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## **Cape May County Budget Message for Year 2014**

*Release Date: January 28, 2014*

FREEHOLDER DIRECTOR GERALD THORNTON

On behalf of the Cape May County Board of Chosen Freeholders – I'd like to offer this year's message introducing the 2014 county budget.

Before I give you the particulars of the proposed budget for 2014, it is important to note that again this year we faced many challenges preparing the budget. I am proud to say that with the cooperation and hard work of all county departments, we are able to introduce a budget that is below the mandated 2 % cap and yet still provide the services and programs needed and expected by the residents of Cape May County.

Each year, as opportunities arise, we continue to rethink and reorganize county government. I am proud of what we as a Board and especially our employees accomplished in 2013 with fewer employees and fewer dollars and we will continue our commitment this year to provide the most efficient and cost effective county government services.

In 2014, we are focusing on investing in important areas such as Infrastructure, Economic Development and Governmental Operations. This year, we will re-open our newly renovated senior center in Upper Township in February, break ground for a new County Correctional Center, build new exhibits at the our county zoo, complete the much needed third floor of the county courthouse and end the year with the opening of a state of the art library in Wildwood Crest.

Reinforcing our commitment to Economic Development, we are working to enhance the economic landscape in such a way that the County will be attractive to new businesses and support existing businesses in any way that will help them continue to thrive. The County's economic development initiatives include supporting our aquaculture and winery communities, as well as, provide new infrastructure projects and further development at the county airport.

And finally, to enhance government operations, our comprehensive wellness program for employees continues to grow not only improving the quality of life for our employees but also helping the county to better control the rising cost of healthcare.

In developing the **2014 budget**, after increasing **18% in 2012**, revenues from transfer fees at the County Clerk's office decreased slightly this year by **3 %** bringing in approximately **4.6 million dollars**. However, interest on investments went down **34 %** to slightly over **\$64,000** and for the fifth straight year, our ratable base declined. Over this five year period, the county lost over **8.1 billion dollars** in ratables – approximately a **15 %** reduction in the county's ratable base.

Despite these financial set-backs – I believe we are introducing a solid budget that will continue to protect the services that residents need and expect from county government – while staying affordable to the taxpayers of Cape May County.

This year's budget has a tax rate increase of less than ½ cent and our tax levy is at a **1.9 %** increase. Keep in mind that this tax rate increase is partially attributable to the continued loss of ratables.

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

1. The Total County Budget for the Year 2014 is **\$138.9 million** compared to the adopted 2013 Budget of **\$138.5 million**.

Total operating expenses are **\$70 million** reflecting a decrease of approximately **1%**. Total Salaries and Wages increased slightly to **45.3 million**.

2. The amount of money to be raised by property taxes to support the 2014 budget is **\$98.3 million** compared to **\$96.4 million** for the year 2013. The amount of revenue other than property tax used to support the budget is **\$40.6 Million**.
3. The budget uses approximately 53 % of surplus. Specifically - **\$9 million** of the available **\$17 Million**.
4. The County equalized tax rate for 2014 will be **.209** 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 **\$209 for \$100,000 of property assessment**. **Cape May County's tax rate should remain the lowest in the State of New Jersey.**

The 2014 Budget complies with the New Jersey "CAP" Law. Public Hearing on the Budget will be held at 7 p.m. on March 11, 2014 in the Freeholders' Meeting Room at the County Administration Building. Public comment and recommendations are welcome. In addition to being on hand at the Office of the Clerk of the Board at the Administration Building – this proposed budget will be accessible on the county website, [capemaycountygov.net](http://capemaycountygov.net)

Thank you.