

Borough of Sea Bright

Sea Bright

1. Overview of Sea Bright and Its Waterfront



Sea Bright: Satellite Photo by USGS

1.1 Geographic Overview

Total area of Borough is 1.13 square miles, with 0.64 square miles classified as land area and 0.49 square miles as water area. The Borough is four miles in length, but barely a few blocks in width in most places. Route 36 runs through the center of town, generally with residential and commercial development on the west side of the road and a sea wall and beach area on the east side. The Borough is almost completely developed.

To the north of Sea Bright is Sandy Hook and access to the Gateway National Recreational Area. To the south, just down Route 36, is Monmouth Beach. Sea Bright is bounded on the west by the Shrewsbury River and on the east by the Atlantic Ocean.

1.2 Demographics of Sea Bright

According to the 2000 Census there were 1,818 people living in Sea Bright. Of note, Sea Bright's population in 1910 was 1,222, but then in 1920 it dropped to 856 with steady increases over the years (with the exception on 1940, where the population declined). This
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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reflects the trend of people moving to the Jersey Shore area for year-round residency.

The racial composition is 90.8% White (Non-Hispanic), 4.5% Hispanic, 1.8% Black, and 1.0% Asian Indian. The Borough's median household income is \$65,562 and the median house value is \$227,600.

The 2000 Census reported that the major occupations of the residents of the Borough are finance, insurance, real estate, and rental and leasing (16.9%); educational, health and social services (16.9%); professional, scientific, management, administrative, and waste management services (12.3%). Most Sea Bright residents commute fairly long distances to the workplace and this is considered a "bedroom" community.

1.3 Historical Overview and Traditional Waterfront Uses

The Borough was incorporated in the late 1880's. During the early 1840's a small cluster of shacks was located on the barrier beach. This community was called Nauvoo ("beautiful or pleasant place"). In 1842 the first hotel (Ocean House) able to accommodate 300 patrons was opened. This hotel catered to patrons in the area for fishing and sea bathing. Steamboats provided transportation from NYC. In 1865 the Long Branch and Seashore Railroad was completed. The railroad met the NY paddlewheel steamers carrying vacationers bound for Long Branch at railway's northern terminus at Sandy Hook.

In 1870 the first cottages were built and the Sea Bright name was adopted. Between 1870 and 1882 substantial development occurred with large summer homes and hotels being built. Top soil was brought in from the main land and yards with formal gardens were built. At this time the Borough absorbed Nauvoo.

During the early 1880's Sea Bright and Long Branch continued to attract wealthy vacationers. At the time Sea Bright had seven grand hotels, two of which had piers with restaurants on them. None of the original hotels remain. Additionally, since the 1920's the rail line has been removed and this area now contains some of the sea wall.

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Now there are party charter fishing boats that run out of Sea Bright and other waterfront dependent use consists of beach clubs, a marine fabricator and marinas.

2. Waterfront Use

2.1 Summary of Waterfront

It is principally residential with a number of resort-oriented recreational uses. Condominiums, townhouses and other multi-family development dominate. Beach clubs, cabanas, marinas and restaurants are integrated among residential uses. Along the riverfront, marinas, condos and restaurants dominate. Along the oceanfront, cabanas, beach clubs and restaurants dominate.

About 65-70% of the waterfront is privately owned, with the remainder being municipal owned (specifically, the street ends) or used commercially, such as for marinas. The Borough is nearly completely devoid of the natural system of barrier beach vegetation because of the long history of development.

Residents and the public use the waterfront for swimming in both the ocean and river, surfing (although there is not much surfing anymore, and there is only one surf spot remaining out of 12 that were known breaks), beach going, fishing, surf and river fishing, clamming, boogie boarding, kite surfing, motor boating and sailing, kayaking, jet skiing, walking, running, beach shell collection, and bird watching.

On the oceanside virtually all of the beach is open to the public and the only limitations are at the privately owned beach clubs where they charge a fee. However, on the riverside most of the waterfront is private residential, multi-family units and condominiums.

There are no municipal riverfront boat launches. On the Atlantic side, people keep their Hobie-Cats on the beach. There is a walkway/bike path along Ocean Avenue and a little boardwalk deck and restrooms on the Sea Bright public beach. There are no public fishing piers in town, and while there are many docks on the river, they are all privately owned.

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There are signs in certain places in the Borough identifying public access or municipal beach areas. The riverfront park, Swing Bridge Park, has identifying signs. There is a bike path, but it is not designated nor is there any associated parking for the path. There is informal use of the beach club parking area by surfers during the off-season. One restaurant allows beach goers to park in its parking lot during the day.

There is no ferry or train service to Sea Bright; public transit is provided by NJ Transit buses. There are 10 – 12 restaurants along the waterfront (both ocean and river), with about half of them having water views. There was one bait shop in town, but it went out of business in 2003. There are 5 or 6 privately-owned marinas that are open to the public for a fee for boat slips, boat launching and mechanical work.



In recent years, Sea Bright has built public access stairs to get over the sea-wall, which was built in early 1900's and has since been upgraded. There are numerous private access stairs over the sea-wall. The sea-wall stretches the entire length of town and varies in height along length of oceanfront.

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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	Sea Bright Municipal Beach			X				X	X	X	X		X		X	X
	Riverfront Park/Swing Bridge Park															
	Anchorage Beach/Al Ferguson Surfing Beach			X						X	X					
Informally Used and Accessible	Access Path at Municipal Complex															
Publicly inaccessible	Private Beach Clubs									X	X		X	X	X	X



Sea Bright Public Beach: This municipal beach charges a fee for beach access and has parking for about 300 cars. The public entrances to the beach are open 24 hours a day.

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“Anchorage” Beach/Al Ferguson Surfing Beach: This is a state-owned, but municipally managed, beach that is located next to the Rumson Bridge. It is not really used for surfing anymore. There is parking available for 25-30 cars.

Riverfront Park: This is a small park, also known as “Swing Bridge Park.” There is parking for about 10 cars.

Informal Access Point at Municipal Complex: This access point does not have a name.

Private Beach Clubs: Private beach clubs along the Atlantic shoreline include the Ship-A-Hoy, Surf Rider, The Sands, Water’s Edge, and Driftwood. Beach clubs are the only groups that lay claim to own the beachfront.

3. Waterfront Issues and Planning Initiatives

3.1 Waterfront Issues

In 1992 storms caused significant damage in the Borough. The biggest change along the waterfront was when the beaches were replenished in 1996 (financed by federal, state and Borough government). This was followed by the formation of a Dune Grass Committee, which planted dune grasses beginning in 1997, and continuing through today, to stabilize the beaches.

Older single family homes are being demolished or substantially redeveloped and replaced by much larger homes that reach the maximum build-out and height. The Borough recognized this phenomenon and in 1997 amendments to zoning ordinances were completed to try and assess the issue. In October 2002, a consultant was selected to assist the Borough for non-residential development in the business area of town.

The planning issues the Borough is currently facing include shore protection, beach access and increased pressure for redevelopment of existing sites with higher density multi-family housing and parking. The Master Plan recommends that riverfront and oceanfront developments should

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be carefully tailored to optimize the use of these sites. Waterfront property is an extremely scarce resource and all development of these properties should either be water dependent or water related.

Flooding in the downtown area is sometimes a problem. There is also flooding along the river whenever there is a full moon and high tides, with it becoming worse when there are storms. Currently the Army Corps of Engineers is studying the issue and discussing with FEMA possible solutions. In the interim, pumping occurs throughout Sea Bright.

On the Oceanside a tremendous amount of floating debris drifts in from New York City and the Harbor. Additionally, all storm drains connect directly to the surrounding waterbodies and the Master Plan states that this is a problem.

There is no open space tax in the Borough.

3.2 Planning Initiatives

Future planning initiatives for the Borough include Riverfront Park on Center Street, expanding the boardwalk on Public beach and upgrading the beach pavilion. There are some larger pieces of property such as marinas and land parcels that are ripe for redevelopment. For example, the Trade Winds, formerly a summer beach club and night club with the night club operating year-round on the weekends, was recently torn down to make way for redevelopment into twenty multi-million dollar single family homes. The redevelopment is subject to two public access points, one at the southern end and one in the middle of the development. There will also be street parking on the cul-de-sac for the public.

There is really no redevelopment plan for the Borough currently and any redevelopment would be done privately. However, the 2003 re-examination recommends zoning for larger lots to reduce potential driveway cuts and traffic along Ocean Avenue.

The entire Borough touches the water and so waterfront zoning includes the following:

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R-1 and R-2: Residence Zones

B-1: the central or town business zone designed to provide for local shopping and retail business use. Permitted uses include:

- Single-family residential
- Multifamily
- Retail business
- Government services
- Utilities

B-2: Riverfront Business Zone is designed to provide for the development of properties for uses oriented to river activities, especially those which cater to the needs and convenience of boating or to the enjoyment of the river views and vistas by others. Permitted uses include:

- Marina or boat storage yard
- Restaurant
- Banking offices, advertising agencies, multifamily

B-3: Oceanfront Business Zone is designed to provide for the use and development of properties for uses oriented to ocean beach activities, especially swimming and sunning. No building whatsoever shall be erected between the sea wall and the Atlantic Ocean in this zone due to flooding damage. Permitted uses include:

- Public parks
- Swimming clubs
- No conditional uses are allowed

CP: Coastal Protection Zone is the special zone covering a very narrow strip of land between Ocean Avenue and the Atlantic Ocean. No building whatsoever shall be erected for any purpose nor shall any commercial use be permitted in this zone. Parking is allowed, but only on gravel. Owners of property in this zone shall be permitted to place “no trespassing” signs on said property. Property owners shall be permitted to erect fencing posts at least four feet from the curbline and install chains between said posts when the property is not in use.

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4. Summary

The character of Sea Bright was described as a town with a quaint downtown and mixed used zoning, that in a way resembles a New England community. New developments are zoned to fit into the character of the Borough. The Borough is almost completely build-out, leaving little opportunity for further open space development. Public parking is available in the municipal lot, but limited along the length of the seawall, where public access walkways are located.

References

Borough of Sea Bright Master Plan (1989).

Borough of Sea Bright Master Plan Re-examination (Oct. 1996; Mar. 2003).

Census 2000 (Borough of Sea Bright).

USGS, Satellite Photograph: Sea Bright (<http://www.city-data.com/city/Sea-Bright-New-Jersey.html>) (accessed Oct. 3, 2004).