

CITY OF CAPE MAY COMMUNITY VISIONING STATEMENT - 2031

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.