

## City of Long Branch

### 1. Overview of City of Long Branch and Its Waterfront



Long Branch: Satellite Photo by USGS

#### 1.1 Geographic Overview

The City of Long Branch is 5.2 square miles and is located in Monmouth County along the Atlantic Ocean shoreline, on the barrier beach, backed by the Shrewsbury River. It is bordered on the north by the Borough of Monmouth Beach, to the west by the Borough of Oceanport and to the south by the Borough of Deal. The headwaters of Branchport Creek and Troutman's Creek are found within Long Branch. The Shrewsbury River forms a portion of the City's border with Oceanport.

Long Branch is accessible via Route 36, the Garden State Parkway, and the North Jersey Coast Railroad Line. This good accessibility has not translated into significant growth of commerce and industry during the past 20 years, however, as a result of the lack of vacant land in the City

*Source: Bonnie J. McCay, Debbie Mans, Satsuki Takahashi, and Sheri Seminski. 2005. "Public Access and Waterfront Development in New Jersey: From the Arthur Kill to the Shrewsbury River ." Keyport, New Jersey: NY NJ Baykeeper. <http://www.nynjbaykeeper.org>*

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and the availability of vacant land in other nearby municipalities closer to the major highway networks.

### **1.2 Demographics of Long Branch**

In 2000 there were 31,340 people living in Long Branch. According to the 2000 Census the racial composition is 56.9% White (Non-Hispanic), 20.7% Hispanic, and 18.7% Black. Additionally, the Census reported that 19.7% of Long Branch's population was foreign born, with 12.7% of the population having been born in Latin America.

The 2000 Census shows that the major occupations of the residents are education, health and social services (19.5%), retail trade (12.6%), professional, scientific, management, administrative, and waste management services (10.6%), and construction (10.2%). City officials reported that Long Branch is considered a "bedroom community," with commuters heading to northern New Jersey and New York City for work. Also, many professionals associated with Monmouth Medical Center live in the area.

The 2000 Census reported that the median household income was \$38,651 and the median house value was \$135,300. However, it was noted during an interview with municipal official that this is a diverse city that includes housing ranging from low-income to \$30 million mansions.

The overall impression of driving through the City is the existence of three distinct areas with differing characteristics: (1) the older, denser and moderately priced residential areas flanking Broadway with most structures in generally fair to good condition, but with several pockets of deteriorated building conditions; (2) the Elberon-West End areas of well-maintained homes; and (3) the shorefront section which, while embracing the entire City frontage, varies in depth back from the ocean and includes a vast gamut of building conditions and character in itself.

Generally, one of the major themes of the City's 1988 Master Plan was the description of the Long Branch's physical liabilities, such as major commercial or industrial uses in residential areas.

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### **1.3 Historical Overview and Traditional Waterfront Uses**

The remaining vestiges of Long Branch's heydays as a summer resort can be found in the commercial areas of the shorefront section. Seven United States presidents (Presidents Grant, Hayes, Garfield, Arthur, Harrison, McKinley, and Wilson) vacationed in Long Branch, and New York's rich businessmen arrived at Long Branch's gambling halls by stagecoach. In the late 1800's the park now known as the Seven Presidents Park was the site of "The Reservation" that a Long Branch businessman built for his Buffalo Bill Wild West Show.

In the 1800's there was a ferry service running from the publicly owned pier.

## **2. Waterfront Use**

### **2.1 Summary of Waterfront**

The waterfront is a mixture of public, semi-public and private ownership and uses. There are five miles of beachfront in Long Branch, with approximately two miles of the oceanfront owned by the city. Along the river, approximately 85 – 90% of the waterfront is privately owned. Uses along the waterfront include swimming, walking along the boardwalk, surf fishing, and passive recreation. There are two marinas in Long Branch along Patten Avenue, one private and one public. Generally the boats slipped here are small due to the low clearance of the local bridges over the Shrewsbury River. There is no marina on the oceanfront.

As an older city, Long Branch has old riparian rights that extend out into the water. However, as publicly funded beach replenishment projects progress these areas will become public. Before the beach replenishment projects, the beachfront was washed out to hard packed sand.

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## 2.2 Waterfront Access Sites

	Common Name	Address	GPS	Fishing	Private Marina	Public Marina	Trailer Launch	Hand Launch	Birdwatching	Swimming	Parking	Handicapped Accessible	Picnic Facilities	Food Concessions	Restroom Facilities	Fee	
Publicly recognized sites	Park Avenue			X						X						X	
	Pullman Avenue			X						X						X	
	Adams Street			X						X						X	
	Plaza Court			X						X						X	
	Ocean Cove	North side		X						X						X	
	Harbor Villas	North side		X						X						X	
	Renaissance	South side		X						X						X	
	Brighton Avenue			X						X						X	
	West End Avenue			X						X						X	
	Cottage Avenue			X						X						X	
	South Bath Avenue			X						X						X	
	North Bath Avenue			X						X						X	
	Pavilion Avenue			X						X						X	
	Morris Avenue			X						X						X	
	Melrose Terrace (note: entrance temporarily closed due to construction)				X						X						X
	Laird Street				X					X							X
Madison Avenue				X					X							X	

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	North Broadway		X					X					X
	Seaview Avenue		X					X					X
	Promenade Beach Club		X					X					X
	Seven Presidents Park		X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X
	Branchport Park	Atlantic Avenue			X								
Publicly Inaccessible	Garfield Terrace		X					X	X				

**Beach Access Points:** As indicated in the table, Long Branch has numerous public access points, mainly at street ends. It also provides for parallel access along the shoreline. The area below the mean high water line is publicly accessible. All of these access points are permanently marked with signs, and beach booths appear seasonally on the waterfront. City beach badges are sold to access the beaches for \$35 for a season pass or \$5 for a daily pass.

**Promenade Beach Club:** This access point is considered semi-public; the club allows access to surfers, fishermen, divers, walkers and persons possessing City Beach Passes.



**Seven Presidents Park:** This a 36-acre Monmouth County park located at the northern end of Long Branch. The park has four access points – Joline Avenue, Seaview Avenue, Avenel Blvd., and Atlantic Avenue. Amenities include a beach pavilion, seasonal snack bar, sheltered eating area, changing and rest rooms, and outdoor showers. A surf chair, providing access to the beach for persons with disabilities, is

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available. Lifeguards are on duty 10am to 5pm on weekends beginning Memorial Day weekend, and daily from mid-June through Labor Day. Owners of personal watercraft, car-toppers and other light boats may launch from designated areas at the park. The park also has restored and reconstructed sand dunes where beach grass has been planted. Beach and parking fees are in effect from Memorial Day through Labor Day. Admission is free during the rest of the year. The park is open every day from 8am to dusk.

*Garfield Terrace:* This access point is private.

## **3. Waterfront Issues and Planning Initiatives**

### **3.1 Waterfront Issues**

Long Branch has attempted to revitalize its waterfront several times, beginning in the 1960's. Over this time the waterfront became blighted, and when the fishing pier burned down in 1987 commercial activity on the waterfront effectively ended, and the city moved to acquire the property to promote its redevelopment: "The city reacted to the blight with an ambitious assault, having the crumbling buildings, a rusting water park and more than 200 other properties deemed a zone in need of improvement in 1996 – a required step under New Jersey's Eminent Domain Act of 1971." (NY Times, Mar. 31, 2004 at B6.)

As developers come into the city to build large-scale mixed use developments they are required to provide public access to the waterfront. City officials state that developers understand that adding open space adds value to their project. They understand that installing stormwater controls helps them because the stormwater outfalls are located on the beach next to their development. The city believes that when the developers understand the benefit of providing beach access then they do it willingly.

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Today, when a person can fly two hours to an exotic destination, the shore areas of New Jersey have lost their allure. The city is hoping to attract tourists back to its beaches and to make Long Branch relevant to New York City once again.

### 3.2 Planning Initiatives



In the early 1990's the process of rebuilding the waterfront began. The problem was getting the community and political will to do this. The feeling was that the redevelopment of the waterfront had to be done in an orderly fashion and that it should be done by locals: no one was going to come into Long Branch and tell them how to do this. The idea for the city was to create a sense of a year-round community.

A Redevelopment Plan was adopted by Long Branch, focusing on an underdeveloped segment of the oceanfront as well as an underutilized commercial area along Broadway. A volunteer group (Long Branch Tomorrow) originally put forward the plan. The city then reviewed the plan and had numerous meetings with consultants, the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP), the State Planning Committee, the New Jersey Department of Transportation, and Monmouth County officials. Former Governor Christie Whitman was instrumental in moving the plan forward. The Waterfront Master Plan was approved and adopted in July 1996.

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The city worked with NJDEP to obtain a sector permit, which means that they received a commitment from NJDEP to review CAFRA (Coastal Area Facilities Review Act) permit applications simultaneously with municipal permits.



The new Oceanfront District includes five sectors or “Zones of Character” which are: beachfront south (residential); pier/village center (mixed commercial, entertainment, residential); hotel campus (office, hotel); beachfront north (residential, entertainment); and Broadway-Gateway (mixed

commercial). Development is not being done on a lot by lot basis, but rather through these zones on a large-scale measure. Recent development has included homes, apartments and condominiums (some owner-occupied, others rental).

The objective of the Redevelopment Plan is to renew a sense of place and destination from the cumulative effect of new and infill redevelopment. The plan provides for projects of varying scale. The development strategy increases density while maintaining neighborhood and community scale. The strategy achieves an inherent urban diversity.

The City’s willingness to achieve this plan is expressed through the following actions:

- a. To use city-owned land in the redevelopment area
- b. To cooperate with the County in funding improvements to Ocean Blvd and Ocean Ave
- c. To use eminent domain to acquire property
- d. To cooperate fully with NJDEP to create uniform process of development review and approval

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- e. To protect development investments by maintaining and enforcing a standard of development that enhances the value of all oceanfront sites

Behind the promotion of larger-scale developments in Long Branch is the fact that under the current state CAFRA regulations most coastal developments in New Jersey are 24-units and under. City officials believe that these small developments do not contribute to the property values around them, as they are often gated communities. The public realm is eroded in small, continuous applications. Long Branch officials and planners are trying to ensure that each investment has a relationship to the other. The City is promoting a higher density with a smaller footprint – they do not want buildings that create a wall of development along the beach or cast a shadow on the beach.

Recently the city approved the spending of \$8 million to “unengineer the engineered road” that runs parallel to the ocean (Ocean Blvd). The plan is to incorporate a context sensitive design and connect the waterfront zone with the commercial zone to the west.

The city has been using its power of eminent domain in the designated redevelopment area to make room for new townhouses and condominiums. There has been some controversy over this and one community of homeowners is refusing to sell, no matter how much the city or a developer offers to pay. The city states that it made this area a redevelopment zone because of the deteriorated nature of the neighborhoods, but acknowledges that this was a severe, but necessary, route to take.

There are plans to rebuild the destroyed pier. This will cost \$30 million. The state has funded the feasibility study. Future development plans for the pier include restaurants, research facilities for local universities, and ferry service.

The last full Master Plan was completed in September 1988. It was re-examined in 1994 and July 2000. As noted above, the city has been focusing its efforts on completing the Waterfront Redevelopment Plan.

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The Waterfront Zoning in Long Branch includes the following zoning (as of Dec. 9, 2002):

### *R-7 Riverfront Mixed Residential District*

Permitted uses include:

1. One-family dwellings
2. Municipal buildings, community centers, public parks, playgrounds and parking lots, exclusive of schools
3. Temporary buildings for uses incidental to construction uses
4. Townhouses at a maximum density of six units per acre.

Permitted accessory uses.

Uses requiring a conditional use permit include

1. churches and places of worship
2. marinas

### *RC-1 Beachfront Mixed*

Permitted uses include:

1. Mid-rise apartment buildings no taller than six stories
2. waterfront mixed residential units
3. Townhouses
4. Beachfront commercial
5. Eating and drinking establishments
6. Professional offices
7. Finance, insurance and real estate services
8. Outdoor dining
9. Bakery
10. Health spa/gym
11. Barbershop/beauty salon/tanning salon
12. One-family dwellings

### *RC-2 Riverfront Residential Commercial Zone*

Permitted uses include:

1. Townhouses
2. Neighborhood commercial
3. Waterfront mixed residential units

Uses requiring a conditional use permit include:

1. Marinas
2. Senior citizen high-rise housing
3. Public utilities
4. Motor vehicle services stations

### *C-4 Resort Commercial District*

Permitted uses include:

1. Motels

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2. Municipal buildings, parks and playgrounds
3. Temporary buildings for uses incidental to construction uses
4. One-family dwellings
5. Townhouses
6. Waterfront mixed residential units

Uses requiring a conditional use permit include:

1. Beach clubs
2. Churches and places of worship
3. Senior citizens project

### *S-2 Oceanfront District*

Permitted uses include:

1. Piers, seawalls, bulkheads, boardwalks, docks or fences for beach maintenance or protection
2. Public beaches and buildings, such as rest rooms and snack bars
3. Buildings accessory to parks, playgrounds and other public beach facilities
4. Municipal buildings, parks and playgrounds
5. Temporary buildings for uses incidental to construction uses

Uses requiring conditional use permit include:

1. Beach clubs
2. Commercial/recreational piers, to include fishing/crabbing, eating and drinking establishments, recreational arcades, beachfront commercial, apparel shops, florists, gift shops, bookstores, antique shops, recreational equipment, and health spas and gyms.

Additionally, the City has the following ordinances related to the waterfront:

### *§ 345-55 Waterfront mix residential units*

Requirements include that each waterfront mix residential complex shall be no more than four stories high, except when build over parking, which shall not count; there shall be no less than 10 nor more than 30 waterfront mix residential units per gross acre; and any waterfront mix residential projects which abut the ocean shall maintain a minimum of 40% of the Oceanside frontage free of residential development.

### *§ 345-57 Conditional Uses*

These are uses that are recognized as necessary to serve the needs and conveniences of the city and at the same time may be or become inimical to the public health, safety and general welfare

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if located and operated without proper consideration being given to existing conditions and character of the surrounding area.

### **Section 4: Summary**

Overall, the major changes in Long Branch and along its waterfront have been the development of large-scale residential and commercial buildings, the beach replenishment program paid for in part by the US Army Corps of Engineers, the final destruction of the fishing pier, infrastructure improvements along the roadways that have made the area more pedestrian friendly for access to the beachfront, and improvements completed at the New Jersey Transit rail station in the city.

The city states that when redeveloping its waterfront they want to interconnect it with the rest of the city, that there will be no gated communities, and that it will be developed in a way that increases public involvement. City officials have stated that the premier tenet or principle of the redevelopment process is to keep oceanfront open to the public. There are plans to build a 450-space parking garage for public access parking needs.

### **References**

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*Source: Bonnie J. McCay, Debbie Mans, Satsuki Takahashi, and Sheri Seminski. 2005. “Public Access and Waterfront Development in New Jersey: From the Arthur Kill to the Shrewsbury River .” Keypoint, New Jersey: NY NJ Baykeeper. <http://www.nynjbaykeeper.org>*