

NEW JERSEY ORIGINATED THE TITLE “CHOSEN FREEHOLDER”

New Jersey alone of all the United States has the distinction of retaining the title of “FREEHOLDER” to denote the elected members of the County governing bodies. This descriptive name, which commemorates the origin of homerule, is used by only 21 of the nation’s 3,047 Counties. In other states, these County officials are known as Commissioners, Supervisors, Probate Judges, Police Jurors, Councilors and a variety of other names.

An old English term, a “Freeholder” originally denoted a person who owned an estate of land over which he had complete control. After the Norman Conquest of 1066 A.D., British Kings found it necessary under pressure to call together an assemblage of higher Clergy, Earls and Barons of the Nobility and later Knights of the Realm, to sit as advisors and to grant taxes for defense of the Kingdom. By the 13th Century, through battles against abuses of the royal power and the growing influence of Burghesses’ and Freeman, the British Parliament was enlarged to include these Freemen who owned their land free and clear, who were called “Freeholders.”

English history from this time onward is a story of the increasing power of the subject and his participation in the government. The Franklyn in Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales* is described as being born a Freeman and “Freeholder”. He sat with the Lord and Knights of his shire (County) in the Parliament of that day.

The name “Freeholder” was well known by the 17th Century, and the holder of the title had a definite place in society. Thus, when the first settlers came to the New World and settled what was to become “New Jersey” under the original proprietors, it is not to be wondered that we find the “Freeholder” prominently mentioned. In the first archives of East Jersey, signed and dated, we discover the origin of the name “Chosen Freeholder”. By crossing the sea, these stout hearted men had already added a popular or democratic refinement to the traditional English name for a Freeman, although they will live under the British Crown.

The Proprietors of New Jersey (Nova Cesarea) issued a proclamation on February 10, 1655 to and every adventurer and all as shall settle or plant there:

“So soon as Parishes, Divisions, Tribes or other distinctions are made then the inhabitants or Freeholders of the several distinctions aforesaid does by our writs and under tour seale shall annually meet on the first day of January and choose Freeholders for each respective Division, Tribe or Parish to be the Deputies or Representatives of the same, which body of Representatives or the major part of them shall with the Governor and Council aforesaid be the General Assembly of the said Province.”

(Signed) Lord John Berkeley
Sir George Carteret

This came into being less than a year after the Province of New Jersey was deeded to the two English noblemen by James Duke of York, the body of Chosen Freeholders to represent each subdivision of the Province, and later (1798) the Counties of New Jersey. Uniquely the original “Chosen Freeholders” were members of the State’s General Assembly, its first Legislature, even before they became the elected representatives of the County Boards of Chosen Freeholders. No other State in the Federal Union has so carefully preserved the ancient freedom of its representative government, in the historic title it still confers on its County governing officials.

It was here in America that the foundation was laid for the County’s role as a functional, geographic arm of the state government. When the English Colonists came to this land of New Jersey, they brought with them the precious concept of County government. Their descendants have refined and strengthened this constitutional idea, to make it an effective instrument of the will of the people for self-government.

Colonel John J. M. Dudley

ATLANTIC COUNTY GOVERNMENT
Legislative Branch

BOARD OF CHOSEN FREEHOLDERS

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CLERK OF THE BOARD OF FREEHOLDERS

Sonya G. Harris, Clerk
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LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL

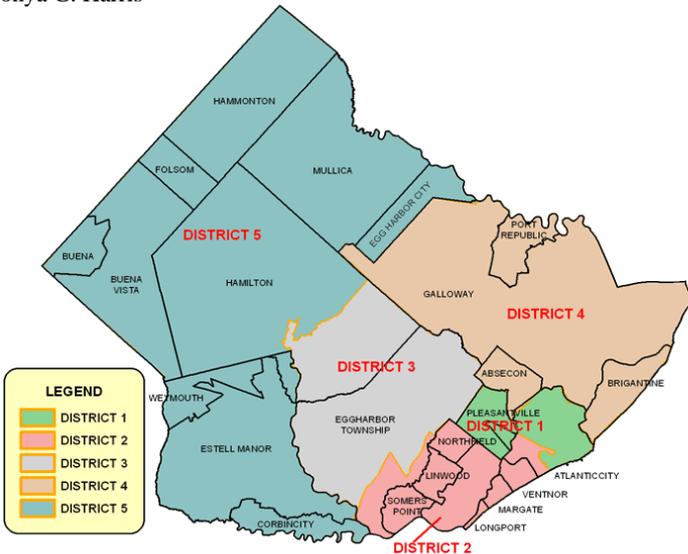
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ATLANTIC COUNTY BOARD OF CHOSEN FREEHOLDERS



First Row: Freeholder John W. Risley, Jr., Freeholder Amy L. Gatto, Freeholder Chairman Frank D. Formica, Freeholder Vice Chairwoman Maureen Kern and Freeholder Richard R. Dase

Second Row: Board Solicitor Roger Steedle, Freeholder Ernest D. Coursey, Freeholder James A. Bertino, Freeholder Caren L. Fitzpatrick, Freeholder Ashley R. Bennett and Clerk of the Board Sonya G. Harris



JOHN W. RISLEY, JR.

Term Expires 2020

FREEHOLDER-AT-LARGE

AD HOC COMMITTEES

Chairperson

County Asset Review, County-Wide Tax Assessment, Public Health and Environment, Veterans Affairs

Member

Budget and Finance, Green Tree Golf Course, Jail, Public Safety, Roads, Bridges and Dams, Shared Services, Solid Waste Oversight



ADVISORY BOARDS/COMMISSIONS

Cultural and Heritage Advisory Board, South Jersey Economic Development District (SJEDD), South Jersey Transportation Planning Organization (SJTPO)

BIOGRAPHY

John Risley was elected Freeholder-at-Large in November 2011 and Vice Chairperson in 2014 and 2017. He previously served on the Board of Freeholders from 1995 to 2004. Freeholder Risley has devoted a lifetime of public service as a past president of the Mainland Regional Board of Education, a Linwood City Councilman, former President of Somers Point City Council and most recently, past Deputy Mayor for Egg Harbor Township. John is the owner and President of L. O. Thomas and Company, Inc. a FINRA/SIPC member investment firm founded in 1929. He has been guiding clients with investment advice for over 40 years. John is a member of M. B. Taylor Lodge in Hammonton and a Past Master of Keystone Lodge in Linwood. John resides in Egg Harbor Township with his wife, Dawn and children Ashley, John, III and Harold.

FRANK D. FORMICA

Chairman

Term Expires 2021



FREEHOLDER-AT-LARGE

AD HOC COMMITTEES

(Chairman Ex-Officio to all Committees)

Member

County Asset Review, Facilities, Parks, Pinelands Review, Tourism/Economic Development

ADVISORY

BOARDS/COMMISSIONS

Atlantic Cape Community College Board of School Estimates, Atlantic County Institute of Technology and Special Services School District Board of School Estimates, Economic Development Advisory Commission, New Jersey Association of Counties, Planning Advisory Board, South Jersey Transportation Planning Organization (*Alternate*), Veterans Advisory Board

BIOGRAPHY

Born in Atlantic City, Frank is the retired third generation owner/operator of Formica's Bakery, established in 1919 by his grandparents, which services the Atlantic and Cape May areas. Presently, he is a contracted consultant to the bakery. Frank was employed by Resorts International Hotel Casino as Executive Administrator supervising casino operations. He was elected Atlantic County District-Two Freeholder in 2009 and 2012, and at-Large in 2015 and 2018. Frank served eight consecutive years as Chairman of the Board from 2011 to 2018, and is the current Chairman in 2020. Over the last 30 years, Frank has held membership in many organizations focused on economic development including the Greater Atlantic County Economic Development Commission, the Southern New Jersey Development Council, the Atlantic City Business Development Board, St. Michael's Development Corporation, the Greater Atlantic City Chamber of Commerce, the Cape May County Chamber of Commerce, and the New Jersey Association of Counties. Frank founded and served as president of the Ducktown Revitalization Association, a neighborhood organization established in 1991, which advocates for a better business and residential quality of life in Atlantic City. He is currently a member of the Ducktown Neighborhood CDC. In December 2010, the Press of Atlantic City presented Frank and his family's bakery the 16th Annual Bailey Award for their community service and outreach. Frank is a lifetime parishioner of St. Michael's Church, Atlantic City, New Jersey. He is a Screen Actors Guild-American Federation of Television and Radio Artists (SAG-AFTRA) member of the AFL-CIO in good standing since 1985. Frank received the NAACP Freedom Fund Business Award in 2018 by the NAACP Mainland/Pleasantville Branch. Frank served honorably in the United States Air Force from 1972 to 1974.

MAUREEN KERN

*Vice Chairwoman
Term Expires 2021*

FREEHOLDER DISTRICT 2

Atlantic City Ward 6, Egg Harbor Township
Districts 1 and 5, Linwood, Longport, Margate,
Northfield, Somers Point and Ventnor

AD HOC COMMITTEES

Chairperson

Education and Schools, Facilities,
Tourism/Economic Development

Member

Green Tree Golf Course, Homeless, Jail, Public Health and Environment,
Public Safety, Veterans Affairs

ADVISORY BOARDS/COMMISSIONS

Disability Advisory Board, Mental Health Advisory Board, New Jersey
Association of Counties (*Second Alternate*)

BIOGRAPHY

Maureen Kern, a lifelong resident of Somers Point, was elected District Two Freeholder in November 2015. She holds the distinction of being elected the first woman to hold the position of Freeholder Vice Chair in Atlantic County's 182 year history. A powerful voice for women's issues, Maureen is an advocate for those who suffer with mental health issues and the disabled. She serves as the Freeholder liaison to the Atlantic County Institute of Technology Board and Special Services School District Board, the Disability Advisory Board and the Mental Health Advisory Board. Maureen has been dedicated to community service throughout her life following in the footsteps of her late father Lawrence "Bud" Kern's legacy of commitment and betterment of the community. His outstanding example of volunteerism coupled with a strong work ethic resulted in the formation of the Somers Point Good Old Days Festival held annually in his memory. Maureen is a member and past co-chair of the Good Old Days Committee who awards scholarships to Somers Point youth that demonstrate prideful commitment to community involvement and the spirit of volunteerism. Maureen volunteered for many years on the Foundation for Education, which supports annual projects and new educational ventures, while raising awareness for the schools through special events and a significant community presence. She was elected to the Somers Point Board of Education from 2002 to 2009, serving on many committees including Budget and Personnel. Prior to serving on the Board of Education she was elected as Somers Point Recreation Commissioner from 2001 to 2008. Maureen launched her public service career in 2009 when elected to the Somers Point City Council. In 2012 she was elected and served as Council President until 2015. Maureen, the only female on Council during her tenure, was an integral part of establishing the City's vision and master plan. She formed a strong economic development team and initiatives to promote Somers Point as a destination location at no additional cost to the taxpayers. Maureen graduated from Montclair State University with a Bachelor's degree in Business Administration. She started her professional career in tourism at Caesar's Atlantic City and has been involved in promoting "Atlantic City," with focus on marketing conventions and corporate meetings since 1979. She currently holds the position of National Sales Manager at Tropicana Casino and Resort and is a member of Meeting Professionals International. Maureen's education and experience is an asset to the Freeholder's Tourism/Economic Development Committee. Married to Jay Phillips, they are the proud parents of three sons Buddy, David and Bryan.



ASHLEY R. BENNETT

Term Expires 2020

FREEHOLDER DISTRICT 3

Egg Harbor Township (Districts 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21 and 22), Hamilton Township (Districts 4, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11 and 13)

AD HOC COMMITTEES

Member

County Asset Review, Homeless, Human Services, Public Health and Environment, Shared Services



ADVISORY BOARDS/COMMISSIONS

Library Advisory Commission, New Jersey Association of Counties (*First Alternate*), Youth Services Commission

BIOGRAPHY

Ashley Bennett, a lifelong Atlantic County resident, was elected District Three Freeholder in 2017. While attending Egg Harbor Township High School, she became an Emergency Medical Technician and discovered her passion to serve others. She holds a B.A. degree from Rutgers University in Psychology, where she also minored in Organizational Leadership and was a Ronald E. McNair Post Baccalaureate Achievement Program Scholar. She went on to earn her masters in Community Counseling at Georgian Court University and a Post Baccalaureate Certificate in Clinical Psychology from Fielding Graduate University, where she worked in The Forensic Neuropsychology Research as a Research Assistant. Ms. Bennett has presented original research at both the Association for Psychological Science and the Association for Behavioral and Cognitive Therapies National Conferences. She has been in the mental health field for a decade and currently works as a psychiatric emergency screener in a local emergency room, where she conducts mental health assessments and links those in crisis with mental health treatment. She is currently completing two additional graduate degrees in Public Health and Business Administration.

JAMES A. BERTINO

Term Expires 2021

FREEHOLDER DISTRICT 5

Buena Borough, Buena Vista Township,
Corbin City, Egg Harbor City, Estell Manor,
Folsom, Hamilton Township
(Districts 1, 2, 3, 5, 6 & 12), Hammonton,
Mullica Township and Weymouth

AD HOC COMMITTEES

Chairperson

Parks, Pinelands Review, Roads, Bridges and
Dams, Solid Waste Oversight

Member

County Code Review, County-Wide Tax Assessment, Shared Services



ADVISORY BOARDS/COMMISSIONS

Agriculture Development Advisory Board, Atlantic County Utilities Authority (ACUA), Parks and Environment Advisory Board, Solid Waste Advisory Council (SWAC)

BIOGRAPHY

Freeholder James "Jimmy" Bertino was appointed Fifth District Freeholder in January 2011. Freeholder Bertino served as a Hammonton Councilman from 1997 to 2011 and Deputy Mayor. He has also served as Chairperson of the Water and Sewer Committee and member of the following Hammonton Town Committees: Highway Department, Law and Order, Master Plan, Administrative, Shade Tree, MUAC, Rent Control, Planning Board, Environmental Commission, Parks and Recreation, Business and Industry and Education. In 2000, Jim was honored with the American Hometown Leadership Award. He is currently a member of the NJ Farm Bureau, Hammonton Historical Society and Knights of Columbus. He serves on the Board of Trustees of the Oak Grove Cemetery and the Board of Directors of the Hammonton Recreation Club, Inc. Jim is a lifelong resident of Hammonton where he resides with his wife Hope. They are the parents of three children, Jackie, Jimmy, Jr. and Michelle.

ERNEST D. COURSEY

Term Expires 2022

FREEHOLDER DISTRICT 1

Atlantic City (Wards 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5),
Egg Harbor Township (District 13) and Pleasantville

AD HOC COMMITTEES

Chairperson

Homeless, Human Services, Jail, Public Safety

Member

Budget and Finance, County Asset Review, County-Wide Tax Assessment, Education and Schools, Facilities, Roads, Bridges and Dams, Veterans Affairs



ADVISORY BOARDS/COMMISSIONS

Atlantic Cape Community College Board of School Estimates, Atlantic County Institute of Technology and Special Services School District Board of School Estimates, Criminal Justice Advisory Board, Emergency Management Advisory Board, Police Training Advisory Board

BIOGRAPHY

Ernest D. Coursey is a life-long Atlantic City resident. His political career started over 25 years ago when he became Atlantic City's Third Ward Councilman. During his tenure in public office he was re-elected three times. He served on City Council from 1991 to 2002. He also served as both Council President and Council Vice President. Ernest continuously strived to make the Third Ward "a shining example of community spirit and pride." He was the first Councilman to operate under an "open door policy", publish the first ward-wide newsletter; and establish the Third Ward Eye-On-Crime, to monitor criminal activity in the neighborhood. Ernest's annual holiday events, food drives, Senior Citizen Day and Youth Day at the Steel Pier were enjoyed by many and served to unite the entire city. "Coursey Cares" is a sentiment that is echoed throughout the community. Ernest has earned a reputation as a fighter, non-conformist and "people person". He brings a proven philosophy: that of leadership and respect for the people! In January 2002, Ernest accepted an administrative position for Atlantic City's then newly-elected mayor, Lorenzo T. Langford. As Deputy Mayor, Ernest's role was expanded to include the entire city. His job was to ensure that city government best served its most valuable and precious asset: the citizens! In 2006, he left city government. He returned to his current position as Facilities Manager of Surf Stadium/Bader Field in 2011. Ernest also served as Staff Assistant to former United States Senator Robert Torricelli. He worked on former Governor James McGreevey's Transition Committee for Transportation and was a Commissioner on the South Jersey Transportation Authority. On June 4, 2013, Ernest overwhelmingly won the Democratic primary election for Atlantic County Freeholder District One. On November 5, 2013, he was victorious in the general election. Ernest credits God Almighty and looks to Him for inspiration and guidance. His parents, Raymond and Hazel, and his seven brothers and two sisters have given him a true sense of family. Ernest and his wife, Leslie, have two sons, Ernest Jr., and Ethan. In his spare time, he enjoys boating, fishing and attending family functions.

RICHARD R. DASE

Term Expires 2022

FREEHOLDER DISTRICT 4

Absecon, Brigantine, Galloway Township
and Port Republic

AD HOC COMMITTEES

Chairperson

County Code Review, Green Tree Golf Course

Member

County-Wide Tax Assessment, Education and
Schools, Human Services, Pinelands Review,
Roads and Bridges



ADVISORY BOARDS/COMMISSIONS

Fire Training Advisory Board

BIOGRAPHY

Rich Dase has dedicated a great deal of his life to public service. As a former member of the staff of U.S. Congressman Frank LoBiondo, he worked toward resolving constituent concerns and problems. He is currently a seventh grade Social Studies teacher at the Galloway Township Middle School where he advises several activities and is also a member of the Schoolwide Planning Committee. Prior to his career in education, Rich worked as an advertising copywriter for three Atlantic City casinos and as a freelance advertising copywriter. He enjoys volunteering with the Galloway Township Police Athletic League, Galloway Township Athletic Association and the Galloway Township Elks Lodge. In 2005, he was the highest vote getter of the eight candidates for Galloway Township Council. He is also a past member of the Galloway Township Planning Board. Rich was first elected District Four Freeholder in November 2007. Rich has been a resident of Galloway Township his entire life and currently lives there with his wife Andrea and children Nicholas, Ayden and Kylie.

CAREN L. FITZPATRICK

Term Expires 2020

FREEHOLDER-AT-LARGE

AD HOC COMMITTEES

Member

Budget and Finance, Public Health and Environment, Solid Waste Oversight, Tourism/Economic Development

ADVISORY

BOARDS/COMMISSIONS

Human Services Advisory Council, Public Health Emergency Preparedness Task Force, Senior Citizens Advisory Board



BIOGRAPHY

Caren Fitzpatrick is a lifelong resident of Atlantic County, having resided in Pleasantville, Somers Point and Linwood, where she graduated from Mainland Regional High School. Caren earned an AAS degree in Accounting from Atlantic Cape Community College (formerly known as Atlantic Community College), a B.S. degree in Administration from the Thomas Edison State College and a Master’s degree in Business Administration from Stockton University. Caren is currently the Director of Finance and Administration at Meet AC, Inc., the sales and marketing force that supports the Atlantic City Convention Center. Caren has worked in finance for more than 20 years in both for-profit and non-profit organizations, achieving deep and varied experiences in budgeting, forecasting and fiscal responsibility. She is married and the mother of two sons and grandmother of a beautiful and smart granddaughter and grandson. Caren’s core beliefs include an individual’s right to equal opportunities. She believes we are all better off when we learn about one another and celebrate our differences as well as our similarities. A feminist, she supports all people having an equal voice in their lives. “We all prosper when we have a variety of opinions and thoughts regarding the decisions we make, and everybody brings something unique to the table”.

AMY L. GATTO

Term Expires 2022



FREEHOLDER-AT-LARGE

AD HOC COMMITTEES

Chairperson

Budget and Finance, Shared Services

Member

County Code Review, Homeless, Parks, Public Safety, Roads, Bridges and Dams, Solid Waste Oversight, Tourism/Economic Development

ADVISORY BOARDS/COMMISSIONS

Atlantic Cape Community College Board of School Estimates, Atlantic County Institute of Technology and Special Services School District Board of School Estimates, Commission on Women, Local Advisory Council on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse, Workforce Investment Board

BIOGRAPHY

Amy Gatto, 38, was first elected to the Hamilton Township Committee in 2007 at the age of 24 and at 29 years old, became the youngest and only the third woman to hold the office of Mayor in the Township's several hundred year history. In 2019, Freeholder Gatto was proudly selected to serve as the first female to Chair the Board of Freeholders in its 182 year history. Despite the tough times facing our region, during Gatto's tenure on Township Committee, the governing body was able to eliminate their \$2.4 million structural deficit by encouraging economic development and making government more efficient as well as pay down millions in municipal debt without raising taxes several years following. She was honored to be elected to the Atlantic County Board of Chosen Freeholders in 2016 and 2019. A lifelong resident of Mays Landing, Gatto graduated from Oakcrest High School in 2000. She attended Widener University in Chester, PA, graduating in 2004 with a Bachelor of Science degree in International Business and a Bachelor of Arts degree in French. Following graduation, Gatto committed herself to public service, becoming a graduate of the Christine Todd Whitman Excellence in Public Service Series and becoming an elected member of the local school board in 2005. She also went to work for PECO Energy, an Exelon Company, in Philadelphia, PA as an Executive Assistant to the Chief Operating Officer. In 2008, Gatto was honored as one of Atlantic City Weekly's "Top 40 Under 40". As her career progressed, she went to work as a Project Manager and Manager of Service Operations at AtlantiCare in Hammonton, NJ, and Horizon Blue Cross Blue Shield of NJ in Mount Laurel, NJ. Currently, she serves as a Lead Manager in Service Operations for Equitable, a financial services company. Gatto is proud to be the daughter of Dr. Jeri-Lynn Vernon, principal of Absegami HS and lifelong educator, now retired, who currently resides in Galloway, NJ with her husband Walter Vernon, retired Army Major; and Bill Gatto, retired union Laborer, Local 172 and 40 year employee of the Atlantic City Race Course, who currently resides in Absecon, NJ and honors the memory of his late wife Maryann. She has one brother, Billy Gatto. Gatto has long battled Crohn's Disease and is an active advocate for the disease. She is a proud member of the Italian American Service Organization, UNICO – Greater Atlantic City Chapter. She has also organized and participated in many community service initiatives including "Rock-N-Vote;" Martin Luther King, Jr. "Day of Service;" public speaker for local high school and college assemblies; member, OHS 50th Anniversary Celebration Committee; member, Township's 200th Anniversary Celebration Committee; fundraiser for Crohn's and Colitis Foundation of America, MS WALK, American Cancer Society, American Heart Association, Hamilton Township PAL, HERO Campaign, Susan G. Koman Breast Cancer Foundation and she fondly volunteers at various events at area schools and local organizations.