

Voters Pass Local School Budgets; Williams, Jakositz Win MS Seats

By CHRISTINA M. HINKE
Specialty Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD — Westfield voters passed a \$75,086,661 school tax levy Tuesday. The school tax represents a 4.59 percent increase from last year. The budget was passed by a tally of 2,553 to 1,352, with a turnout of 19.9 percent, or 3,857, out of a total of 19,712 registered voters. Taxes will rise \$324 on a home assessed for \$183,448. The total budget is \$86,585,234.

Re-elected, uncontested, to the board of education (BOE) were Alice Hunnicutt, 2,566; Gary McCreedy, 2,492, and Ann Ormsby Cary, 2,471. Write-ins and absentee ballots were not included in the tally.

"It was a very good turn out," Board Chairman Ginny Leiz said.

The polls were open early from 7 a.m. to 9 p.m. for the third consecutive year in Westfield.

"I'm really excited. The community came out to support our kids from about two to one. We were able to preserve our programs for our kids in this tough year," said Anne Riegel, board finance chairman.

"I'm thrilled for the students in the district. That's what this is all about," Superintendent of Schools Margaret Dolan said.

The board of education gathered at board member Richard Solomon's home to wait for the final vote count. Mayor Andy Skibitsky, Councilman

Frank Arena and Councilman Mark Ciarrocca came out to the board of education gathering to show their support and offer their congratulations.

In the neighboring Scotch Plains-Fanwood School District, voters approved a \$67,753,660 school tax in support of a \$77,775,487 spending plan by a tally of 1,879 to 1,187. Turnout was 14.7 percent in Scotch Plains out of a total registration of 14,903, and 18.4 percent in Fanwood out of 4,810 registered voters.

The budget passed by a margin of 1,340 to 845 in Scotch Plains and 539 to 342 in Fanwood.

"We are very grateful for the support of the community, parents and students. It demonstrates that are our town supports education in Scotch Plains and Fanwood. We are looking forward to moving forward," Superintendent of Schools Margaret Hayes said.

Re-elected to the BOE were unopposed incumbents Donald Parisi, 1,443, and Warren McFall, 1,275, both representing Scotch Plains, and Fanwood resident Sasha Slocum, 601.

Based on the totals, Scotch Plains voters cast 533 less ballots on the school budget than on the unopposed candidates. In Fanwood, 280 more people voted on the budget than for Ms. Slocum.

In Garwood, 338 of the borough's 2,545 registered voters (13.3 percent) turned out and the school tax of \$6,588,420 was approved by a vote of 174 to 135. This will raise taxes in the borough by \$126 on a home assessed at \$100,000. The tax levy will fund an \$8,256,284 spending plan.

Two candidates running unopposed for three open seats were elected to the local school board. Incumbent Christine Guerriero received 177 votes, while former board member Linda Koenig garnered 143 votes.

According to unofficial results provided by the borough clerk's office, write-in candidate Karen Rusin defeated fellow write-in candidate Debbie Courtney, a former school

CONTINUED ON PAGE 12



Christina Hinke for The Westfield Leader

DELIGHTED...Westfield Board of Education members are delighted Tuesday night at board member Richard Solomon's home on Ambree Crescent upon learning that voters approved the school budget.

Skibitsky, Caruana: State Is to Blame for Tax Problems

By MICHAEL POLLACK
Specialty Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD — Westfield municipal taxes will rise more than 9 percent this year not because of monetary mismanagement by the municipality, but because of county and state "dysfunction," Finance Policy Committee Chairman Sal Caruana said in an interview at *The Westfield Leader* on Sunday.

The state's fiscal crisis will also impact neighboring towns. According to Mr. Caruana, while Westfield will "escape" the loss of 100 percent of its state aid, which occurred in towns with less than 10,000 citizens, Garwood, Mountainside and Fanwood were not so fortunate.

Mr. Caruana and Mayor Skibitsky told *The Leader* during an on-camera interview conducted by *Leader* Publisher Horace Corbin (goleader.com/video) that there is a disconnect between government and New Jersey citizens. Until that gap is bridged, no meaningful property-tax reform can be realized, the town officials said.

Calling it the "best example of the state's dysfunction," Mr. Caruana pointed to the Paid Family Leave measure that recently passed in the State Legislature. The plan would allow workers to take up to six weeks off to care for ill family members or newborn children. The bill stipulates that workers can receive two-thirds of their salaries, up to \$504 a week,



SEE FOR YOURSELF...Westfield Leader publisher Horace Corbin, left, interviews Mayor Andy Skibitsky, center, and Finance Policy Committee Chairman Sal Caruana about the Westfield budget. During the session, Mr. Corbin encouraged the readership to visit goleader.com/video to view this discussion in conjunction with Governor Jon Corzine's definition of the fiscal crisis, filmed during his January 30 presentation at Union County College. This, Mr. Corbin said, will allow citizens to understand the full scope of the state's fiscal problems.

Westfield Mayor Andy Skibitsky said while the governor is stressing consolidation of towns as a way to fix the fiscal dilemma, he is not addressing the "core issue" — spending.

Mayor Skibitsky said fellow mayors of Union County towns have told him, after the state aid cut, that they would be "very happy" to keep tax increases below 10 percent. The borough of Fanwood is facing increases as high as 29 percent.

Mr. Caruana, a first ward councilman, said a Westfield taxpayer whose home is assessed at \$183,000 should expect to pay roughly \$12,260 in taxes, an increase of more than \$768. Approximately \$180 of the \$768 can be attributed to town increases. The rest arises from state mandates, county increases and the board of education budget.

during their leave.

He said the state is encouraging municipalities to cut spending and increase revenue; "yet, the state passes a program that will cost \$168 million a year...this is a program we can't afford."

Mr. Caruana said the measure's passing shows that "on a visceral level, legislators don't get it."

Mayor Skibitsky, while "applauding" Governor Jon Corzine for "bringing the [fiscal] problem to the forefront," took issue with the state for not giving municipalities the autonomy to handle their own problems.

For example, as per state mandate, Westfield must raise an additional \$137,000 to fund the Westfield Memorial Library. The formula states

CONTINUED ON PAGE 12

Board OK's Tear Down of Porches for New Deck

By CHRISTINA M. HINKE
Specialty Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD — The Westfield Board of Adjustment approved all eight of the variance applications heard during Monday night's meeting.

David Barbosa of 400-402 East Dudley Avenue was approved to tear down two existing rear porches at the two-family home and to build a deck. The variances approved were: improvement coverage of about 10 feet more than allowed, a maximum coverage by buildings and above-ground structures with a deck of about 23 feet more than allowed, a street side yard setback of 9.7 feet, where 20 feet is needed, and a side yard setback of four feet when 10 feet is required.

This application was carried over from 2006 with multiple hearings since then.

Neighbor Cynthia Folke has opposed this application since the beginning of the case. On Monday, she said she was "pleased the applicant



Greg Ryan for The Westfield Leader

SLEEP OVER...About 1,000 Westfield residents line up at the municipal building Saturday morning in hopes of signing up for the remaining spots at the Westfield Memorial Pool. Some came early enough to catch some sleep in the early morning darkness.

Westfield Town Council Approves \$37.9 Mil. Budget Intro by 8-1 Vote

By MICHAEL J. POLLACK
Specialty Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD — The Westfield Town Council, Tuesday, voted by an 8-1 margin to introduce and approve a \$37.9-million municipal budget that represents a 9.38 percent tax increase over 2007.

Fourth Ward Councilman Tom Bigosinski voted against the budget's introduction.

Since the budget was approved by

a majority of the town council, it can be formally adopted on May 20.

The proposed 2008 municipal budget will represent an approximate jump of \$180 per year to the average Westfield home assessed at \$183,500.

Overall, the average Westfield taxpayer should expect to pay roughly \$12,260 in property taxes, an increase of about \$765 over last year.

Approximately \$22 million of the \$37.9 million budget will be supported by local property taxes.

Finance Policy Committee Chairman Sal Caruana called the 2008 budget the "most difficult in recent years," and said Westfield "was subject to factors that all but guarantee even greater hardships in 2009 and beyond."

The tax levy represents an increase of \$1.9 million from last year. The \$1.9 million takes into account town expenses capped at 4 percent (\$797,000) and an additional \$1.1 million in state-mandated expenditures, such as library costs and pension payouts.

Mr. Caruana said while spending jumped more than 5 percent, the portion Westfield could control only rose 1.7 percent. Mandated costs, including the Rahway Valley Sewerage Authority (RVSA) assessment (\$340,000), library (\$173,000) and pension costs (\$740,000) comprised the bulk of the increase.

The finance policy committee chairman said it became "clear" during the budgetary sessions that new state obligations, combined with escalating market and state costs, are forcing municipal governments into a "new era" to which they "must be quick to adapt."

To "succeed" in the new era, he said Westfield must not only downsize, but "we must look to all of

our limited sources of revenues for increases or enhancements to levels comparable to other communities."

To increase revenues, the council has agreed to bump up the \$20 overtime parking fine to \$32, and change the language in the ordinance, capping the figure at \$50.

Mr. Caruana said Westfield is "adapting quickly to the new reality" and that the finance committee is beginning a review process of "non-essential" programs and services by identifying those that should be reduced or eliminated prior to the 2009 budget cycle.

Town Administrator Jim Gildea gave a PowerPoint presentation on the budget before an audience filled with more town department heads than Westfield residents.

He outlined that in order to account for all statutory expenses, which went up \$1.6 million (12.5 percent), and more than a half-million in salary increases, as well as declining revenues, the town will use its entire available surplus, \$3.9 million, and pull more than \$326,000 from its sale of assets account to fund the budget.

Mr. Gildea said the 4 percent cap, designed as a tax-relief mechanism, did not "translate" into savings.

After the presentation, the council voted on its approval.

Mr. Bigosinski commended the work of the finance committee and Mr. Caruana. He also acknowledged the difficulty of working under a "complex mosaic of laws that hamstring the committee." However, he said he would not support a budget that continued the practice of enrolling part-time salaried employees in the state pension system.

Westfield contributes less than \$10,000 annually to fund the pen-

CONTINUED ON PAGE 12

RVSA Elects Papen Chair, Lombardo, Vice Chairman

RAHWAY — Joan Papen of Scotch Plains has been named 2008 chairman of the Rahway Valley Sewerage Authority (RVSA) Board of Commissioners and Charles Lombardo of Garwood has been named vice chairman. In addition, two new members have joined the board this year: Richard LoForte, representing Kenilworth, and Maria Abram, representing Springfield.

Ms. Papen was appointed to the RVSA in 1995 and served one previous term as chairman. Ms. Papen has been a four-time mayor and deputy mayor of Scotch Plains during her 16 years on the township council. She initiated the municipal TV programming, environmental commission and the Downtown Business Alliance.

She served on the planning board, master plan review committee, library board of trustees and local assistance board. Ms. Papen was president of the Scotch Plains/Fanwood PTA Council and the Union County

Women's Political Caucus; was vice chairman of the Union County League of Municipalities and Union County Republican Committee, and presently is vice chairman of the Scotch Plains Republican Committee.

Mr. Lombardo was appointed to the RVSA in 1995 and served one term as chairman. He is employed by the County of Union, Department of Public Works as the safety coordinator. Mr. Lombardo served six terms as a councilman in Garwood, and served as council president, police and fire commissioner. Mr. Lombardo has been liaison to the Union County Solid Waste Authority, the board of education, planning board, the shade tree commission and the Union County Air Traffic Noise Advisory Board.

Mr. LoForte has served Kenilworth as recreation commission chairman, emergency management coordinator, planning board member and two terms as a borough councilman. He is a 30-

CONTINUED ON PAGE 12



Greg Ryan for The Westfield Leader

PLAY BALL...Several thousand players and parents take their annual march, parading from Mindwaskin Park to Gumbert Field, to kick off the season for the Westfield Baseball League.

PAGE INDEX

Regional	2-3	Obituary	10	Real Estate	13-21
Editorial	4-5, 19	Education	8-11	Classifieds	23
Community	6-9	Sports	13-18	A&E	24-26