

# *State of the Township Address*



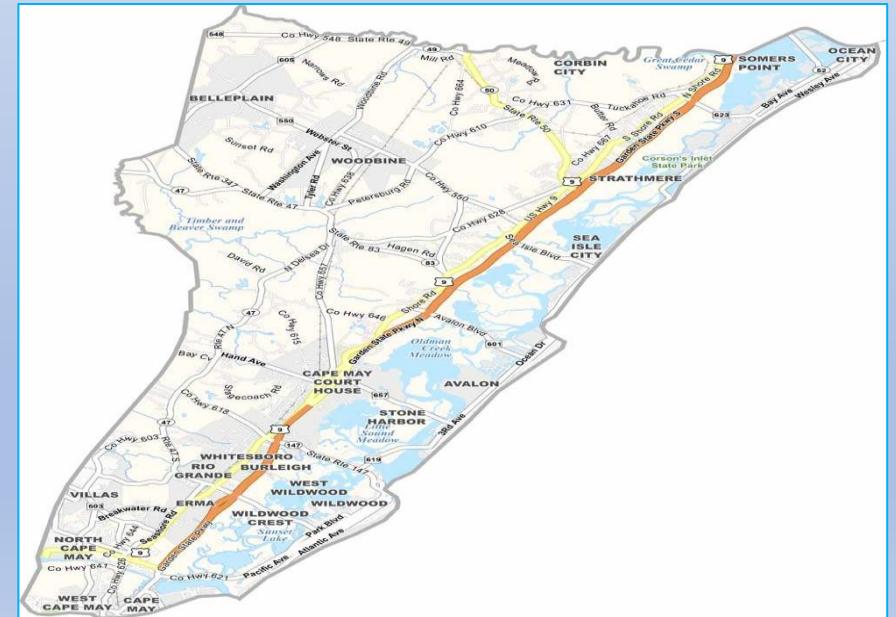
*Lower Township (Cape May County) New Jersey*

*Mayor Frank Sippel*

February 2, 2026

# *About the Township of Lower*

- Located at the **southernmost tip of New Jersey**
- Largest **year-round population** in Cape May County ( $\approx 23,000$  residents)
- Covers **32 square miles** between the **Atlantic Ocean** and the **Delaware Bay**
- Known for its **coastal communities**, natural landscapes, and **scenic Delaware Bay sunsets**
- **Incorporated in 1798**, with a rich local history
- Comprised of historic communities including:
  - Cold Spring
  - Erma
  - Fishing Creek
  - Villas
  - Diamond Beach
  - Shawcrest
  - Schellenger's Landing
  - North Cape May
  - Townbank



Lower Township is home to key regional assets, including the **Cape May County Airport** and the **Cape May–Lewes Ferry**, and features a rich collection of historic, cultural, and natural attractions. These include **Historic Cold Spring Village**, **Naval Air Station Wildwood**, **Higbee Beach Wildlife Management Area**, **Fish and Wildlife Refuge- 2 Mile Beach Unit**, **Bennett Bog Preserve**, **Bethel Civil War Cemetery**, the **Fishing Creek School**, the **Cape May Lighthouse**, **Sunset Beach** and **The Atlantis**, and the **Cox Hall Creek Wildlife Management Area**.



The Township has operated under a **Council–Manager form of government** since 1984. The governing body consists of a Mayor, Deputy Mayor, and three Ward Councilmembers, with the Township Manager overseeing daily operations and administration.

# Councils 2025 Administrative Actions

- In 2025, Mayor & Council approved a public land auction at which 9600 Seaview, was successfully auctioned off for \$1,000,000.00 and put this property back on the tax rolls. We will continue to identify vacant properties that can assist in benefiting Lower Township.
- Over the last several years, the Township of Lower has been diligently working to improve Schellengers Landing by working on a traffic calming project which includes, rumble strips, crosswalks and Rectangular Rapid Flashing Beacons which will help the flow of traffic. The Solar Powered Flashing Beacons were installed this year.
- Mayor and Council with the assistance of the Lower Township Chamber of Commerce and Citizens/Veterans advisory committee implemented the Hometown hero's program, recognizing local Veterans that served our Country on banners hung throughout the township. Lower township Public works assisted with the installation of banners and poles.



# 2025 Points of Interest

- 2025 Municipal Budget
- Higbee Beach Project
- Capital Improvement Projects
- Highlighted Special Events
- 9/11 Ceremony
- Various Recreation Events
- Township Engineer



# 2025 Municipal Budget

- Council approved a \$ 34,688,495.57 budget

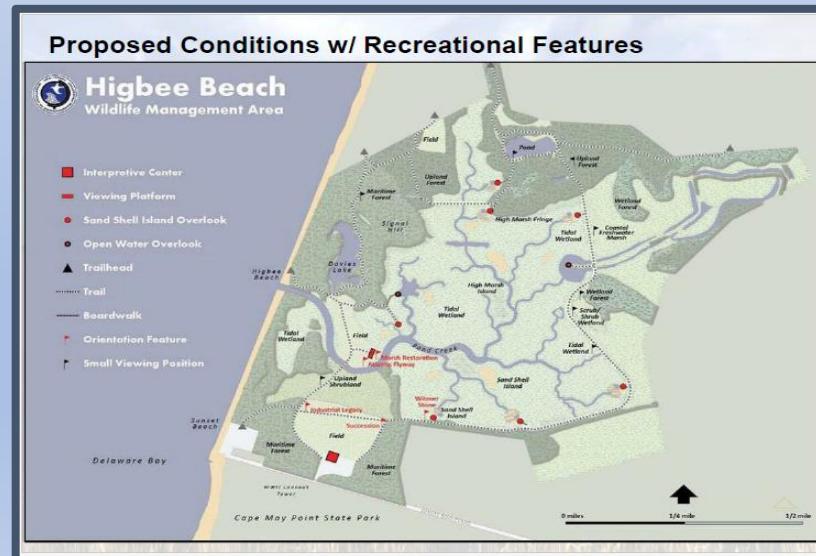


# Higbee Beach Project

The New Jersey Division of Fish & Wildlife have been working on the upgrades to Higbee Beach to provide enhanced viewing of our spectacular natural resources. This project will visually open up Pond Creek tidal and fresh water habitat and provide access for viewing via a bridge crossing. This is a 33-million-dollar project funded by the state and federal government.

This project includes:

- Observation Deck
- Nature Trails
- Overlooks





## Trail Map

### Higbee Beach Wildlife Management Area



The New Jersey Division of Fish & Wildlife stated that the official end date for the project is December of 2026, but the project is currently running slightly ahead of schedule so if the project stays on track, it may be completed fall 2026.

## 2025 Completed Capital Improvement Projects

- Schellenger's Landing Traffic Calming Improvements
- Reconstruction & Paving of Cardinal Road
- Extended 5 Bayfront outfall Pipes Phase I
- Bayshore Pickle Ball Courts
- Reconstruction of Beach Avenue from Spruce-Maryland





# 2025 Highlighted Special Events

The Township of Lower hosted several FREE concerts in 2025 at the Ferry Terminal from 5:30 to 8:30 p.m. The concerts featured many artists on Wednesday evenings throughout the summer.. This event was partially funded with a grant from the Cape May County Department of Tourism.



**Lower Township's Annual Veterans Day Parade** honors those who have served in the United States Military. The parade consisted of some of the same favorites as years past, such as a line-up of military and first responder vehicles, live music, youth and civic groups, a marching band from a local high school, and representatives from several veterans' groups and elected officials.



# 9/11 Ceremony

The Township of Lower hosted a remembrance ceremony to observe the 24<sup>TH</sup> anniversary of 9/11, which was held at the NAS Wildwood. During the ceremony there was a moment of silence to honor those who lost their life. In addition to Mayor Sippel and Council there were several guest speakers who sang, prayed and gave speeches.



**The Easter Egg Hunt/ Spring Fling** is a Spring-time activity for children up to and including the fourth grade. Children are divided into age groups and each “Hunt” in their own area. The children “Hunt” for eggs filled with goodies and golden coins for special prizes. Children receive a bag to put their treasures in, and the Easter Bunny is also at the event to visit with the children.



**The Annual Trunk or Treat** event is a fun, safe, interactive Halloween event! People gather in a large parking lot (Ferry Terminal), and decorate the trunks of their car. Kids are able to trick or treat by going from trunk to trunk!



# Haunted Trail Walk



Halloween Haunted Trails is a fall event that is free, fun, family-friendly and is perfect for everyone. There are plenty of screams and nervous laughs compliments of the scary Halloween characters.

- Free event for everyone
- Over 50 volunteers participated
- Over 1,500 residents enjoyed the haunted trail walk



# Engineer Report (DeBlasio and Assoc.)

- Planning and Zoning Escrow Reviews on Thirty-Four (37) Projects.
- Project Management, Design Engineering, Right-of-Way Services, Utility Engineering, Environmental Compliance, and Construction Observation on Twelve (17) Capital Projects.
- Engineering and Support Services on six (6) Grant and Loan Initiative(s).

<b>Grants Obtained for the Following Projects</b>	
<b>Program</b>	<b>Amount</b>
DO NJDOT Municipal Aid-Frances Avenue	\$ 130,710.00
H NJ Infrastructure Bank-Storm Sewer & Roadway	\$ 2,000,000.00
CMC – Open Space Grant	\$ 2,139,567.00
Small Cities – Rotary Park	\$ 400,000.00
Green Acres-Rotary Park	\$ 750,000.00
Municipal Stormwater Assistance Grant- GIS Mapping Services	\$ 25,000.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$ 5,445,277.00</b>



# *Snapshot of 2025 Departments:*

- Public Safety (Police)
- Courts
- Public Works
- Clerks Office
- Tax Assessor
- Tax Collection
- Treasurer
- Human Resources
- Office of Emergency Management (OEM)
- Planning and Zoning
- Construction
- Code Enforcement
- Recreation
- Fire Safety

# Public Safety

- **Glock G45 MOS 9 mm Handguns** (65) procured and fielded with Holoson direct mounted Red Dot sights and Streamlight TLR-7X Flex Flashlights. Previous weapons were traded against the overall cost. The 9 mm platform is FBI recommended and long-term a very cost-effective savings to the Township. The combination of the 9 mm platform and direct mount red dot sights have a proven track record of significantly increased qualification statistics, thus increasing the level of officer safety in the unfortunate event that an officer is required to use deadly force.
- **Cordico Wellness App** to increase officer wellness, resiliency, and safety. Allows for anonymity for all employees who reach out for services. The police chaplains, EAP, and resiliency counselors are all listed within the app with one touch direct contact. This application is also available for the officers' families and retired officers.
- **RAM Pro-Master Utility Van** to be converted into a Command/UAV operations vehicle to be utilized as a command center at critical incidents and special events.
- **Axon Body Worn Camera Body 4** upgraded the Body 3 version for all officers. Body 4 cameras have significant upgrades to include two way hands free audible communication.

# Public Safety cont.

- **Panasonic CF-33 Rugged Tablets** (16 MDTs for patrol vehicles) the ultimate 2-in-1 detachable notebook offering unparalleled flexibility in the even the most extreme environments. TOUGHBOOK 33 delivers rugged mobility with a wide range of integrated options making them customizable to the department's specific needs.
- **Blue Voice Closed-Loop Generative AI** one-stop AI Assistant for Officers and Administrators. Allows quick searches for any information and enables voice-active paperwork. Our officers now have critical information almost instantly at their fingertips. It also has built-in policy management, case law, accreditation compliance analysis, fillable forms, and is CJIS (criminal justice information systems) compliant. Contains but not limited to integrated maps and floor plans of critical infrastructure, ordinances, criminal and traffic laws, operations plans, training plans, and emergency response protocols.

# Lower Township Courts

- The Township of Lower and the Borough of Wildwood Crest have started the steps into a shared services agreement for their municipal courts. The Wildwood Crest Municipal Court is now being heard at the Lower Township Municipal Court. You can now handle all your matters with these two courts on the same day.
- Lower Township Court held 44 weekly court sessions in 2025, between 50-80 cases are heard each week.
  - 39 were scheduled for trial
  - 8 were referred to mediation
  - 5 were successfully mediated without having to go to court
- Lower Township saw a 1% increase in criminal filings and a 32% increase in traffic filings
- Wildwood Crest saw a 10% decrease in criminal filings and a 26% increase in traffic filings

Grand total of filings for both courts were 6,270

--Falling behind on your fines? Please contact the court! The Court does not want to see you fail! They will work with you to get you back on track. Fines may be paid online at [www.njmcdirect.com](http://www.njmcdirect.com)



# Public Works

- Fall/Winter leaf and branch schedule is on the Township website; 2nd sweep starts the end of January - weather permitting.
- The Reconstruction/Paving of Cardinal Ave and a portion of Beach Ave in Villas was completed in the fall of 2025.
- Several Stormwater Outfall pipes on Delaware Bay front have been extended to increase prevention of roadway flooding.

*Any questions please reach out to Public Works*

*609-884-0898 Ext: 310 or 315*

*Hours: 7:00am- 3:00pm*



# Clerk's Office

- 1092 Short Term Rental Licenses
- 307 Business Licenses
- 817 Dog Licenses Issued
- 416 Resolutions
- 22 Ordinances passed
- 234 Yard Sale Permits
- 171 Street Opening Permits Issued
- 19 Registered Vacant Properties
- 127 Marriage Licenses Issued

## **Clerks Office:**

It is a public service office that performs a wide variety of department functions and citizen services with the main objective to provide prompt and courteous service to the citizens of Lower Township.

In addition, the Clerk's Office maintains records including all resolutions, ordinances, agendas, and minutes for the municipality. The Clerk, is the Registrar of Voters for the municipality, administers local elections and issues licenses and permits.



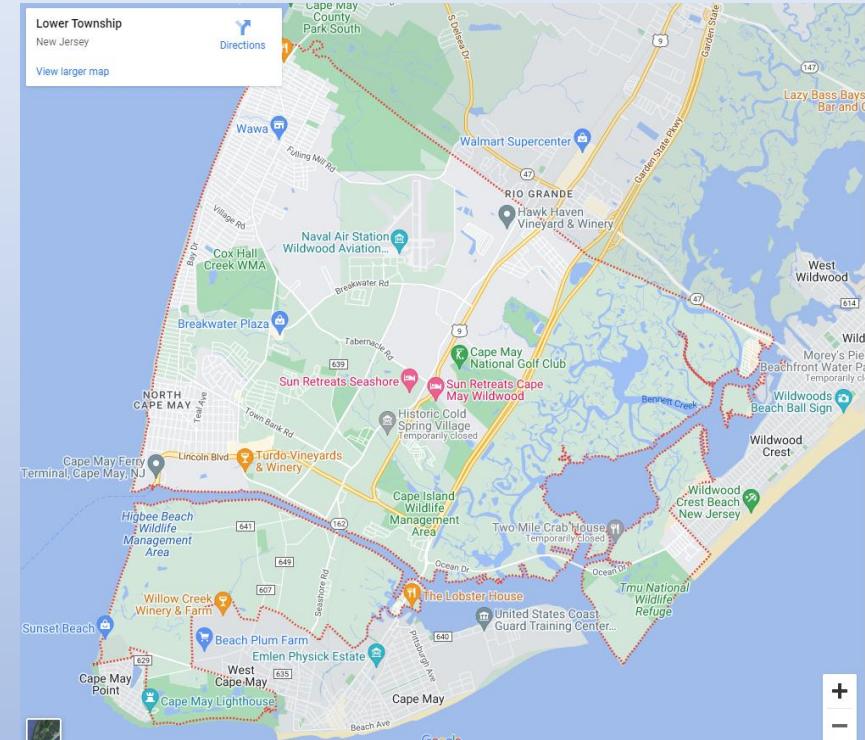
## **Vital Records**

The Registrar maintains permanent records of births, marriages and deaths that occur within Lower Township. Applications for a Marriage or Civil Union license for Lower Township residents or out of state residents wishing to have their ceremony in Lower Township's municipal boundaries can be obtained in the Clerk's Office.

# Tax Assessor Office

- \$37,825,050 in added ratables via 2025 added assessments.
- Generated \$526,663 in tax dollars through 2025 added assessments. \$398,848 to the Municipality, \$101,955 to the County, and \$25,860 total for our fire districts.
- 2024 & 2025 added assessments increased our municipal assessed value by \$75,465,750. This generates an additional \$1,522,899 in annual tax dollars.
- 2026 Ratable base \$3,794,140,600

**Mission Statement:** *The Assessor's Office is committed to distributing the tax burden fairly and equitably for the property owners of the Township of Lower. The Assessor and staff strive to provide excellence in public service in a courteous, timely, and professional manner, as well as educate the public of the overall assessment process and property tax relief programs.*



# Tax Collectors Office

- In 2025 the tax office collected over 79 million dollars in taxes and other municipal charges such as Lot Clearing Fees, Commercial Trash Payments and Municipal Service Fees..
- The unaudited tax collection rate for 2025 is 98.93%.
- As of 12/31/25, only 12 properties had a balance of \$7,000.00 or higher. Eleven properties received a 6% YEP (4 of which went to the Outside Lien Holders.) totaling \$9,609.63.
- The Township of Lower has over 900 property owners who qualify for a Veteran Deduction and/or Senior Citizen/Disabled Person Deduction of \$250.00. As well as the largest number of Exempt Veterans in the County.
- Over 3,500 residents of Lower Township qualify for Stay NJ.



*Property taxes are due: on February 1, May 1, August 1 and November 1.*

*Failure to receive a bill does not exempt you from paying taxes or the interest due on delinquent taxes.*

# Treasurers Office

- 2025 Year End Fund Balance \$ TBD
- Cannabis Tax: \$137,535.17
- 3% Occupancy Tax: \$1,069,794.74
- Grants Received: \$4,045,624.50

Program	Amount
Alcohol Ed	\$ 2,063.32
CMC Arts Program	\$ 9,475.00
Atlantic County JIF	\$ 5,475.00
Clean Communities	\$ 103,145.30
Click it or Ticket	\$ 5,600.00
Cops in Shops	\$ 2,880.00
Distracted Driving	\$ 3,500.00
Drive Sober	\$ 10,850.00
DOT Municipal Aid	\$ 200,000.00
Historic Trust	\$ 151,000.00
Local Recreation Grant	\$ 92,000.00
Lower Cape Alliance	\$ 26,215.00
OEM	\$ 10,000.00
Opioid Settlement/Future Programming	\$ 74,896.39
CMC – Open Space Grant	\$ 2,139,567.00
Recycling Tonnage	\$ 36,957.49
Small Cities – Rotary Park	\$ 400,000.00
Summer Shore Safety	\$ 7,000.00
Green Acres-Rotary Park	\$ 750,000.00
Police Summer Program	\$ 10,000.00
NJ Humanities-Community History Project	\$ 5,000.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$ 4,045,624.50</b>

# Human Resources

- **Mission Statement:**

- To support Lower Township's mission by attracting, developing, and retaining a qualified and diverse workforce while ensuring compliance with all applicable laws, regulations, and civil service requirements. The Human Resources Department provides strategic guidance, operational support, and fair, consistent personnel practices that promote accountability, transparency, and organizational effectiveness.

- **Administration & Compliance:**

1. Civil Service compliance and liaison
2. Policy development and interpretation
3. Personnel records management
4. Workforce planning
5. Title & duty alignment
6. Organizational and position-support
7. Health benefits administration
8. Performance evaluation administration
9. Employee Relations



# Office of Emergency Management

- Emergency Management Coordinator – Gary Douglass and Deputy Coordinator - Katie Crecca.
- Tasked with establishing a warming shelter which currently is located at the Seashore Community Church on Seashore Rd in Erma during the winter months. Lower Township, also has two (2) Emergency Warming/Cooling Shelters located at the Recreation Center and the Millman Center - always ready for emergencies.
- OEM is responsible for Incident Action Plans for Large-Scale Events within the Township which include:
  - July 4<sup>th</sup> Fireworks Event
  - Town Bank Property Owners Assoc – Whale of a Day
  - Veterans Day Parade
  - 9/11 Ceremony
  - Lower Township Rotary Club Christmas Parade



# Planning and Zoning Office

- 14 Use Variances were conditionally approved.
- 19 Site Plans were conditionally approved.
- 19 Subdivisions were conditionally approved.
- There are currently no vacancies on either the Zoning Board of Adjustment nor the Planning Board.
- Total Collected in Application and Escrow fees \$218,770.40.



# Construction Office

- 1,869 permits issued
- 127 permit updates issued
- 6,240 inspections completed
- Grand total permit fees collected \$1,036,837

*The Construction Department is in place to enforce the Uniform Construction Code (UCC) and Township rules and regulations for permit compliance. The Department will issue any Certificates of Approvals or Certificates of Occupancy for active permits. The Construction office is available to all residents with questions regarding any construction project within Lower Township. 609-886-2005 Ext: 104 or 136*



# Code Enforcement

- Received 603 Complaints
- Issued 21 Summons
- Responded to 511 dogs on the beach
- Goal is to obtain compliance through verbal warnings, notices of violation, and issuing summons

IMPLIED WRITTEN CRIMINAL RULES REGULATIONS

FEDERAL SAFETY LAWMAKERS CRIMINAL AUTHORITY

CODE POLICIES FOLLOW GOVERNMENT ENFORCE

ENVIRONMENTAL SOCIAL REFORM

PHILOSOPHY PENALTIES PERMITS COURT STATUTES LOCAL STANDARDS

# Parks and Recreation

- Bayshore Road Pickleball Courts Project
- Implementation of Drone Show as part of Family Fun Night
- Implementation of Youth Summer Camp- Anticipated Increased Enrollment in 2026
- Installed Digital Information Sign at Millman Center
- Installed Digital Information Sign at Freeman Douglass Park and New Baseball Scoreboard
- Increased Summer Concert Series to Eight (8) Concerts
- Community Pool Building Reconstruction and Renovation Project In Progress



*The Lower Township Department of Parks & Recreation strives to provide a comprehensive park system, recreation programs and special events for the entire community.*

# Fire Safety

In 2025, the Bureau of Fire Safety completed:

- 1,867 Rental Inspections
- 1,810 Business Inspections (initial & re-inspections)
- 480 Sale Inspections
- 50 permit inspections (tents, welding, gas exchange, etc.)
- Conducted Fire Prevention Week in all Lower Township Elementary Schools, October 6 through October 10.
- Conducted 20 Fire Scene Investigations



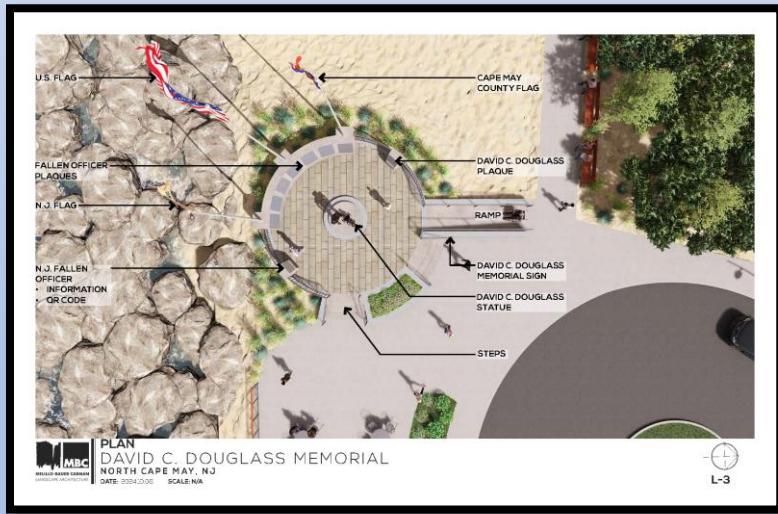
# *2026 Capital Improvement Projects*

- David Douglass Memorial Park Improvement Project
- Rotary Park Improvement Project Phase II
- Delaware Bay Outfall Extension Project Phase II
- Reconstruction of Ridgewood Avenue
- Lincoln Blvd Sewer Replacement
- Lower Township Municipal Pool House Renovation Project
- Arctic Avenue Storm Sewer Replacement
- Clem Mulligan Sports Complex Storm Sewer Pump Station
- Department of Public Works Facility and Recycling Center Improvements
- Holmes, Gorham & Scott Avenue Storm Sewer & Roadway Improvements





## ***David Douglass Memorial Park***



# **2026 Municipal Budget**

Mayor and Council anticipate introducing the 2026 Budget at the March 3 Council Meeting. Manager Laffey and Council and department heads are working diligently to have this budget come in with no increase.



# Questions & Comments







*Thank you, Mayor Sippel and Council*