

## Mayoral Candidate Zack Mullock

**1. Cape May is a combination of a vibrant tourist destination, within a town of declining demographics. The resident population is aging, families are finding it difficult to secure affordable housing and the identity of our small town is losing its traditional quality of life.**

### What would like to see done to reverse this trend?

*There is no simple solution to this problem. In many ways Cape May is a victim of it's own success. One thing that will be the nail in the coffin for year round residents & families is addressed in the question below, taxes. This is one area where we can control our future. As a Council member for the last 2 years I have witness an attitude that seems to think 'taxes are low, we can afford an increase'. I disagree, we cannot afford another 4 years of tax increases as has been the case under Mr. Lear.*

*To address the issue more directly as Mayor I would implement incentives for City employees to live in town. While this may not bring dozens of families back, it could bring back a few, having our First Responders & City employees in town is certainly a benefit.*

**2. Our Property Tax has risen 44% in 10 years. 10 years ago, our property tax was 47% of all city revenue. This year it is 55% of that city revenue.**

### What would like to see done to reverse this trend?

*It's very unfortunate this question is not being asked in a well publicized debate. This is the type of well researched question the public deserves to hear a honest answer to.*

*I have to give a little shout out to my father who is retiring from his position as Commissioner in Cape May Point, over his 7 years of service Cape May Point saw zero tax increases, while also completing many important flood mitigation projects and road paving. Having worked with him I know what it takes, it boils down to sound budgeting, fiscal responsibility, and planning.*

*Over the past two years I have voted 'no' to both budgets. That isn't something I'm proud of, but ultimately I was given no input whatsoever. I believe the changes I recommended would have saved taxpayers and wouldn't have effected services.*

*I am a business owner, with a Masters in Business Administration. I dedicated many hours into the budget, yet much like the TPA I was not allowed input.*

*To answer the question directly there are many changes I would make. The last Financial Report showed \$1,739 in interest on our cash balances of nearly \$23 Million or basically 0% interest on \$23 Million. Neighboring municipalities get 1.5% interest just on their checking account. 1.5% interest on 23 Million is \$345k. Or enough to finance a \$6.5 Million bond for say a new Fire Station. That is all on money we already have. Under my Administration we be getting interest on our cash and investments. We will also use sweep accounts which may have higher interest rates.*

*The TPA made very good suggestions in regards to beach tags. While it is difficult to study beach tag sales this year due to Covid, I believe the Commercial tag was flawed and so did the Beach Tag Manager. We need to give a good look at our beach tags again.*

*Projects that actually save taxpayers money. Well planned and prudent projects have not been done over the last 4 years, in fact really no projects have been completed over the last 4 years. However, it is possible to do projects that may actually save taxpayer funds. One example I did was the solar panel project at our business. 10 years ago we installed one of the largest solar panel arrays in Cape May County. Today it is paid off, not only do we get Solar Renewable Energy Credits that we can trade on the renewable energy market, but we have essentially no energy bill. These are the types of projects Cape May should be doing.*

*Flood Mitigation projects, again for the last 4 years we haven't done any. These projects typically have lots of available grants. They also can help decrease our CRS rating which would decrease flood insurance premiums.*

*Renewed focus on grants. Cape May has fallen behind on grants. Cape May needs a grant writing office within City Hall. We also have to look at the structure of how we pay our Grant Writers. I believe it should be based more on 'grants rewarded' and less on salary.*

*Cutting expenses. There are many expenses that could be cut. One I would make a change to right away is our Engineering. Over the last 4 years the Lear Administration has spent millions on Engineering and have very little to show for it. With the amount we are spending we could afford to hire a City Engineer strictly for Cape May, and still have a major savings.*

**3. City Council and our Administration have taken a wide variety of unique and unusual actions to accommodate our businesses as they struggle to survive what we all hope will be a short-term disaster. We view these measures as temporary expedients to address a crisis situation.**

**Do you agree? How should the city return to our pre-Covid 19 Quality of Life.**

*I was very happy to ask early on during Covid that the City do what it can to help our businesses. I asked our City Manager if we could put together a Task Force to look at the major issues that our businesses would be facing. Our City Manager did a wonderful job putting that together. I was happy to serve as Council liaison to the Committee. I wrote the Outdoor Seating Resolution with the help of the Committee. I also represented Council on the Slow/Close streets subcommittee, which closed Decatur Street. Those were all very important changes that helped many of our businesses survive.*

*Many of you know my family owns a bar and restaurant. I knew how difficult this year was going to be, and I believe those changes were a major success. I also felt that those with alcohol licenses should be able to serve to tables. I even agreed that those getting drinks could walk within so many feet from the establishment.*

*I totally disagreed with opening up the entire town to open carry during a pandemic. Even as a bar owner myself I thought that was a step too far. In fact I am unaware of any other town on the East Coast that allows open container everywhere, it is always restricted to a certain area. It was a major strain on our Police which was already understaffed. I do not believe that Cape May should continue open container everywhere. It is a recipe for disaster. On the other hand al fresco dining was already on the upswing and I personally feel that was a great success. I believe we should look at how we can accommodate al fresco dining, even if that means charging the business.*

**4. Despite the urgings of TPA, several months ago our City Council adopted the stand-pat 2020 Budget. Revenue projections and planned spending were not adjusted to anticipate the fiscal and operational damage from the Covid Lockdown that we all knew was about to arrive. That damage is here, and it is real. Revenues are running significant deficits, Municipal Services are being altered, and planned improvements are being delayed.**

**What is your feeling on finding new revenue sources and/or reducing spending to address this issue?**

*I voted against this budget because it was completely dishonest. While our businesses were closed, beach tags halted, parking meters off, and no occupancy tax revenue, we passed a budget 3-2 which showed increases to our revenues over 2019 (2019 was a very strong year). To me that was a dereliction of our*

*duty as fiduciaries of the taxpayers. Our August ending Financial Report showed our Current Fund off \$5.5 Million, and it showed our Tourism Utility (mainly funded by Convention Hall) off \$1.1 Million. These numbers are too large to be made up by January. We will absolutely be taking from our surplus and raising taxes. The sad part is much of this could have been avoided had we passed an honest budget. While our expenses are down \$1.3 Million, much of that is in Capital Improvements, and Deferred Charges, meaning we're really just pushing expenses down the road.*

*I spoke about some of the new revenue sources above. Cape May will absolutely need to tighten it's belt over the next year. I am hopeful that as Mayor I will be working closely with the TPA on how to best do that.*

*A member of the TPA gave an excellent presentation many months ago and recommended a Budget & Finance Committee. We have committees for just about everything in this town right now but nothing for the budget. As Mayor I will put this team together within the first 100 days, and start implementing recommended changes.*

**5. The Sewell Tract is 100+ acres of environmentally sensitive wetland that will have a significant fiscal impact on taxpayers.**

**Two separate issues have emerged:**

**a. the preservation of this critical natural barrier, and**

**b. the resolution of a 30-year ligation between the owners of the property, the State and Federal government and a private group of citizens who have joined the litigation.**

**What is your position on each of these issues?**

*I 100% support the preservation of the Sewell Tract. My family and I have been involved in preserving over 100 acres of land in Cape May County. Land preservation is very important to me, preserving the Sewell Tract is extremely important to the City of Cape May. As many people know the Sewell Tract is mainly wetland and is a natural habitat to several endangered species and of course an important flyway for migratory birds. It also has been called "Cape May's sponge" which is vital for storm mitigation.*

*To preserve the Sewell Tract most effectively the City of Cape May must represent itself. It cannot be accomplished through a third party. It was inappropriate that our Mayor & Deputy Mayor attempted to have City taxpayers give funds to a private organization that her husband was President of.*

*The policy of the last four years was to allow the Concerned Citizens to handle the Sewell Tract litigation. That was a mistake. The Lear & Hendricks Administration did not contact the New Jersey Dept. of Environmental Protection, they did not contact the American Littoral Society, they did not contact the Army Corp of Engineers who were opposed to development. Those are the parties involved in the case, not contacting them was a major mistake. Under my Administration we will immediately contact all parties involved in the litigation and work directly with them. We will also contact the other Environmental groups involved in Land Preservation that have also been left out, such as the Sierra Club, the Nature Conservancy, Green Acres (State & County).*

*The bottom line is my family and I have worked with these groups before, we have preserved land and I will do everything possible to preserve the Sewell Tract in perpetuity.*