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FW Municipal Budget Woes Remain In Spotlight As Aid, Revenues Drop

By TED RITTER
Specially Written for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times

FANWOOD — The borough council on Tuesday night discussed the funding dilemma faced in their proposed \$8.5 million spending plan introduced last month. Without changes, the borough would need to raise municipal property taxes by about 29 percent.

Expenses are up, revenues, such as from fines, are down, and municipal aid for Fanwood from the state is \$200,000 less than anticipated in the budget.

Mayor Colleen Mahr said the municipal aid cuts announced recently by Governor Jon Corzine are "directly impacting this local budget in a very big and bad way."

She said the proposed budget requiring a property tax increase of about 29 percent will not be the same spending plan ultimately adopted by the governing body this summer.

"Until we hear otherwise [from the state], we have to go with what we

have been informed of. There has been 'some talk' in Trenton about possibly 'phasing in' the proposed aid cuts," the mayor said.

During the public comment session, resident Monica Felsing asked Mayor Mahr why she hasn't formed the "bi-partisan budget review committee," an idea suggested by the mayor.

The mayor responded that the idea behind such a committee was not to focus on this year's or even next year's budget.

"We are caught in a very bad place. It's our responsibility to come up with a really new way of thinking about the budget for the next several years," Mayor Mahr said.

Mrs. Felsing also asked if a "bond issue" would be required if the merger of Scotch Plains and Fanwood libraries were to become a reality.

The mayor said that the merger idea is only at the point of a "feasibility study. We're not there yet, at all. We don't know what the cost would

be."

"We need to [first] determine where the building would be and the cost," said Mayor Mahr, adding that it would be up to residents to approve the idea of a merger and how it would be financed.

"I'm more concerned with the fiscal responsibility of this town," said Mrs. Felsing, who claimed the library merger study shows "residents do not want this. I'm sorry, but this is such a low priority; I see this as a waste."

The mayor said the library study was financed with a grant and the borough has up to a year to decide, "whether the merger can be cost-effective and provide better services."

Mrs. Felsing asked whether the borough's Chief Financial Officer, Fred Tomkins, has "really explained the budget to the public."

"Every time we've had a budget meeting, it's been advertised in the newspaper," Council President Joan Wheeler said. "We wish the public would be here; we want you to be here and participate in this."

"We had three people get up and give some very constructive comments and genuinely want to help," said Councilman Anthony Parenti, pointing to one budget meeting held last month.

Mayor Mahr said that a series of "town hall" budget meetings might begin as soon as this month. "We may not all agree 100 percent on everything, but we all give 100 percent [of our effort] to you."

In other business, the council approved a series of resolutions, including purchasing automated pay stations for daily train station parking; applying for a \$500,000 state "Safe Routes to School" grant for sidewalks between Midway and Morris Avenues; and filing for a \$50,000 state "Smart Future" grant to further the borough's downtown redevelopment plans.

Mayor Mahr said she is serving on a "task force of community leaders to keep our fingers on the pulse of what's going on" regarding the announced closure of Muhlenberg Medical Center in Plainfield.

She said that if the 396-bed facility, which employs more than one thousand employees and is used by Fanwood residents, does close as expected, "the plan is to keep the emer-

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BOE CANDIDATES...The incumbents seeking re-election to the Scotch Plains-Fanwood Board of Education are running unopposed. Pictured, left to right, are: Warren McFall, Don Parisi and Sasha Slocum.

Voters Head to Polls Tuesday To Decide School Taxes

By CHRISTINA M. HINKE and JESSICA JASKULA
Specially Written for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times

SCOTCH PLAINS — Voters will head to polls Tuesday to decide the fate of school tax levies and vote for mostly unopposed members of local school boards. Only Mountainside has a competitive school board race among towns covered by *The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times*.

Scotch Plains and Fanwood residents will cast ballots on a \$67,753,660 tax levy, including debt service of \$2,343,994. The total school budget is \$77,775,487.

If approved, school taxes would increase \$153 per average home in Fanwood (an increase of 2.80 percent) and \$271 per average home in Scotch Plains (an increase of 4.29 percent).

The district's total school budget this year represents an increase of \$3,013,818 from the 2007-2008 school-year budget.

Incumbent board of education members Warren McFall and Donald Parisi, representing Scotch Plains, and Fanwood resident Sasha Slocum, are running unopposed for board seats.

Mr. Parisi is general counsel to Rider Insurance Company in Springfield. He graduated from Rutgers in 1978, and Rutgers-Camden Law School in 1982.

Mr. McFall is a member of the technical staff with Bell Labs, Lucent Technologies.

Ms. Slocum is a social studies teacher at Plainfield High School in

the alternative program. She has worked as a fourth and fifth grade teacher, as well as a teacher for special needs children in Westfield, New Mexico and Massachusetts. She holds a master's degree in education policy from Harvard University and a doctorate in politics, with a focus on education policy in New Jersey and France, from Brandeis University.

In Westfield, voters will decide on a \$75,086,661 tax levy, a 4.59 percent increase from last year. Property taxes on a home assessed for \$183,448 would increase \$324 if the tax levy passes. The total budget is \$86,585,234.

There are three more budget presentations, open to the community, prior to the school board election: tonight, Thursday, April 10, at 7 p.m. at Wilson School and at 8:15 p.m. at Roosevelt Intermediate School; and Monday, April 14, at 7 p.m. at Edison Intermediate School.

Running unopposed for re-election to the board of education are incumbents Alice Hunnicutt, a former professional musician and currently employed by Statewide Parent Advocacy Network (SPAN); Mr. McCready, a computer systems manager with Sumitomo Mitsui Bank in Jersey City, and Ann Cary, a former senior vice president with the United Way.

Mountainside will vote on a \$12.2 million tax levy, which would increase taxes \$156 on a home assessed at \$162,700, to fund total expendi-

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Zoning Board OKs Garage, Puts Off New House Hearing

By FRED T. ROSSI
Specially Written for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times

SCOTCH PLAINS — The township's zoning board of adjustment, at last Thursday's meeting, gave unanimous approval to a homeowner's application to construct a new, attached garage as part of a larger renovation to his house.

Francis Quigley was granted a 10-foot front yard setback variance for the new garage at his home at 539 Cedar Street. The required setback is 30 feet.

Mr. Quigley told the board he is also planning to expand his kitchen and convert the existing garage, which is located toward the rear of his house, into a bedroom.

The eight board members had few questions for Mr. Quigley during the 10-minute hearing. Chris Abeel said the fact that the home is situated at the end of a dead-end street "minimizes the impact" of the new garage.

The board also granted a continuance to Kimm Construction, LLC., whose application to construct a new single-family home at 7 Johnson Street was scheduled for a hearing last week. The company was seeking variances related to lot width and front yard setback requirements.

Richard Cohen, the attorney for Kimm Construction, told the board at the start of the meeting that it was possible that the zoning board may have already granted those variances back in 1998, and asked for a continuance to allow him time to review the files from the earlier hearing.

If it is concluded that variances were already granted, another hearing may not be necessary. If the board needs to take new action, the hearing on the Kimm Construction application will be held at the board's May 1 meeting.



PLAY BALL...The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Youth Baseball Association hold a well-attended season opening at Booth Field last Saturday. The kids, parents, coaches and mayors were all on-hand to play ball.

Malool, Glover to Run for Mayor; Samuel, DePaola Vie for Council

By FRED T. ROSSI
Specially Written for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times

SCOTCH PLAINS — Republican Councilwoman Nancy Malool and Democratic Councilman Kevin Glover will face each other in the November mayoral election while Democratic Party Chairman Richard Samuel and Republican Mary DePaola will vie for a seat on the township council in an election that will determine control of the five-member governing body, which is

now controlled by three Republicans.

Mrs. Malool and Mr. Glover are seeking to succeed Republican Martin Marks, who has served as mayor since January 2000, and is currently running for the Republican nomination for U.S. Congress from the 7th District. Mr. Samuel and Mrs. DePaola are vying for the council seat held by Republican Paulette Coronato, who is finishing her second four-year term this year.

Mrs. Malool was appointed to the

than seven years. In 2003, she received her law degree and opened her practice in Scotch Plains.

She told *The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times* she has three goals, including "a continuation of responsible budgeting" while "keeping tax increases as low as possible while still providing the services that people expect." She also hopes to improve the downtown business district via the establishment of a Special Improvement District. And Mrs. Malool



SCOTCH PLAINS MUNICIPAL CANDIDATES...Council incumbents Nancy Malool (R) and Kevin Glover (D) filed at the deadline Monday to seek the office of mayor in the November Election. Richard Samuel (D) and Mary DePaola (R) will face off for the open council seat. Pictured, left to right, are: Mrs. Malool, Mr. Glover, Mr. Samuel and Mrs. DePaola.

Mahr, Walsh: Daily Rate at Train Station is Same for All

By PAUL J. PEYTON
Specially Written for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times

FANWOOD — Fanwood Mayor Colleen Mahr and Councilman Bruce Walsh this week said the new \$5 daily fee to park at the borough's train station is the same rate for all commuters and, thus, is not unfair to Scotch Plains residents.

The officials on Friday responded to Scotch Plains Mayor Martin Marks' comments, as reported in last week's issue of *The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times*, that Scotch Plains residents are charged a higher rate than Fanwoodians. Flyers were posted in Scotch Plains' downtown by an individual seeking a boycott of Fanwood's business district over the issue.

"There was an implication put out that somehow this was discriminatory to the people in Scotch Plains," Mr. Walsh said.

"It was erroneous information that got out to start with and then I think it just sort of mushroomed into comments that were made at the [Scotch Plains] council meeting," Mayor Mahr added.

Mr. Walsh said he believes there is confusion over the daily rate, which was raised from \$3.25, the first rate hike in seven years, and the \$504 cost for an annual permit for non-Fanwood residents. There are 103 daily parking spots at the train station's southside lot. The annual permit fee for Fanwood residents is \$240.

Surrounding towns charge more for out-of-towners, the officials said. Cranford charges \$780, Berkeley Heights, \$625, and New Providence, \$1,560, for an annual parking permit. Mr. Walsh said Westfield does not sell commuter-parking permits to non-residents.

"Because of the current budget crisis that we find ourselves in, we had to look at all of our sources of revenue; see whether or not we were maximizing what we could," he said.

The councilman said a study of

other county towns showed that Fanwood "was well below everyone else" for daily parking fees. Mayor Mahr said Summit charges \$9, while Westfield's daily fee is \$5.

"So we were required to bring up our revenue to at least what everyone else is charging and that's what we did," Mr. Walsh said.

"There's no targeting of Scotch Plains," Mayor Mahr said.

Mayor Mahr said Fanwood "does not have many pots of revenue," adding that "Scotch Plains is three times the size of Fanwood." She said that 30 percent of the daily parking rate increase goes to New Jersey Transit, which owns part of the train station property.

She noted that the two towns share a number of services, such as public works, recreation and technology, and are talking about merging their libraries and having a shared public works garage to store equipment, and are initiating a Reverse 911 system.

"This [parking fees] is something that we feel we have a right to control...and we are sensitive to the fact that Scotch Plains residents feel that maybe they are shut out to getting permits," Mayor Mahr said. "But I think that Scotch Plains needs to understand where our responsibilities first lie for our residents when it comes to looking at our revenue sources and looking at how we operate things that belong to us in the town."

Mr. Walsh said Fanwood does not expect Scotch Plains to "give up revenue to Fanwood residents." He noted that the Scotch Hills Golf Course, operated by Scotch Plains, charges more to Fanwood residents.

"That's understandable, we think," Mr. Walsh said.

The councilman said he feels Mayor Marks' comments "seemed calculated to shed more heat than light on this situation."

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council in 2002 before winning four-year terms later that year and in 2006. Prior to joining the council, she was chief legislative aide to the late Assemblyman Alan Augustine for more

said she is seeking "a kinder, gentler township council." She said she wants to "try to restore civility" to the council's deliberations "so we can

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Council Passes Ordinances Increasing Myriad of Fees

By FRED T. ROSSI
Specially Written for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times

SCOTCH PLAINS — The township council, Tuesday, approved ordinances that raise fees on various permits and licenses, and also introduced an ordinance to revise construction permit fees.

The council passed an ordinance revising the inspection fees for restaurants, catering facilities and other retail food establishments. Councilwoman Paulette Coronato said these fees have not been increased in many years.

Another ordinance increases fees for non-residential swimming pools. Councilwoman Nancy Malool said the new fee structure applies to publicly accessible pools such as those at the YMCA, Robert Wood Johnson Fitness and Wellness Center and condominium complexes.

The council also introduced an or-

dinance to amend the Uniform Construction Code so that construction permit fees can be increased. The public hearing will be held on April 22.

In other business, the council passed an ordinance adjusting the rates for "extra-duty police assignments," in which township police assist with traffic control at construction sites and security at events. The contractor or event organizer pays the police in these instances, Councilman Jeffrey Strauss said.

Mrs. Malool announced that the first of multiple meetings to discuss an ordinance establishing a Special Improvement District (SID) in the downtown business district and along Route 22 would be held next Tuesday.

She said Edward McManimon, who was hired as a consultant, would be

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FANWOOD COUNCIL...Incumbent councilwoman Joan Wheeler (D), Russell Huegel (D), Joel Stroz (R) and Robert Manduca (R) have filed to run for the two Fanwood Council seats in November's Election. Pictured, left to right, are: Mrs. Wheeler, Mr. Huegel and Mr. Stroz. A photo of Mr. Manduca was not available.

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