

Atlantic County 3rd most compact metro area in U.S.

By STEVEN LEMONGELLO Staff Writer | Posted: Thursday, April 3, 2014 9:35 pm

Atlantic County has been called a lot of things, but one new study has an unexpected description — one of the most “compact” and least-sprawling metropolitan regions in the U.S.

According to the 2014 Sprawl Index rankings, issued this week by the nonprofit group Smart Growth America, the Atlantic City-Hammonton metropolitan area — which the U.S. Census defines as all of Atlantic County — is the “most compact, connected” metro area with a population of less than 500,000 in the country.

Overall, regardless of size, the metro area is also the third most compact and connected metro area in the country, ranking behind only the New York/ White Plains/Wayne metro area in New York/ New Jersey and the San Francisco/San Mateo/Redwood City metro area in California.

“It is a surprising conclusion,” said Michael Busler, a past fellow at the it PublntiPopocyow aT thR MichirSto

Beyond that, said Rich Perniciaro, director of the Center for Regional and Business Research at Atlantic Cape Community College, such sprawl is limited to certain areas.

“Much of it is by design,” Perniciaro said. “If lack of sprawl is a good thing, part of it is intentional. Usually I think zoning laws add to the problem, but in this case it works well.”

Pinelands Commission regulations, he said, “have ‘growth nodes’ in Egg Harbor, Galloway and Hamilton townships, and they were put very close to where the ‘employment node’ was, in Atlantic City. That was done specifically to limit sprawl. The problem we would have had without the Pinelands (Commission) would be sprawl up the parkway and up the expressway.”

Perniciaro said he remembered when the site of the former Shore Mall in Egg Harbor Township was considered the limit of development in the area. And while areas have been built up leading into southern Hamilton Township, “for a lot of stores in the Hamilton Mall, the problem has been that there are no rooftops west of there. The market area is pretty much set.”

Another reason that development has been limited to certain