



HAPPY HALLOWEEN

Serving the Community Since 1959



THE SCOTCH PLAINS FANWOOD

www.timesnj.com

TIMES

OUR 48TH YEAR - ISSUE NO. 43-2007

USPS 485200 Periodical - Postage Paid at Scotch Plains, N.J.

Thursday, October 25, 2007

Published Every Thursday Since 1959 www.timesnj.com

(908) 232-4407 press@goleader.com

SIXTY CENTS

Fanwood Candidates Square Off On Taxes, Redevelopment, TDR

By TED RITTER

Specialty Written for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times

FANWOOD — The two Democratic incumbents and two Republican challengers vying for the two three-year borough-council terms up for grabs on Election Day squared off in a public forum Monday night.

Co-sponsored by The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times and the League of Women Voters, the one-hour debate—carried live on local cable television by TV-35—drew a crowd of more than 30 people to borough hall, where the mayor's office and all six council seats are currently held by Democrats.

Because she is running uncontested for a second four-year term, Mayor Colleen Mahr did not participate in the forum, in accordance with the rules of the League of Women Voters. She was in the audience, along with other current and former council members.

Democrats Kathleen Mitchell and William Populus, both incumbents, and Republicans Anthony Parenti and Joel Stroz took alternating turns responding to pre-selected questions concerning local issues ranging from downtown redevelopment and a proposed Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) program to property taxes and traffic.

Regarding the issue of "extraordinary municipal aid" from the state, which Fanwood has relied on to reduce the property tax burden in the past few years, Mr. Parenti said the borough should "take a cautious look" at such funding.

"Don't rely on it forever because it's not going to be there forever," he said.

Ms. Mitchell countered that extraordinary aid has allowed the borough to maintain services. "It's direct tax relief for the citizens of Fanwood, and that's our ultimate goal," she said.

Mr. Populus spoke of the importance of closely examining expendi-

tures and shared-services opportunities, in addition to selectively pursuing state aid, to "make sure that we're operating efficiently."

Pointing to municipal tax increases of 7.3 and 4.7 percent in the past two years, Mr. Stroz said, "We have to curtail expenditures," adding that the

South Avenue traffic; it'll interrupt the quiet and peace of the neighborhoods."

All four candidates were asked to state their positions on TDR, a program intended to spur economic development while preserving historic properties.

"I'm still in the process of analyzing the program," said Mr. Populus, who suggested that the Republican candidates have engaged in "scare tactics" to oppose TDR.

"We probably won't do it," said Ms. Mitchell regarding TDR, noting that the proposed program "is on hold for the moment."

Mr. Parenti said the TDR proposal "should have first gone to the historic-preservation commission for a recommendation" before the council considered it.

Mr. Stroz said the TDR concept is likely to resurface after the "election cycle" is over. "The only thing placed on hold is discussion," Mr. Stroz said.

In their closing statements, the candidates noted their backgrounds and records of service as they summed up the focus of their campaigns.

Mr. Stroz said he would like to bring a "fresh, alternative voice" to the council, saying that a "one-party government leads to limitation."

A resolution by Rahway Commissioner Peter Pelissier described the authority as seeking "the assistance of certain professionals to explore enter-

borough would be better served by a "two-party system."

On the issue of downtown redevelopment, Mr. Stroz suggested that progress has been "too slow, and said what has been accomplished so far is not what was originally envisioned.

Mr. Populus responded that redevelopment is something "you just can't force; you just have to take it the way it comes."

Responding to a question of how to manage traffic related to redevelopment, Ms. Mitchell said the borough is working with the state Department of Transportation and the Fanwood Police Department to better synchronize traffic signals. But, she said, "Most people coming through Fanwood are people coming from Clark and points south...the [traffic] problem is not only Fanwood's; it's all along the line."

Mr. Parenti, pointing to an impact of redevelopment, said, "People are going to cut through side streets [to avoid



CANDIDATES DEBATE...Fanwood candidates square off on Monday night. GOP challengers Anthony Parenti and Joel Stroz, right, face Democratic incumbents William Populus, left, and Kathy Mitchell (not pictured).

Ted Ritter for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times



D.A.R.E. TO SPIN...Local children give the wheel a spin to try to win prizes from the D.A.R.E. anti-drug program's table at Scotch Plains Day on Sunday afternoon. The annual celebration spanned the weekend, starting with a bonfire and pep rally on Friday night. Saturday festivities included the Lions Market and a Scotch Plains-Fanwood High School football game and tailgate party; on Sunday, a ceremony recognized outstanding local residents before music events and festival amusements.

Susan Cook for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times

RVSA Votes 6-5 to Reexamine Privatization Option After Debate

By WAYNE BAKER

Specialty Written for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times

RAHWAY — At its meeting last Thursday, the Rahway Valley Sewerage Authority voted 6-5 to begin the process of reexamining privatizing for the authority.

A resolution by Rahway Commissioner Peter Pelissier described the authority as seeking "the assistance of certain professionals to explore enter-

into a public/private partnership for the operation of its wastewater-treatment plant and all other facilities."

The resolution authorizes the publication of a request for proposals (RFP) from legal, engineering and financial professionals for their services related to privatization.

Commissioners Frank Mazzarella of Clark, James Murphy of Cranford, Charles Lombardo, a councilman in Garwood, Mr. Pelissier of Rahway, Rosalie Berger of Springfield and Robert Luban of Woodbridge voted to pass the resolution.

Commissioners Gregg David, the mayor of Mountainside, Clark Landale of Mountainside, Attilio Venturo of Roselle Park, Joan Papen of Scotch Plains and Allen Chin of Westfield voted against it.

Mr. Landale, who read a prepared statement, was the most vocal in his opposition.

"The idea of privatizing the RVSA or some portion of its operations was discussed and considered at great length during 2006. At that time, certain members insisted on pressing ahead, despite the views of many of the members and many of the member municipalities that no one had presented any sound reasons for such a radical change in the operation of the RVSA and that the significant costs in time and money in even soliciting privatization proposals simply could not be justified," he said.

Mr. Landale said, after listening to questions from mayors at a forum last November, "RVSA's own experts agreed that it was premature to determine whether privatization might be a sound and cost-effective measure for RVSA."

"There was a good-faith consensus that we would wait until the plant construction was complete and then reevaluate, in light of the newly upgraded plant and sufficient experience with its operations, what areas, if any, consideration of some form of privatization might make sense," he said.

He questioned the motivations of two of RVSA commissioners.

"Mr. Pelissier, who has spearheaded this renewed effort to steamroll privatization through, is under investigation for collecting a state pension while serving as a consultant for Rahway doing the same work that he

was before his retirement," Mr. Landale said.

His comments drew shouts and hisses from the crowd of more than 40 attendees, which included several members of the Rahway City Council.

Mr. Landale continued, saying, "I am very concerned that his position as a highly paid employee of Rahway, serving once again as its business administrator and as the director of its redevelopment agency, creates a conflict or the appearance of a conflict in his duties as a member of this authority."

He next turned his attention to Commissioner Frank Mazzarella of Clark.

"I am also concerned that with a

CONTINUED ON PAGE 12

SP Council OKs Bond Ord. For New Southside Field

By FRED T. ROSSI

Specialty Written for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times

SCOTCH PLAINS — The township council on Tuesday approved a \$1.99-million bond ordinance to finance the development of a new artificial turf and lighted soccer field behind the south-side firehouse.

A majority of the approximately 225 residents attending the council's meeting at Scotch Plains-Fanwood High School stood and applauded after the vote, which followed more than an hour of resident comments in favor of the project.

The field should be completed and ready for play by fall 2008, according to Councilman Jeffrey Strauss.

Four council members voted to approve the ordinance, but Councilman Kevin Glover abstained, saying he disagreed with how the project is being funded. As he did last week during discussion of the ordinance at the council's conference meeting, Mr. Glover asked that the bond's down payment be significantly increased, using four times as much money from the township's open-space trust fund, so that the new field is "less of a tax burden" for residents.

Mayor Martin Marks called Mr. Glover's concerns about the field's financing "a red herring" and "another chance to be divisive." The mayor said increasing the bond down payment from \$95,000 to the \$400,000 proposed by Mr. Glover "will hamstring" the council next year in its budget deliberations.

When Mr. Glover announced his abstention, the mayor asked if he had a conflict.

"You vote your way," Mr. Glover told him. "I vote mine."

Twenty-eight residents, 15 of them school-age soccer players, spoke during the public hearing, with nearly all voicing support for the new field. Many players said they looked forward to being able to play on a field whose playing surface will not be affected by wear-and-tear and weather conditions.

Jim Fawcett, president of the local soccer league, expressed his group's "gratitude" to the council and the township's recreation commission, saying a lighted field "extends our playing time dramatically."

Township officials said they hope to request bids for the project next month, with the groundbreaking taking place sometime during the winter months.



FOR AND AGAINST...Rahway Valley Sewerage Authority Commissioner Peter Pelissier, center, the leading proponent of a measure to re-examine privatizing the RVSA, sits next to Mountainside Commissioner Clark Landale, right, the most vocal critic of Mr. Pelissier's resolution. Joan Papen, Scotch Plains commissioner, looks on. The measure to reexamine privatization passed, 6-5, at last Thursday's meeting.

Wayne Baker for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times

McConnell, Gatto Focus on Spending, Regional Districts

By PAUL J. PEYTON

Specialty Written for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times

WESTFIELD — High taxes, corruption and leasing or selling state assets were among topics The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times discussed last Wednesday with the District 22 Republican State Senate and Assembly candidates, Rose McConnell and Robert Gatto, respectively.

Ms. McConnell, no stranger to politics, served as a North Plainfield councilwoman and Somerset County freeholder. She said she entered the race this year when she discovered her opponent, Democratic Senator Nick Scutari, had no opposition. Before entering politics, she taught business and was a guidance counselor for 20 years in Elizabeth.

"I enjoy public service. I am not a politician, but you have to be in politics to make a difference," she said.

Ms. McConnell and Mr. Gatto both won positions on the November ballot after waging a write-in campaign after no candidates filed by the April 9 filing deadline.

Mr. Gatto previously ran for North Plainfield council. As a blue-collar worker, he said he feels he has more of a connection to voters.

"I am not wealthy. [State politics] seems to be the realm of wealthy individual politics. It seems to be a hobby that they dabble in. They like it on their resume and they want to stay in there as long as possible. And, unfortunately, it seems the position is self-enriching," he said.

He noted that New Jersey "has the highest property taxes in the United States," which he said is especially difficult for working families.

"It's getting to the point where there

is some mass exodus in New Jersey where people just can't cut it anymore," he said. "But I don't want to leave New Jersey. I'm not one of these cut-and-run people."

On services, Mr. Gatto said citizens in other states "have services provided to them by good government."

"It's just that [New Jersey] government can't get a handle on the cost for these services [that], it seems in New Jersey, equate to more government jobs per capita than anywhere else in the United States," he said. "Are these people really necessary in order to drive these services, or is this driven by political patronage?"

Ms. McConnell said, "It's not the [political] climate that is driving the people out (as she said Governor Jon Corzine said it was), it is the expense of living here."

Mr. Gatto said the state has seen a net loss of 44,000 state residents while it has added 50,000 state jobs. "That's a real interesting figure."

The candidates also discussed Governor Corzine's monetization proposal, which includes the leasing or selling of state assets such as the New Jersey Turnpike. Mr. Gatto said for those working class persons who drive the New Jersey Turnpike and Garden State Parkway daily like himself, "This is the scariest thing I've ever heard."

"We are going to take a non-ending revenue stream in the State of New Jersey and sell it off to some other private entity outside of our state, outside of the country," he said. "Am I going to be looking at toll increases every year by some people who really don't care what it takes for me to get

CONTINUED ON PAGE 12



SOME BUNNY LOVES ME... The harvest festival at All Saints Episcopal Church in Scotch Plains last Saturday proved to be a hands-on experience for residents Victor and Aubrey Johnson, who got their faces painted and enjoyed the sheep, goats, rooster, and especially the bunny, at the petting zoo.

Susan M. Dougherty for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times



ALL GHOULS ON DECK...A Fanwood residence on North Avenue lets passersby know which holiday approaches.

Benjamin B. Corbin for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times

PAGE INDEX

Table with 4 columns: Page, Section, Page, Section. Includes Regional (2-3, 10-11), Obituary (8), Real Estate (13-20), Editorial (4-5, 20), Education (9, 21), Classifieds (21), Community (6-8), Sports (13-18), A&E (22-24).