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**OCEAN COUNTY OFFERS ASSISTANCE IN DEBRIS REMOVAL**

TOMS RIVER – Debris fields filled with household items, and appliances to chunks of asphalts and macadam are now across Ocean County’s landscape following the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy.

In an effort to help municipalities begin to rid areas of the debris, Ocean County is offering assistance in the form of a shared service agreement with the towns.

“Our intent is to have the County enter into a contract with a debris removal company, one that has expertise in dealing with the Federal Emergency Management Administration and its requirements for reimbursement,” said Freeholder Deputy Director John C. Bartlett Jr. “This will help the smaller towns in particular who do not have the staff or the expertise to take care of this aspect of the storm recovery.

“This will free up the time of the town staff to take care of other pressing matters,” Bartlett said.

Under the shared services agreement Ocean County would provide the initial upfront funding for the contract and apply for the FEMA reimbursement of 75 percent. The county would then bill the towns for their 25 percent of the cost share.

“This will not impact the county’s bottom-line financially,” Bartlett said. “It is the right thing to do and it will help the towns and their residents that have already gone through so much.”

Bartlett said that any town that had sustained damage from the storm can enter into the agreement with the County.

“The barrier islands, because they are all small towns, will probably need this the most but any town that was affected by this storm and it was most of them, can join us in this effort to remove the debris,” Bartlett said. “If we can help we are here to do so.”

Freeholder John P. Kelly, Director of Law and Public Safety, said the County would act as the lead agency under this recommendation.

“This will allow towns to focus on other storm related issues and assist in getting the towns up and running again,” Kelly said.

Freeholder Joseph H. Vicari said the county also is working closely with the Army Corps of Engineers in its efforts to remove debris now scattered throughout the county waterways.

“We met with Army Corps representatives and are discussing ways to clear debris from the bay and the ocean,” Vicari said. “We have 44 miles of oceanfront and 198 miles of bay and estuary shorelines.

“There are houses and boats in Barnegat Bay and we need to develop a plan with other agencies that will help clear the waterways which play a big part in the county’s tourism industry,” Vicari said. “We have to work towards getting things started again and this will be a big part of it.”