

BOE Unveils \$77.8 Mil. Budget; Del Sordi: Budget is Over State Cap

By JESSICA E. JASKULA
 Specially Written for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times

SCOTCH PLAINS – Scotch Plains-Fanwood Board of Education Business Administrator Anthony Del Sordi unveiled a proposed budget of \$77,846,725 last Thursday. He said the portion of the draft budget that falls under the state-mandated 4 percent, or \$74,291,238, is \$398,942 over the state's spending limitation.

Mr. Del Sordi said the district received state and federal aid of \$1,211,493. The district's debt service is \$2,343,994. Both figures are not sub-

ject to the spending cap. "We are still currently above the state mandated cap," he said. "Our administration is continuing to look at options."

The budget, Mr. Del Sordi said, combines the cost for classroom instruction, support services and capital outlay. He said the maximum budget the district is allowed under the state's cap is \$73,892,296.

The classroom instruction category includes costs for teachers' salaries, instructional aides, in-district special education classes, tuitions and benefits, as well as other programs such as basic

skills, ESL, speech, co-curricular programs and athletics. The proposed budget specified for each of these areas has increased from last year.

Support services would include items not directly related to in-class instruction. This would include costs for areas such as health, the guidance department, media, transportation, maintenance and staff training.

The guidance category, general administration, business administration, administrative technology and community service each would have budget decreases in the proposed budget, the largest loss being in general administration, which Mr. Del Sordi said did not signify staffing, but in technology areas.

He said the support services' budget decreases were in areas that least affect the classroom, and that there still would be room in the budget for three portable classrooms at Terrill Middle School starting in September.

The capital outlay area included costs for equipment, leasing and construction, with the only budget decrease in construction.

Assistant Superintendent of Schools Madeline Meyer said that there would be an increase in textbook purchases due to wear and tear, as well as increased enrollment. Ms. Meyer also described the curriculum development allotments in the budget, noting that teachers would work over the summer to enhance the curriculum for most subjects.

For 2008-2009, for example, teachers will make adjustments to the Scotch Plains-Fanwood High School Spanish course, levels 2, 3 and 4, since the current freshman class was the first class to begin studying Spanish in elementary school. Also, teachers will work together on creating an assessment of grades 3 through 5, so students will become more engaged in social studies and better prepared to perform well at high-stakes tests in all subjects, Ms. Meyer said.

Director of Special Services Thomas Beese said the proposed special education budget is up by \$1,086,175 for 2008-2009. He said the largest expenses in this area are tuition and transportation. Tuition includes private alternative schools.

"I'm not going to place the students [in district] based on the budget," he said. "I look at what the child needs and would have to make sure that their needs were adequately met here and that there was an educational benefit."

In other business, Board President Trip Whitehouse commended the good sportsmanship of student athlete Mike Allemen. At the Jersey City Development Meet, Allemen threw what was

CONTINUED ON PAGE 10



Benjamin B. Corbin for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times
CRIME STOPPER...Union County Prosecutor Theodore Romankow, right, discusses how his office combats crime with publisher Horace Corbin at The Leader/Times office last Friday. The interview can be seen on the Internet at goleader.com/video.

Cty. Prosecutor Romankow Discusses Gangs and Drugs

By HORACE R. CORBIN
 Specially Written for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times

WESTFIELD – When asked if law enforcement is winning the war on drugs Union County Prosecutor Theodore Romankow said, "No." But, he said, police will keep pressing.

He said gangs are in every town in Union County – whether residents want to acknowledge it or not. The first part of the battle was to get the towns and its police departments to recognize gangs exist. Gangs need money, and to get money, they sell drugs, buy guns and commit violent crime.

Union County is home to more than 1,900 gang members. Roughly 1,600 live here; some are in jail, and others have left the state.

Mr. Romankow met with publisher Horace Corbin in the office of *The Westfield Leader and The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times* on Friday, February 8, to discuss initiatives of the prosecutor's office for the coming year. The video of the interview is available for viewing on the Internet at goleader.com.

Mr. Romankow was reappointed in December to a second, five-year term by Governor Jon Corzine, with the support of State Senators Ray Lesniak (LD-20, Elizabeth) and Nicholas Scutari (LD-22, Linden), of the majority party, along with the concurrence of Senator Tom Kean, Jr. (LD-21, Westfield) from the minority party. He said this provides him with broad-based support, and he keeps in touch with the leaders on a frequent basis.

In New Jersey, the county prosecutor is the "top cop." Each of the 21 counties has a prosecutor who reports to the attorney general, currently Ann Millgram. The Union County prosecutor oversees all police departments in the county, including the sheriff's office, Union County police and Kean University police.

Mr. Romankow's office determines policing policy and provides oversight but seldom becomes involved in day-to-day operations. Although, if necessary, Mr. Romankow said he could take over a police department. Mr. Romankow said he prefers to consider his office as a law office rather than an investigative operation; although, his staff frequently debates this role.

It is best that police departments are empowered with the investigative and on-the-beat responsibilities, he said. The Union County prosecutor's office houses 260 employees and handles 5,000 to 7,000 cases a year, excluding juvenile cases. It also serves an important role in plea-bargaining to resolve cases; otherwise, the court system would be jammed, he said. Other cases are sent to the grand jury; if the grand jury indicts, then they are prosecuted in superior court in Elizabeth, which is part of the state court system.

Fighting street gangs, drugs and crime are major activities of the Union County prosecutor's office. Mr. Romankow said his office prefers to attempt to stop the distribution of drugs at the source, which in his opinion is the most effective approach, rather than only pursuing the "street urchins."

Mr. Romankow said he would visit the attorney general in Columbia in March to enhance cooperation in fighting the influx of drugs.

In the fight against gangs, information is gathered and put in a database. He said gangs are "proud" of their indicators – specific colors, body markings, scars or clothing – and brag about it.

In order to assist police in apprehending suspected gang members, police cars in 17 Union County towns are equipped with computers that feature a program called "Infocop." When police officers

CONTINUED ON PAGE 10



Benjamin B. Corbin for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times
SWINE FLEW...At the "Pigs Will Fly" rally in Trenton last Friday, Sen. Tom Kean (LD-21, Westfield) speaks to a crowd in opposition to Governor Jon Corzine's financial-restructuring plan.



Benjamin B. Corbin for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times
HEARTS AND HUGS...On Monday, the staff at Irma's Hallmark in Fanwood is fully prepared for Valentine's Day, from balloons to chocolates to cards. Pictured, from left to right, are: Millie Wagner, Ceil D'Agostino and Grace Rich.

Mayor Describes Ordinance On Cell Towers 'Ineffective'

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

SCOTCH PLAINS – Mayor Martin Marks this week repeated his comments from last week that it would be "unfair" to township residents for the council to pass an "ineffective" ordinance outlining where cell phone towers could and could not be placed.

The mayor made his remarks at Tuesday's township council meeting in response to comments from Richard Samuel, the township Democratic chairman, who questioned the accuracy of input the council received last week from Bruce Eisenstein, a professor of computer and electrical engineering at Drexel University and a consultant on cellular technology issues to more than 80 municipalities.

At the council conference meeting last week, Professor Eisenstein told the governing body that enacting an ordinance is "probably not a good idea" because local officials would end up having less control over the size and location of such towers.

Calling Professor Eisenstein's conclusion last week "incorrect," Mr. Samuel asked for a response to correspondence that he sent to township officials that cited a federal court of appeals case involving a Pennsylvania town's ordinance limiting cell tower placement. Mr. Samuel offered it as evidence that an ordinance of this type could be effective in Scotch

Plains.

But Township Attorney Brian Levine said that, in that case, "the ordinance was deemed ineffective" and that the town had been ordered to issue building permits despite the town's ordinance. Mr. Levine told Mr. Samuel that it would be "ineffective and cost taxpayer dollars to defend an ordinance that would serve no purpose."

In other business at the council's 40-minute meeting, held amidst the winter's first snowfall, the council introduced an ordinance that will prohibit parking on a portion of Redwood Road during school hours. Deputy Mayor Nancy Malool called the area of Redwood Road adjacent to Brunner Elementary School "dangerous and crowded, especially at school time."

She said the ordinance, which prohibits parking on the south side of

Redwood Road between Cedar Brook and Westfield Road between 8 a.m. and 4 p.m. on school days, "will allow parents to safely bring their kids to school and is welcomed by homeowners in the area." A public hearing on the ordinance will be held on Tuesday, February 26.

The council also approved an ordinance formally appropriating \$135,000 from the state Department of Transportation Trust Fund to be used for roadway improvements to Deer Path from Glenside Avenue to the Mountainside border and Glenside Avenue from Deer Path to Sky Top Drive.

The council introduced an ordinance amending local storm water control ordinances. Councilman Jeffrey Strauss said enactment of the ordinance, which will involve storm water management controls for all

CONTINUED ON PAGE 10

Fanwood Receives Grant, Hires Downtown Developer

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

FANWOOD – At their regular monthly meeting Tuesday night, Mayor Colleen Mahr and the borough council approved two resolutions related to the ongoing redevelopment of the downtown.

The first measure authorizes the governing body to sign a \$50,000 Smart Future Grant agreement with the state's Office of Smart Growth.

"We have been lucky to receive [grants] from the Division of Community Affairs to help support our efforts with the redevelopment," said Mayor Mahr, pointing to similar grant awards in recent years.

"The downtown redevelopment is approaching the end, and we're going to be making some changes [pertaining to consultant work]," the mayor said.

To that end, the mayor and council a short time later approved a resolution to hire a professional planning firm to work in concert with the borough's redevelopment agency.

The resolution spells out a professional-services contract "not to exceed \$10,000" with the firm T&M Associates. Part of the Smart Future grant will pay for the contract.

In other business, the governing body reviewed, on first reading, a proposed ordinance that would give the borough the option of exceeding the "municipal budget appropriation limit" of 2.5 percent; a second reading is scheduled for Tuesday, March 11.

Borough Clerk Eleanor McGovern said the ordinance would allow the borough "to increase our budget cap to 3.5 percent if we need it only because of all the expenses we're facing."

The mayor and council this week began holding a series of special budget meetings to review departmental budgets and formally prepare to introduce a proposed budget early next month; sticking to this timeline will preserve the option of applying for "extraordinary municipal aid" from the state, which must be dedicated to reducing

CONTINUED ON PAGE 10



Ted Ritter for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times
GOOD JOE...Longtime Fanwood resident and volunteer Joe Nagy was given special recognition by the mayor and council at Tuesday night's meeting. Councilman David Valian, right, presented Mr. Nagy with a resolution and plaque honoring his work with TV-35, the Historic Preservation Commission and many other organizations in town.

PAGE INDEX					
Regional	2-3	Obituary	6	Real Estate	11-19
Editorial	4-5	Education	8-9, 20	Classifieds	19
Community	6-8	Sports	11-16	A&E	20-22