



The Newsmagazine of Long Beach Island and Southern Ocean County

Emergency Operations Center Should Be Rebuilt

Letters

April 29, 2026

The following was addressed to Beach Haven Municipal Clerk/Borough Administrator Sherry Mason.

Dear Sherry:

One of the Beach Haven Taxpayers' Association's top 2026 priorities is to support the development of a long-range strategy for the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) and increase its effective utilization. BHTA recognizes it is an admirable plan to use the EOC to provide low-cost dormitory housing for qualified first responders, lifeguards and other seasonal employees as well as a training and meeting space for our volunteer fire department and Beach Haven First Aid Squad. However, BHTA believes this plan may not be in strict compliance with the federal Government Services Administration deed.

The deed for the EOC property, dated Nov. 30, 2005, between the borough of Beach Haven and GSA restricts its use to an emergency management response facility. Should the property not be used for that purpose, the property, at the *option* of the GSA, shall revert to the federal government. The borough is responsible for submitting compliance statements to the GSA. The GSA is also responsible for amending this deed to granting releases. Should either party discover a change in the use of the property, as originally intended per the deed, the parties shall notify each other to determine continue appropriateness of the use of the property.

To the best of our knowledge, GSA has not actively moved to take over the property if not used strictly for emergency purposes. However, correspondence dated July 10, 2025 between the borough attorney and the borough council references a 2018 threat to reclaim the property by GSA because while it was "used and maintained as an emergency management response facility," it was not used and maintained *exclusively* for that purpose.

Whether the property is renovated or demolished and rebuilt makes no difference as long as the property is used as an EOC. If the property is to be used for lifeguard EMS training or any other purpose, GSA should be consulted. It is unacceptable to BHTA that GSA was never consulted by council. Now, renovations and repairs are underway and cost overruns are being reported.

EOC condition assessment provided by the borough indicated that construction cost repair estimates from 2015-2024 to the east and west wings of the building have escalated by 100% to \$2.068 million. For the same period, renovations of the west wing have estimated to have tripled to \$2.787 million. Since 2022, to address these cost overruns, the borough through three separate bond ordinances has approved increased bond expenditures from \$3 million to \$5.6 million to \$7.2 million.

Taxpayers will be paying for these repairs and renovations via 15-year notes. BHTA believes there is a more cost-effective approach.

We believe the deed restriction that the property be maintained as an emergency management response facility is accomplished with replacement of the current facility that is structurally compromised and currently cannot be used for emergency response purposes. Replacing the facility will address coding issues and FEMA flood standards, while providing an opportunity for review by the Architectural Advisory Committee.

BHTA recommends initiating talks with GSA and experts in the construction trade industries to demolish and rebuild the current EOC property into a state of the art emergency management response facility.

Steve Steiner, president

John Hailperin, vice president

BHTA Board of Directors