



## 2016 Freeholder Director's Budget Message

As we move to introduce the 2016 County Budget, I would like to first review with you the spending plan put into place. I believe this budget is fiscally sound and delivers on our promise to streamline government spending and meet the needs of our residents, while providing essential services and programs.

Never in my many years in County Government has the need to protect our citizens been more critical than it is today. We are facing an assault on our communities, our personal safety, and our way of life. We must be prepared to face the challenges of today's world. It would be irresponsible to assume the violent actions that take place all too often around the world, cannot happen here in Cape May County.

To that end, Public Safety is a serious concern; we must be ever vigilant and never underestimate the need to be prepared and proactive. Tighter security measures are being implemented in all County buildings, including the Courts and the Community College. Staffing, training and updating equipment for our law enforcement agencies is a reality and an ongoing process. Our Public Safety Officials, Freeholder Desiderio, and I myself, as Freeholder Director, regularly meet with Homeland Security to ensure we are aware of potential threats and are prepared to implement best practices and procedures.

As Freeholders, we are tasked to provide countywide programs and services to protect and enhance the quality of life of our residents. We are making investments into Economic Development projects at the Airport. We see the potential of new jobs coming to Cape May County and anticipate expanded employment opportunities for our residents.

Through the Open Space program, we are not only preserving land for recreation, farming and through the Historic Preservation Program implemented this year, we are preserving our past for future generations.

Changes in the Department of Social Services were instituted to provide better services to those in needs. Through stricter enforcement as a County Government Department, we have increased staffing and enhanced fraud detection; abuse has been reduced significantly, and benefits are better allocated to qualified recipients. The Code Blue Program has been updated to provide faster response in times of severe weather.

We are moving forward on the County Central Dispatch at the Cape May County Airport. The partnership with Lower Township will result in a considerable cost savings for the County, Lower Township, and all municipalities as they come on board allowing for updated state-of-the-art technology; and, more importantly, resulting in faster response time for First Responders.

The Cape May County Health Department continues to provide needed health programs and services to protect the public. Last year more than 2000 residents took advantage of the free flu shots and hundreds participated in programs and wellness clinics provided by the department's professionally trained staff.

To the credit and commitment of my colleagues on the Freeholder Board, the outstanding work of the Budget Committee and the cooperation of the Department Heads, the Budget we are introducing provides effective and efficient government services that stays with the mandated CAP, and remains affordable to the taxpayers of Cape May County. During these economically challenging times, we are all working to keep spending down; every department is doing more with less.

Inter-local agreements are on the rise, resulting in shared services and reduced cost for the County and our municipalities. New software is in use that makes better use of technology, saving time, money and resources. Historically, this County has operated within its means and has been fiscally responsible to the taxpayers, and that is most evident in the handling of County finances. Bond sales in 2015 resulted in low rates due to our reaffirmed Aa1 rating from Moody's.

Growth in revenue generated from the County Clerk, Surrogate and Sheriff's Offices has offset increased costs and resulted in keeping this Budget on track and within the CAP. Tourism growth continues to reach record highs. Indicators point to 2016 being another record year in tourism expenditures.

Ratables are showing a slight increase for 2016, the second year in a row. This is a positive indicator for the County. However, over the last five year period, the County lost over 8.1 billion dollars in ratables – an approximate 15 % reduction in the ratable base of 2011. These factors all impact the Budget process.

This year's budget has a tax rate increase of less than ½ cent and our tax levy at a 2.6% increase.

The specific overview breakdown of this year's budget in rounded-off dollars is as follows:

1. The Total County Budget for the Year 2016 is \$151.1 million compared to the adopted 2015 Budget of \$142.2 million. This equates to a 6% increase with 4% of that due to the inclusion of the Board of Social Services as a County Department. Total operating expenses are \$75.9 million reflecting an increase of approximately 3.7%. Total Salaries and Wages increased to 50.5 million.
2. The amount of money to be raised by property taxes to support the 2016 budget is \$103.7 million compared to \$101.0 million for the year 2015. The amount of revenue other than property tax used to support the budget is \$47.4 million.
3. The budget uses approximately 52 % of our surplus. Specifically - \$9.65 million of the available \$18.6 million.
4. The County equalized tax rate for 2015 will be .218 cents per \$100 of assessed value. Although it will vary depending on the ratio of assessed value to true value in each of the County's sixteen municipalities, an average taxpayer will pay \$218 for \$100,000 of property assessment.

Cape May County's tax rate remains one of the lowest in the State of New Jersey. The 2016 Budget complies with the New Jersey "CAP" Law. The Public Hearing on the Budget will be held at 7 p.m. on March 8, 2016 in the Freeholders' Meeting Room at the County Administration Building. Public comment and recommendations are welcome. Additionally, this budget document will be available at the Office of the Clerk of the Board at the

Administration Building, and accessible on the county website at  
[www.capemaycountynj.gov](http://www.capemaycountynj.gov)

Thank you.