



**Ortley Beach Voters & Taxpayers Association**  
**P.O. Box 223, Lavallette, NJ 08735**  
**Website: [OrtleyBeach.org](http://OrtleyBeach.org)**

**Media Advisory**

December 30, 2021

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**OBVTA Celebrates Closing of Surf Club Purchase**

*The signing of sale papers today marked the end of years of lobbying, prodding and facilitation by the Ortley Beach Voters & Taxpayers Association (OBVTA).*

**The purchase means more public beach, an expanded boardwalk, additional beach parking and most importantly the protection of our NJ shoreline and overall environment.**

After years of efforts to encourage and facilitate the protection and preservation of one of the few significant stretches of beachfront property available along the Jersey Shore, members of the Ortley Beach Voters & Taxpayers Association were present today as Toms River officials signed the documents to purchase the Surf Club properties.

The signing marked the end of a multi-year campaign by the OBVTA to see three oceanside properties between 5<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Avenues adopted for public use. The acquired land had been Joey Harrison's Surf Club, a popular shore destination that was irreparably damaged nine years ago in superstorm Sandy.

The purchase was made possible with substantial financial support in the form of New Jersey state Blue Acres and Green Acres funds; the cooperation of the Ocean County Board of Commissioners to help Toms River raise its portion of the purchase price; and the efforts of the Toms River Town Council and the Town Administration. But it was the persistence of the OBVTA that first put the Surf Club property on the public radar, and the support of its now nearly 700 paid memberships that kept it there through years of delays, negotiations, setbacks, bureaucratic foot dragging and heated politicking.

"From the start, this was an effort to improve the quality of life for all lovers of the Jersey Shore," said Anthony Colucci, president of the Ortley Beach Voters & Taxpayers Association. "As we've said repeatedly, this was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to protect and preserve a substantial portion of the oceanfront, and the OBVTA was determined to see it happen."

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The OBVTA refused to take no, or even maybe, for an answer. Over the years its Board of Directors and members have lobbied town and county officials; prodded state legislators and agencies; encouraged the sellers; and courted public and political support. OBVTA members called, wrote, texted, addressed the Toms River Town Council and Ocean County Commissioners, pressed town officials at OBVTA monthly meetings, demonstrated outside the county commissioner offices and helped to keep the issue front and center in the news media.

But a crucial turning point was reached in 2019 when the OBVTA membership agreed to allocate up to \$10,000 to pay for a mediator to try to break a stalemate in the purchase talks. Both the buyers and the seller, the Barcellona family, agreed to the intervention of the mediator, the Honorable Thomas W. Cavanagh Jr., a retired judge. Judge Cavanagh kept the parties talking until they could at last sculpt the outline of a deal with the help of state Blue and Green Acres funds, the sale of several Toms River properties to the county, and the town's allocation of some of those proceeds towards the Surf Club purchase. Still, the purchase dragged on for months.

"There were many moments when the OBVTA board and membership were in despair about whether a deal would ever get done," Mr. Colucci said. "It was a slow, frustrating process. But the addition of those beach properties and the Surf Club parking lot to our shoreline are crucial to Ortley Beach's full recovery from superstorm Sandy. So, with each delay or setback, we would just press harder."

When the mega-storm blew through and flooded Ortley Beach, earning the Toms River enclave the dubious nickname of "ground zero" for the 500-year storm, it took with it hundreds of homes, St. Elisabeth's historic church and Joey Harrison's Surf Club. The rubble of the Surf Club's foundation, enveloped in a sagging chain-link fence, had been a depressing reminder to residents of, and visitors to, Ortley Beach of the storm's devastating power. It had remained a community eyesore, even as Ortley Beach continued to build up house by house to a newer and more affluent version of its former self.

"Ortley Beach remains not just a prime source of revenue for Toms River and Ocean County but is also becoming a top destination for homebuyers and visitors along the Jersey Shore," Mr. Colucci said. "Our beautiful new dunes and sandy beaches are among the best at the shore. With the addition of the Surf Club properties, an expanded boardwalk and parking, it will become an even more desirable location."

The OBVTA would like to thank the Barcellona family for its patience and fortitude. Most especially, we are grateful to departing Town Council member Maria Maruca for being an unrelenting champion of the purchase, and to Mayor Maurice "Mo" Hill for seeing the wisdom of her advocacy and becoming a staunch supporter in turn. Thanks also to other town council and municipal officials; Judge Cavanaugh; Ocean County commissioners and other state and local officials and administrators for their efforts.

The OBVTA will continue to be vigilant to press for the best protection of and public use for the property. "This is a great day for Ortley Beach, greater Toms River, all of the barrier island communities, Ocean County and the entire State of New Jersey," Mr. Colucci said. "This is evidence of what can be achieved when citizens stand united in pressing for the public good. We look forward to future festivities to celebrate this great achievement."

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## Surf Club Property Purchase Timeline

**1930's** – The club, live music venue, and restaurant later known as Joey Harrison's Surf Club is established in Ortley Beach at 1900 Ocean Avenue, between 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Avenues.

**1973** – Joseph Barcellona Sr. takes over the Ortley Beach property, establishing the Surf Club as a center of entertainment, dining and community activity and attracting numerous recording artists, famed DJs and local musical acts.

**1980s and 1990s** – The Surf Club owners explore development or sale of the nearly two-acre, three-lot property, including takeover by Toms River township as a public beach.

**Oct. 29, 2012** – Superstorm Sandy rips through Ortley Beach, damaging, destroying, or washing away more than 2,500 homes, an historic church (St. Elisabeth's Chapel) and such local landmarks as Barnacle Bill's amusements and the Surf Club. The devastation earned the Toms River enclave the distinction of being "ground zero" for the 500-year storm.

**2015** – The rubble of the Surf Club is cleared away, leaving just remnants of the foundation protected by a chain-link fence and remaining an inaccessible public eyesore.

**2012-2018** – The Surf Club owners, Joseph and Dolores Barcellona, now retired and living in Florida, again attempt to sell or see the Surf Club properties developed.

**2016** – The Ortley Beach Voters and Taxpayers Association begins efforts to persuade government officials to purchase the three Surf Club lots and take advantage of a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to expand the public beach and protect the coastline from further development.

**July 2018** – The Surf Club owners sell their liquor license and continue their search for a buyer.

**Fall 2018** – The OBVTA encourages the Barcelloνας, as owners of the Surf Club property, to apply for a buyout from the state via its Blue Acres waterfront conservation program.

**Oct. 31, 2018** – The OBVTA writes to the state, urging the allocation of Green Acres and Blue Acres funding to purchase the three Barcellona properties.

**January 2019** – The state offers the Barcellona family \$6.3 million to purchase their three Surf Club properties – the old club site; an adjacent house; a vacant parking lot across Ocean Avenue -- through its Blue Acres and Green Acres programs. The Barcelloņas pursue negotiations with Toms River township to make up the difference between the state's offer and their asking price.

**April 2019** – The OBVTA membership engages in one of several letter writing campaigns to encourage government officials to make the Surf Club purchase happen.

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**July 2019** – The state increases its offer for the property to \$6.615 million and Toms River agrees to add some funds to the purchase, while promising improvements to the site including an extended boardwalk, pavilion, and maybe bocce ball courts and a playground.

**Fall 2019** – The property owners and government entities reach a standstill regarding purchase price and talks lag.

**November 2019** – The OBVTA Board of Directors and members agree to allocate up to \$10,000 of association funds to hire a non-binding mediator to facilitate talks between all parties. The Barcellonas, the state and Toms River Township agree to participate.

**January 2020** – The OBVTA secures the services of the Honorable Thomas W. Cavanagh Jr., a retired New Jersey Superior Court judge, to serve as mediator and try to facilitate an agreement.

**Jan. 23, 2020** – An agreement to submit to mediation is signed by the relevant parties.

**Spring 2020** – Judge Cavanagh brings the parties to the table, including Ocean County.

**May 2020** – OBVTA members engage in a letter-writing campaign to urge Toms River officials to not use the coronavirus outbreak, and subsequent financial shortfalls, as an excuse not to act on the Surf Club property.

**June 20, 2020** – OBVTA members are informed that the State of New Jersey, Toms River, Ocean County and the Barcellona Family have made “significant progress” toward an agreement in principle to purchase the property.

**December 2020** -- Ocean County leaders agreed to buy 167 acres of land from Toms River, providing the township with the funds needed to make the Surf Club purchase.

**July 2021** – All state regulatory and legal requirements are reportedly achieved.

**July 27, 2021** – The Toms River Town Council approves a first reading of an ordinance to acquire the properties, clearing the way for a final vote and closing on the property.

**Summer and Fall 2021** – The clearing of titles required for Ocean County to close on purchase of the Toms River properties hits many bumps but is eventually achieved.

**December 2021** – Ocean County closes on the Toms River properties, providing the township with the funds to close the Surf Club deal. Demolition of the remaining building and foundations is completed. Mayor Hill pledges to close on the Surf Club deal before the end of the year, allowing Council Member Maruca, who completes her term on December 31, to get credit for her tireless but successful advocacy.

**December 30, 2021** -- At long last, the papers are signed and the Surf Club is now preserved for public use.

**Spring 2022** – Coming soon: OBVTA advocates to ensure the land is put to the best use, for the benefit of Ortleigh Beach residents, all of Toms River and their guests, as well as the environment.

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