

Municipal Update

December 2025

Dear Ocean Gate Residents,

As 2025 draws to a close, I want to take this time to update you on what's been happening in town since our last update letter in May.

PUBLIC SAFETY:

Council President Jim McGrath, 2025 Chairperson

Brandon Waters, one of our Patrolman (and Ocean Gate resident) continues his EMR training of our Police Officers, Fireman and CERT team. This is an invaluable addition to the capabilities of our protective services, especially since the dissolving of our volunteer EMS service. To date our emergency services departments, have 12 qualified EMR technicians and more continue to be trained.

The Ocean Gate Fire Company has elected new leadership. Chief Larry Murray will be stepping down after 13 years as Chief and 50 total years in the department. Chief Murray has been invaluable as the leader of this extremely important public safety service. Thank you, Chief Murray for your years of service!! Lieutenant Eric Batykiefer will be sworn in as the new Chief at our re-organizational meeting on January 1st.

The Borough continues to invest in our Fire Department. We just invested \$62,000 in new, battery-operated extrication tools (jaws of life & metal cutting tools) to replace our outdated equipment. We have also invested in a 1 man monitor system to spray a continuous stream of water to a separate part of a fire or to prevent the spread to neighboring houses. Our department continues to train at the County training facility, with neighboring communities as well as in town.

The CERT (civilian emergency response team) program continues to be a huge success with 12 fully trained individuals (1 EMR certified). The CERT team expands our police department's ability to keep our residents safe. If you are interested in joining the team, you can go to www.Ready.gov/cert to learn more about the program or contact Chief Mike Kuchta in the municipal building.

The Borough has just passed a new Ordinance dealing with Electric Bikes and Scooters. It is a comprehensive Ordinance and due to the proliferation of electric vehicles, it will be strictly enforced. You can view the new Ordinance at our website; www.oceangatenjgov.com, Government, Ordinances. It will eventually be added to our online code book.

FINANCE:

Councilman Jim Fry, 2025 Chairperson

We have started the 2026 Budget process which is due to the state at the end of March. We will again be applying for Transitional Aid for 2026. We sent out a specific letter regarding the town finances earlier this year so I will not go into detail for the necessity of the State Aid. The \$1,150,000 we received in 2025 was instrumental in helping us raise taxes at a reasonable rate (4.89% in 2025) while we continue to grow towards self-reliance and rebuild a surplus. We are not sure what the 2026 program will look like since there is a new administration in Trenton. We heard rumors before the election that the amount of state funding available will be about 15% less.

The oversight of the state DLGS (Dept. of Local Government Services) has been extremely helpful, connecting us to their experts in categories like Utilities and Public Works. They have also alerted us to grant opportunities that we are pursuing.

MUNICIPAL BUILDINGS & ASSETS:

Councilwoman Joella Nicastro 2025 Chairperson

Many necessary updates to Adrian Hall have been made this year. We have also updated the rental agreement to be more flexible for different types of rentals.

The committee will continue to work on a comprehensive plan in 2026 that addresses the long-term plans and ongoing maintenance of our buildings and grounds.

PUBLIC UTILITIES:

Councilman Russell Ernst, 2025 Chairperson

We are nearing the completion of our new water meter installations with less than 75 to install. These are either unusual, time consuming installations or noncompliance. The noncompliance accounts are being charged a severe penalty.

Our first bills based on the reading of the new meters will have gone out by the mailing of this letter so results of the first 2 readings will be addressed in the May 2026 letter. Since this is our first reading, we are bound to encounter some problems and mistakes. Should you suspect a problem, please be patient with our staff since this is new to them as well.

We are moving along on the water tower and filtration project. The financing through the I-BANK and our Bond Counsel is in place. The first step is to move the cell arrays from the tower to a temporary tower which will be located in the police impound yard next to the tower. This will start shortly and is the responsibility of the carriers to move and fund. The total project will be put out to bid in February and awarded by May. Since the summer is not the time to close the tower, we will start the tower work in October of 2026. We will be obtaining and paying for our water for 3 months from Aqua, which is our back up water supplier. The filtration system has a long (6 months to a year) order lead time so that schedule will be developed once the equipment is ordered after the bid award. Again, this whole project and the water meters have been fully funded by the two \$2,000,000 forgivable (we don't have to pay them back) loans we have been awarded by the I-BANK.

We are entering into a shared services agreement with the BTSA (Berkeley Sewer Authority) to help us maintain and inspect via camera, our sewer system. This idea was generated out of discussions with the utility expert from the DLGS. We are applying for a LEAP grant that will cover the cost of the shared service.

HEALTH, WELFARE & ENVIRONMENT:

Councilman Rick Zieser, 2025 Chairperson

We have updated our Boats and Boating ordinance. One of the changes we have made is the removal date of the moorings. We have moved the date back from Oct 1st to November 15 of each year.

Our 5-year carting contract with Meadowbrook Industries is ending at the end of 2026. We will be going out to bid for the next 5-year contract sometime in the spring. We will be exploring all options available including Robo cans.

PARKS & RECREATION:

Councilman Mark Haug, 2025 Chairperson

Beach Badges and Parking stickers will remain the same price in 2026. New pricing goes into effect every 3 years with the next change in 2027.

The car show returned to the Borough this year, sponsored by the Sentimental Cruisers Car Club. It was a huge success, with over 150 Cars participating. The Sentimental Cruisers donated \$500 from their proceeds to the Ocean Gate Veteran's association and many of the Borough's clubs also had a terrific fundraising day!

The Kris Kringle market was a huge success in its 2nd year! We had 12 vendors and clubs (7 last year) and a huge turnout for Santa and the Grinch on a chilly day!!

MAYOR:

Bob Curtin

Ordinance Codification – We have completed the codification of our Ordinances and they are now available online at our website, www.oceangatenjgov.com. Simply go to our webpage, click the Government tab and click Ordinances in the drop-down window. Click on the Ocean Gate Code button to go to the Table of Contents. You can also search by key word if you're not sure which Ordinance is applicable to your question. This was a HUGE accomplishment that took over a year. We reviewed all Ordinances, made 119 changes, totally updated 9 Ordinances, eliminated 3 Ordinances and identified Ordinances that will shortly need a second look. We also separated all of the Borough's fees into a separate ordinance so it is easier to search for fees and easier for the Borough to keep them up to date with a yearly review.

Insurance – Because of the dramatic increase in the proposed 2026 Borough insurance costs, a major review was undertaken for all the Borough insurance needs. We were able to reduce our property, casualty and workers compensation costs by 18% (\$42, 034.00), and still remain with the Ocean County JIF-MEL.

Our major challenge was the proposed increase to our employee medical benefits costs. In 2025 we got creative with our approach to our medical benefits by adding a form of self-insurance. We projected a savings of \$72,000 but it will actually be closer to \$90,000. When we received our new proposal from the state for 2026, they were increasing our premium by 52% or \$297,000!! After much research, we made the decision to leave the state benefits program (SHBP) and go into the private insurance market. We were able obtain excellent insurance while shaving \$211,000 off the increase from the state. Still an increase but reasonable considering todays health insurance market.

Roads - We were able to work with the County as well as obtain DOT grants to re-mill and re-pave many of our streets. All of Lakewood, E. Long Branch, E. Pt. Pleasant, parts of Stone Harbor were done this year. All of Red Bank (plus curbs), parts of Monmouth and the balance of Stone Harbor will be re-paved in 2026.

Stone Harbor will also have new outflow pipes and new storm drains from E. Lakewood to the boardwalk. This should eliminate the ponding on Stone Harbor with storm/high tide events.

Grants – We recently were awarded a \$235,000 Grant for the work to be done on Stone Harbor Ave. We are also applying for another LRIG grant (Local Recreational Improvement Grant) for the updates to Mease Park. To date we have received \$160,000 in 2 LRIG grants. **In fact, in the last three years, the Borough has obtained \$5,890,000 in grants and forgivable loans!**

We were recently honored at the New Jersey League of Municipalities convention. Our repaving of the Bike Path and the addition of the Exercise Equipment won a statewide award as one of the best recreational projects for 2025. The posterboard from the award ceremony is in the lobby of the municipal building.

Municipal Building upgrades – Our council room sound and recording system was recently replaced. The system was 20 years old and failing. Of particular concern was the recording reliability for court and council sessions. Microphone reliability was also sketchy. The new system was 50% paid for by a Comcast grant. Improved microphone performance and addition of 11 new speakers have greatly improved the sound volume in the council room and for the sound when streaming our meetings.

We are also updating the sign in front of the Municipal Building. The sign has been falling apart for years and a stiff breeze causes some unusual messages when a few letters fall down! This is an important method of communication to our residents so we are excited about our ability to do so with the new digital sign.

Jeffrey's Creek – The condition of Jeffrey's Creek is being addressed by Ocean County under the direction of the Barnegat Bay Partnership. The BBP has a significant sum of money from the county to dredge the Creek from the culvert under E. Chelsea avenue to the Toms River. This will significantly impact the flow of water in and out of the pond. We will be participating in the next phase during a conference call on 12/23/25.

Document Digitizing – A major goal in 2026 is to organize and shred documents in our archives that have been accumulating for years. Many documents need to be permanently retained but many are only necessary to be kept for a specific period of time. We will develop a plan to digitize all our documents so they are safe and as important, easily searchable. OPRA (Open Public Records Act) requests are extremely time consuming, especially for a small municipality like ours with few employees.

In 2026, we are reducing our Council Workshop meetings to quarterly. We continue to have our regular Council Meetings the 4th Wednesdays of each month. Our workshop and regular Council meeting schedule for 2026 are listed on our website.

Follow the Borough on its' Facebook page, Borough of Ocean Gate Municipal page or at our website; www.oceangatenjgov.com.

Bob Curtin
Mayor

Jim McGrath
Council President

Jim Fry
Councilman

Joella Nicastro
Councilwoman

Mark Haug
Councilman

Russell Ernst
Councilman

Rick Zieser
Councilman