Following, an introduction was made to Kate Meade, Office of Planning Advocacy and Leslie Gimeno, Cape May County Planner. A power point presentation was prepared and shown by Kate Meade to outline the parameters that would be utilized in developing the City's Vision Statement and a photo survey was taken by all attendees. Attendees were given an opportunity to comment and voice their opinion on their vision and nine people participated. Visioning Session #2 identified and focused the visioning process on creating the vision statement. Based on all survey and comments taken through this meeting, Craig Hurless, PP, was charged with drafting a consensus vision statement by June 1, 2011. This vision statement was placed on the City website on June 1, 2011 so that all could review and comment.

Thursday, June 9, 2011 – Visioning Session #3

The third session was held on Thursday, June 9, 2011 before the PEAC and public attendees. Approximately 20 people were in attendance. Craig Hurless, P.P., presented a summary and review of both sessions to get feedback on a draft vision statement as well as gather additional ideas regarding the visioning process, vision statement and other ideas presented thus far. A summary of the Community Vision Survey and comments was prepared by Craig Hurless. A total of 64 surveys were received through July 1, 2011. The Committee members reviewed the summary documents and offered changes and revisions. Seven members of the public also commented. After all comments and revisions were made, the PEAC unanimously endorsed the draft vision statement with recommended changes. The following is the approved vision statement:

Vision Statement

“In the year 2031, Cape May shall have retained, protected and promoted the City’s unique character by ensuring that the beaches, open space, environmentally sensitive resources and historic resources have been protected and enhanced. Cape May shall have promoted and sustained tourism and economic development by establishing enhanced promotion and advertising as well as providing additional desired recreational and cultural amenities that continue Cape May’s development towards a year round community and destination. Cape May will have maintained a high quality, active life for its citizens and visitors, provided appropriate, adequate and affordable housing, and provided a purpose of place and belonging for all. Cape May shall have implemented planning recommendations to mitigate traffic, parking and circulation problems that impact both residents and visitors. Cape May shall have balanced the needs of residents, property owners and business owners to accomplish this vision.”

Cape May’s shoreline is formed by wide, white sand beaches that border the Atlantic Ocean. Wetlands occur throughout all sections of the city and limit development on vacant lands, particularly near Cape May Harbor in the east end and bordering Cape Island Creek on the north end. Wetlands not only store water and help to control runoff and flooding, they support numerous wildlife habitats, some of them home to threatened or endangered species. Fragile dunes, essential to protect the valuable beach resources, line the beachfront. Cape May shall protect and conserve its valuable beach, environmentally sensitive lands and resources to promote tourism, provide protection from storms and flooding, provide for year round recreational opportunities, and otherwise maintain a high quality of life for all. Cape May also recognizes that water conservation, habitat restoration and protection, recycling, energy efficiency, alternative energy sources, environmentally friendly green buildings, technology and initiatives, and public outreach initiatives shall be implemented where they can be balanced with the City’s other environmental and historic resources. Cape May shall have also retained its status as a “Tree City USA” by preserving and enhancing its vegetation.

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. This designation was bestowed on the City of Cape May by the U.S. Department of the Interior in 1976. Currently, the City has over 600 Victorian buildings which are in use as accommodations, offices, retail shops, restaurants, and private residences. The Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) was established to protect the City's National Historic Landmark Status. Along with their other significant responsibilities, the HPC accepts and reviews exterior changes to our historic structures. The HPC's regulation and review of applications play a vital role in protecting our historic resources. Cape May recognizes that the historic resources differentiate this seashore community from most communities and therefore Cape May seeks to promote, protect and enhance the historic quality of the town.

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, the historic resources and a wide-range of community activities and facilities have led to Cape May's development towards a year-round resort. However, Cape May recognizes that there has been an overall loss of bed and breakfast guest houses and hotel businesses as they have been converted to family rental units in recent years as a result of the poor economic environment. Cape May seeks to preserve and maintain a diverse and viable lodging industry through tourism and economic development strategies including promotion, marketing and advertising as well as protecting all of the other resources that make Cape May a travel destination. The tourism industry, U.S. Coast Guard and fishing are essential to the economy of the City and Cape May shall have protected and fostered their relationship and development within the City. Development of the "Promenade" area along Beach Avenue shall also be addressed.

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. Cape May seeks to develop and promote year round community events. Cape May shall have protected and fostered the development of a wide range of activities that complement residents and visitors alike. Beyond the beach, the City's recreational assets are somewhat limited. The City seeks funding resources to acquire additional land and develop open space lands/recreational opportunities.

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, 150 miles south of New York City, 160 miles north of Baltimore, 194 miles north of Washington, DC and 300 miles north of Richmond, Virginia. In terms of vehicular access, Cape May is within a tank full of gasoline for 25% of the American public. 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 was also serviced by the Cape May Seashore Railroad, which provided service between the City and Cape May Court House, via the historic Cold Spring Village. In addition, the Transportation Center is also serviced by frequent daily bus service by New Jersey Transit on a year round basis. This bus service connects with Atlantic City, Philadelphia, North Jersey destinations, New York City, as well as coastal resort towns in Cape May and Atlantic Counties. Cape May recognizes that for the sustainability of the tourism industry, public transportation must be enhanced, so that it is convenient for tourists to reach and travel throughout Cape May. Cape May shall have sought to coordinate with state, county and local municipalities and solicited funding resources to improve and better develop a public transportation system.

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. 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. Because the City was planned and developed prior to the invention of the automobile, small lots that do not allow for adequate parking and narrow roadways that do not accommodate both traffic and parking are the basis for traffic and parking problems that affect the quality of life for all. The City shall continue to seek funding resources and implement planning recommendations to mitigate these problems. Development of parking and roadway improvements, promotion of enhanced public transportation, pedestrian and bicycle friendly improvement development, as well as determination of the feasibility of alternative transportation such as electric vehicles shall be promoted. Because of the City's geographic location, the City also seeks to foster relationships with adjoining communities and the County of Cape May to address transportation, circulation and parking problems. Continued regional planning including shared service agreements with neighboring communities for various services shall also be continued and promoted by the City to keep costs down for the taxpayers.

The City of Cape May is primarily developed. The Sewell Point residential development proposed in East Cape May remains as the largest remaining area of undeveloped lands. This land area contains approximately 100 acres of environmentally important lands that stretch from the beach to Harbor Cove. The City recognizes that approximately 18 acres are proposed to be developed and the City shall preserve, protect and develop passive recreation opportunities for the remaining 82 acres. The City recognizes this area as a critical habitat and wildlife area and Cape May shall remain vigilant in ensuring any future development will be limited to the anticipated 18 acres and will not adversely impact the environmentally sensitive lands in that area. Other widespread development is not anticipated as the major building construction trends toward tear down and replacement of single family homes.

Lack of affordability of homes has been identified as a concern. Rising property values and attendant taxes have been cited as contributing factors for this condition. A direct result of these factors has been the loss of permanent residents and neighborhoods within the City. Cape May shall continue to implement its affordable housing regulations and otherwise promote greater affordability for homeowners. Cape May also recognizes that majority of property owners do not

reside full-time within the City. Cape May must strive to recognize and balance the needs of both full time and part time residents with the City's commercial interests.

The eastern end of the city is occupied by a U.S. Coast Guard training facility, which occupies approximately 20% of the land area in the City. The training facility trains approximately 4,500 recruits per year, employs approximately 1,200 workers and has approximately 40,000 visitors per year. Cape May recognizes that the base provides a year round population that sustains economic activity and therefore desires to foster and better its relationship with the U.S. Coast Guard. The City shall work with business owners to develop a "Coast Guard friendly" business program and shall also work with the Coast Guard to establish the City to be ranked as a "Coast Guard City". Cape May shall also continue its cooperative planning including the beach replenishment program and shared service agreements that include police, fire and rescue services. Cape May shall also work with the Coast Guard to promote alternative energy sources including the proposed wind turbines. Cape May shall strive to develop housing options that are more affordable and may be utilized by the Coast Guard.

Summary

Cape May City conducted three vision workshops as part of the Plan Endorsement process with the State Planning Commission. The first two sessions, held on May 12, 2011 and May 19, 2011, respectively, were workshop style workshops that provided residents with the opportunity to give input and help shape the vision of Cape May with respect to specific topic areas. The first session focused on what makes Cape May special and identifying problems that must be addressed. The second session focused on more specific issues including the beach, environmental and natural resources, traffic, housing, demographics and historic and cultural resources. Both sessions were well attended with approximately 70 residents at all sessions county, state and federal representatives also participating. The sessions were unique in that visioning was not so much a dramatic change, but how to preserve, protect and enhance the many positive aspects of the City was the focus. The third session was a presentation of a summary of both sessions and included public feedback and additional comments. The results of all three sessions were compiled into this vision statement for submittal to the State Planning Commission as part of Cape May's petition for Plan Endorsement.

The Visioning Statement was presented by the PEAC and Craig R. Hurless at the June 14, 2011 regular Planning Board Meeting of the City of Cape May. The Plan Endorsement and Visioning process was discussed and comments from the public and Board Members was taken. The Planning Board unanimously approved and endorsed the Vision Statement and recommended it for consideration by Council.

On June 21, 2011, the Vision statement was presented by the PEAC and Craig R. Hurless to the City Council of Cape May at a advertised public meeting. The City Council unanimously voted to approve the Vision Statement and adopted Resolution 131-06-2011 authorizing the submission of the Vision Statement and support materials to the Office of Smart Growth (Office of Planning Advocacy).

While this vision statement summarizes the thoughts and ideas projected during the three workshops, planning board meeting and council meeting, it cannot completely convey the great sense of community cooperation and participation that occurred because of these sessions. The Cape May City community showed its dedication, ingenuity and commitment to proper planning and implementation of its overall vision as articulated within this Vision Statement.