

WEST CAPE MAY OVERVIEW

III

The Town

West Cape May is part seacoast village and part countryside. However, the Borough is not located directly on the ocean. Half of its land area remains open space -- a serene rural landscape dominated by farm fields, woods, wet meadows and water. The remainder of the town consists of a single compact traditional neighborhood with a historic district at its core. The buildings lining Broadway, the town's tree-shaded main street, are older and notably attractive.

Regulation

West Cape May is positioned within an environmentally sensitive area adjacent to the ocean. The coastal area and its associated wetlands and waterways are highly regulated by both State and Federal agencies.

The Borough is located entirely within the CAFRA Zone as designated by the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP). CAFRA stands for Coastal Area Facilities Review Act and regulates development within the CAFRA Zone.

Other State permitting potentially applicable to projects in West Cape May include Waterfront Development, Coastal Wetlands, Tidelands Conveyances, Freshwater Wetlands and Stream Encroachment. In addition, the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACOE or Corps) has jurisdiction within tidal wetlands and waters. Any projects located within such areas would require a permit from the Corps as well as the NJDEP.

Land

There is a significant amount of land in West Cape May that remains undeveloped. Decisions made over the next few years will have a significant impact on the look and feel of the community, and how financial resources will be committed in the future.

Environment

West Cape May is environmentally significant in that it is part of an internationally recognized avian migratory path along the Atlantic flyway. Along with the rest of Cape Island, it serves as part of a migratory stopover for birds of prey, butterflies, dragonflies, shorebirds and songbirds. In addition, it supports populations of *Hyla chrysoscelis*, the southern gray treefrog, which is a State listed endangered species. Many other protected species have been documented within the Borough, see Figure III-1. Migratory Bird Habitats Adjacent to West Cape May.

Migratory Bird Habitats Adjacent to West Cape May

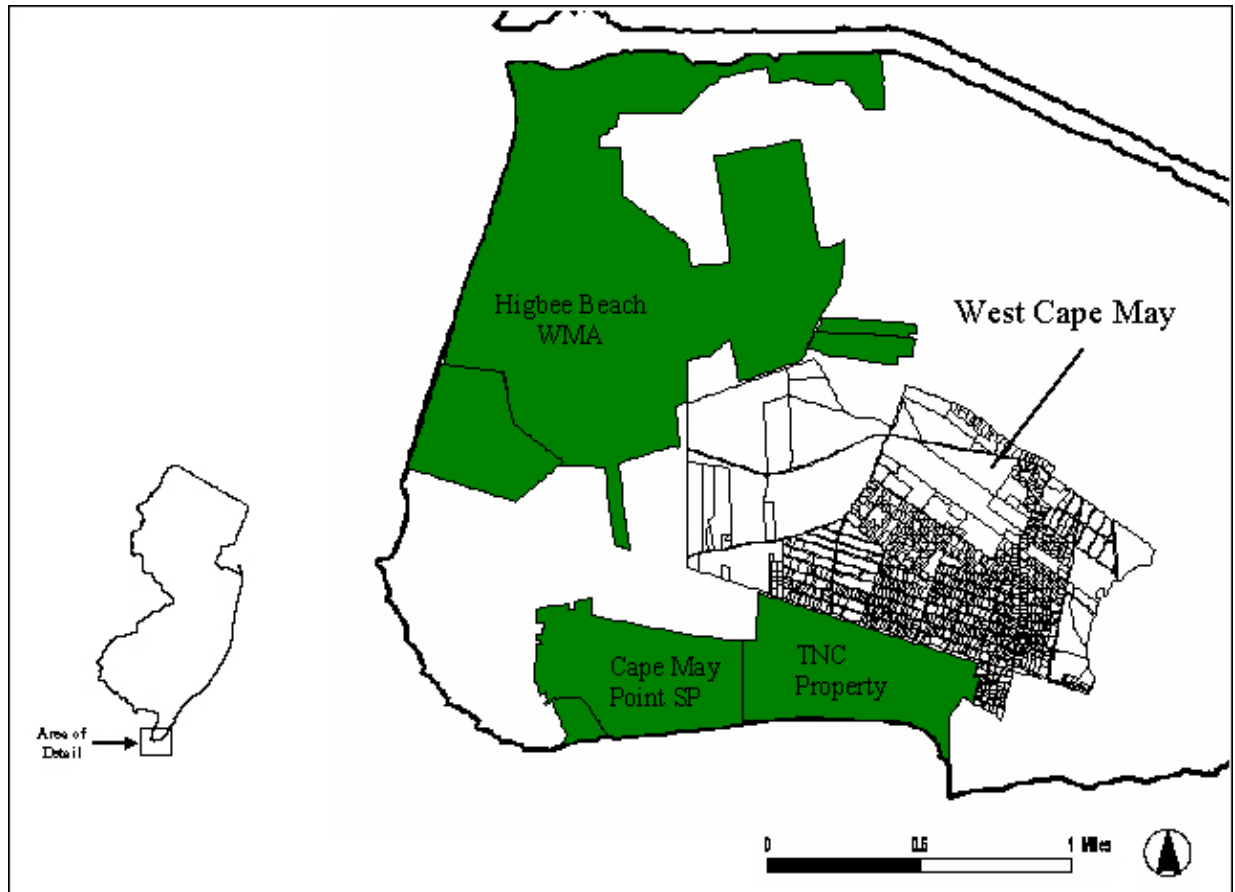


Figure III-1. Open Space Areas Adjacent to West Cape May. These Areas Have Been Internationally Recognized for Their Importance to Migratory Birds.

Tourism

According to the New Jersey Audubon Society (NJAS), ecotourism pours over \$46 million into the Cape Island economy. It is critical that decisions regarding the environment reflect this reality.

Geography

Geographically, West Cape May sits between two internationally recognized migratory and breeding habitats, Cape May Meadows and Higbee Beach Wildlife Management area. It is important to note that open space decisions could be

made to link these areas, creating a greenway connecting the Atlantic Ocean to the Delaware Bay through properties in West Cape May.

West Cape May: Borough Facts & Figures

- ❖ 1.2 square miles
- ❖ 1,095 residents
- ❖ summer population – 6,400
- ❖ 1,004 housing units
- ❖ population over 65 – 27%
- ❖ racial mix – 84% white, 15% black, 2% Hispanic
- ❖ children in elementary school – 91
- ❖ cost/pupil - \$9,300
- ❖ cost/pupil – middle school - \$11,557
- ❖ cost/pupil – high school - \$11,557
- ❖ median assessment - \$160,300
- ❖ median tax bill - \$2,966
- ❖ principle economic activity – tourism

Location

West Cape May is located 70 miles south of downtown Philadelphia. One hundred and ten (110) miles due west is Washington, D.C. and the Pacific Ocean is 2,700 miles away. Due east of the Borough, the Azores are 2,300 miles away and Lisbon, Portugal is 3,500 miles away.

Terrain

The Borough is flat. It is a level, low-lying and wet place on the edge of the sea. More than half of West Cape May's land area is less than ten feet above the ocean at mid-tide. The highest point in town is barely more than twenty feet above mean sea level.

Land's End

Cape Island is at the tip of a peninsula, a finger-like projection of land stretching 20 miles out to sea. Peninsulas are a relatively rare type of landform and the Cape May Peninsula is among the largest in North America. Its closest cousin is the Delmarva Peninsula, which forms the eastern shore of Chesapeake Bay.

Rising Sea Level

For about 18,000 years, the temperature of the earth's atmosphere has been rising, causing melting of the polar ice caps. The melt water has increased ocean depths throughout the world. Sea level rose approximately 15 inches in our region during the past century, and is expected to continue to rise for the foreseeable future.

The consequences of the on-going inundation of Cape Island by the sea include:

- ❖ Shoreline erosion and tidal flooding caused primarily by storms (hurricanes and northeasters).
- ❖ Wider, deeper, and saltier streams
- ❖ The tides penetrate further into the interior of Cape Island
- ❖ Salt marshes migrate; replacing swamp forests as trees are killed when saltwater inundates their roots.

Sandy Loam Soils

About 30% of West Cape May (225 acres) is part of a contiguous agricultural district that can best be viewed from Bayshore Road. The soils in this district are made up of various combinations of sand, loam and gravel, with the best soils having the most loam (sand, silt and clay). Loam improves the fertility of a soil, as well as its capacity to retain the right amount of moisture that growing crops need. Good farming soils are found in higher elevation areas that are well drained, since most crops cannot tolerate long periods of inundation by standing water.

Specialty Crops

West Cape May has a long history of providing Cape Island's hotels and restaurants with fresh produce, meat, poultry and dairy goods. Lima beans have been a major crop here for at least 50 years. However, the soils are good for raising a variety of vegetables, including peas, sweet corn, snap beans and tomatoes. Potting plants and flowers for dried arrangements are important local crops, and rye is often planted over the winter months. Agriculture is highly compatible with the local tourism economy. Farms are scenic, and for generations a trip to the shore has always included stopping at a farm stand and taking some "Jersey Fresh" produce home.

Vineyards

Although there are none in West Cape May, a vineyard has been established on Cape Island and premium table wines are now being produced by a local family-run winery. Both white and red wine grapes thrive in local soils and relatively dry climate. Netting placed over the vines protects the grapes from birds. Vineyards are scenic and tourists love wine tasting, and so it makes sense for Cape Island to become a mini "wine country". The most valuable agricultural lands in the world are vineyards.

Mineral Resources

Sand, gravel, and topsoil have been excavated out of local "borrow pits" (open mines) in past years. These mined areas are shown on County Soil survey maps. Small fresh water ponds were sometimes created in the process of mining. Most

of these have been taken over by reed grass (*Phragmites*) or have become swamp forests.

Geology

West Cape May is located within the New Jersey Coastal Plain. The New Jersey Coastal Plain is a seaward-dipping wedge of unconsolidated sediments that range in age from Cretaceous to Holocene. These sediments, for the most part, are classified as continental, coastal or marine-type deposits. The sediments generally strike northeast-southwest and dip gently to the southeast between 10 and 60 feet per mile.

The Coastal Plain deposits thicken seaward from less than 1 foot at the Fall Line (north/northeast of Trenton) to more than 6,500 feet at the southern tip of Cape May County. Since the Borough is located at the southern tip of Cape May County, the coastal plain has a thickness of more than one mile beneath the Borough.