

School Taxes to Rise \$2.6 Mil. On \$67.7-Million Tax Levy

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

SCOTCH PLAINS — Scotch Plains and Fanwood Board of Education business administrator Anthony Del Sordi last week reviewed a proposed \$77.7-million budget for the upcoming school year, which represents a \$3-million increase over last year. A total of \$70 million would be raised in local taxes, including \$2.3 million in previously approved debt service. The \$67.7 million in new taxes in support of the operational budget represents a \$2,583,465 hike over the 2007-2008 school tax levy for the two towns.

Mr. Del Sordi said \$54.9 million would be raised in Scotch Plains (\$53.076 million current tax levy

and \$1.8 million debt service) and \$15.185 million in Fanwood (\$14.6 million current tax levy and \$507,781 debt service).

Mr. Del Sordi cautioned that the estimated 2008-2009 tax impact was based on last year's numbers; until the state gives its official word, the numbers are preliminary. School officials said the proposed spending plan state exceeds the state-mandated cap by \$398,942.

The business administrator said Scotch Plains residents would pay \$2.1 million in additional school taxes over last year, with Fanwood residents paying an increase of \$483,465.

The owner of a Scotch Plains home assessed at \$121,000 would pay \$266

over last year in school taxes, a 4.21-percent increase from last year.

The owner of a home assessed at \$84,000 in Fanwood would pay \$181 in additional school taxes for a 3.3-percent increase over last year.

At last week's Scotch Plains-Fanwood Board of Education meeting, Superintendent of Schools Margaret Hayes called the spending plan a "sound" and "fiscally responsible" proposal.

Officials said the Scotch Plains-Fanwood High School's (SPFHS) ROTC program has been cut by the United States Air Force because the district has not met the minimum requirement of at least 100 students and two staff members.

Last year, the district was able to have these requirements waived and, therefore, was able to proceed with the program.

Ms. Hayes confirmed that David Heisey, the high school's principal, did submit an appeal but that his request was denied.

"I regret losing that one," Ms. Hayes said of the program.

In addition, four positions have been cut at the elementary level, as well as one clerical position, through attrition, totaling a savings of \$222,718 for the district. These reductions, Ms. Hayes said, "are manageable" and were based on anticipated enrollment.

Officials said cost reductions were also made in the areas of salaries (\$54,546), tuition (\$20,500), transportation (\$75,000) and equipment in the world language (\$9,900) and music programs (\$8,000). The proposed budget, the superintendent said, would also keep principals and supervisors at current salary levels.

Mr. Del Sordi said additional savings were found in the areas of health insurance (\$195,000), dental insurance (\$15,000), supplies (\$20,000), aides (\$37,500), substitutes (\$21,442) and equipment (\$10,000).

Officials said the proposed budget includes money for the black topping of the parking lot at SPFHS, the replacement of windows at Brunner Elementary School and the upgrading of infrastructure at the district's four elementary schools.

The budget process, Mr. Del Sordi said in summary, "certainly went a lot better than [the process did] last

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David Samsky for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times
LINCOLN DAY...Scotch Plains Mayor Martin Marks (center) greets fellow Republicans at the annual county GOP Lincoln Day celebration held last Thursday at Solar do Minho in Roselle Park. Mayor Marks seeks the party's nomination as candidate for Congress in the Seventh Congressional District in the November General Election. Pictured, left to right, are: David and Ted Trumpp from Fanwood, Mr. Marks, Bill McClintock of Scotch Plains and Frank McDermott of Westfield.

Clark Reservoir Ownership Transferred to Union County

By RAYNOR DENITZIO
Specially Written for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times

CLARK — Ownership of the Clark Reservoir was passed from Clark Township to Union County on February 20 during a ceremony at the Clark Municipal Building. Union County purchased the land from the township for \$1 through the Union County Open Space, Recreation and Historic Preservation Trust Fund.

At the ceremony, Clark Mayor Sal Bonaccorso formally handed the deed for the 150-acre property to Union County Freeholder Chairman Angel Estrada. Mayor Bonaccorso praised the township council and the freeholders for their cooperation in completing the transfer.

"This is government at its finest," Mayor Bonaccorso said. "Two entities working together for the right reason to help a township and the county."

The Clark Reservoir was built in 1907 along the Robinson's Branch of the Rahway River. It fell into disuse in the 1990s. Mayor Bonaccorso said that the township acquired the land in 1997 from the Middlesex Water Company for \$10 to prevent it from being sold and developed.

Clark first approached the county about taking over ownership of the property in 2004.

According to Mayor Bonaccorso, the freeholders were in favor of the idea initially, but the logistics of the sale resulted in the delay between the plan's proposal and the actual

transfer of the deed.

"The due diligence of surveys and all of that took the bulk of the time," Mayor Bonaccorso said.

Presently, the land is off limits to the public. Mayor Bonaccorso said this was primarily due to safety concerns.

"There's no real way to walk through it other than traipsing through wooded areas, which isn't safe," Mayor Bonaccorso said.

He said the township did not study the possibility of putting "passive recreation" facilities at the site, such as walking trails and docks. Mayor Bonaccorso said that although the township could have paid for the recreation facilities through capital bonds, the township felt that the county had the resources to better maintain the site.

Freeholder Nancy Ward, chairman of the Union County Open Space, Recreation and Historic Preservation Trust Fund, said that the county would explore the possibility of opening the site for public use.

"It definitely may be open to the public in the future," Freeholder Ward said. "That's a definite possibility."

The county has also previously acquired land behind St. Agnes Roman Catholic Church on Madison Hill Road, the Schwarz Farm property on Old Raritan Road, the Esposito Farm and Hazelwood Cemetery on Madison Hill Road in other land acquisitions. Milton Lake on Rahway/Clark border is also owned by the county.



Benjamin B. Corbin for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times
PASSING THE BUCK...Clark Mayor Sal Bonaccorso (sixth from left) and Union County Freeholder Chairman Angel Estrada (seventh from left) hold a symbolic dollar bill to mark the transfer of the Clark Reservoir to the county on February 20. Also pictured are members of the Clark Township Council and the Union County Board of Chosen Freeholders.



Fred T. Rossi for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times
CALLING FOR HELP...William Mariani and a young neighbor were out early last Friday, clearing the sidewalk in front of Rossi Funeral Home on Westfield Avenue in Scotch Plains. The first real snow of the winter resulted in the closing of area schools and provided a fun playground for children.

Township Representatives to Meet With Samuel Regarding Cell Towers

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

SCOTCH PLAINS — In an effort to clarify some of the reasons why the township council has balked at enacting an ordinance specifying where cell towers can and cannot be placed, township representatives will meet with Richard Samuel, the township and Democratic Party chairman, who is providing legal advice to residents concerned about cell tower placement. Residents are particularly interested in possible cell towers at the Willow Grove Swim Club.

After Tuesday night's meeting had formally concluded, with the television broadcast ending and the transcription recording device turned off, residents spoke about their concerns about cell towers being erected near their homes and whether the municipal government was doing enough to limit new towers.

Mayor Martin Marks repeated comments he has made in recent weeks, saying that an ordinance designating where towers could be located would

provide residents with "a false sense of security that we've done something to protect you." He noted that other towns have enacted similar ordinances, which, he said, had recently been reviewed by township attorney Brian Levine and assistant township attorney Lawrence Woodruff, as well as Deputy Mayor Nancy Malool and Councilman Jeffrey Strauss, the two attorneys on the governing body.

The mayor said township officials have also consulted about the matter with the general counsel for the New Jersey State League of Municipalities. And, the mayor added, the zon-

ing board of adjustment has retained the services of Bruce Eisenstein, a consultant on cellular technology issues to more than 80 municipalities.

The mayor said if an ordinance were enacted and a cell provider applying to erect a tower meets all the local land use and zoning requirements, the zoning board would have "less ability to negotiate" the parameters of such a tower. At present, with local ordinances prohibiting cell towers anywhere in Scotch Plains, all tower applications must be approved by the zoning board.

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Police Investigate Accident That Killed Deliverywoman

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

SCOTCH PLAINS — Township police continue to investigate the circumstances of how a 41-year-old newspaper deliverywoman was killed early last Friday morning when she was pinned against her vehicle as it collided with a parked car in the parking lot of the Spruce Mill apartment complex.

Mirtha Bravo was delivering *The Star-Ledger* to the apartments between 5:15 and 6 a.m., according to Lieutenant Brian Donnelly, when, somehow, her Jeep Cherokee began moving forward beyond the control of Mrs. Bravo.

"We're still investigating to see if the car somehow kicked into gear or she slipped," Lt. Donnelly told *The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times*.

The incident occurred in the early hours of last Friday's snowfall. Police have surmised that Mrs. Bravo was partly out of her car when it rolled forward, with its driver-side door open, and hit a parked pickup

truck, which caused the door of Mrs. Bravo's car to be pushed closed, pinning her between her car and the door, and, ultimately, suffocating her.

There were no reported witnesses to what Lt. Donnelly called "a tragic accident." A resident discovered Mrs. Bravo — with her legs and the bottom of her body on the ground and her torso pinned between the car and the door — at about 6 a.m. "There are no signs of foul play," Lt. Donnelly said. He noted that initial reports of Mrs. Bravo being discovered with a cut throat were inaccurate.

"This wasn't a real traumatic accident," he added, pointing out that there were no signs of visible injuries on Mrs. Bravo and that neither vehicle was more than minimally damaged. "We may never know what exactly happened."

Lt. Donnelly said Mrs. Bravo's car hit the parked truck "perfectly," meaning that if the impact point had been any different, she likely would have survived.

Mrs. Bravo resided in Linden with her husband and two sons.



Jessica Jaskula for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times
TALKING NUMBERS...Scotch Plains-Fanwood Board of Education Business Administrator Anthony Del Sordi explains details of the proposed \$77.7 million school budget to BOE members at last Thursday's meeting.

Cooper Subdivision Draws Opposition From Neighbor

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

SCOTCH PLAINS — The township's planning board will continue a hearing next month on a major subdivision application on Cooper Road, which, like a similar and unsuccessful application a year ago, is drawing opposition from an adjacent neighbor contending that if the application is approved, it would be difficult for him to subdivide and develop his own property.

Anthony D'Amore is seeking approval to subdivide the rear portions of the adjoining properties at 1240 and 1250 Cooper Road. The rear lots would then be converted into two conforming lots that would front on an extension of the Eton Row cul-de-sac.

Mr. D'Amore said he plans to build a house on one of the two new lots and leave the other lot vacant for the time being, according to his attorney, Joseph Paparo. Both houses on the lots on Cooper Road would remain.

Vincent DeLisi, who owns the prop-

erty at 1230 Cooper Road, claims that his own similarly sized property, which is nearly 800 feet deep, would be "landlocked," with its rear portion being unable to be easily accessed and, thus, subdivided and developed in the future, according to his attorney, William Butler.

Mr. DeLisi is seeking to have Eton Row extended into his own property to improve access should he eventually decide to subdivide.

Much of Monday night's two-hour hearing involved Mr. Butler questioning Anthony Gallerano, a professional engineer and professional planner who explained the proposed site plans for the two new lots. Mr. Gallerano said his plans called for a drainage easement to be located where Mr. DeLisi's proposed Eton Row extension would be.

Mr. Butler said initial site plans showed the drainage easement in a different location, and he wondered if, after he had written a letter proposing the Eton Row extension, the plans

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Fred T. Rossi for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times
FROSTY THE SNOWMAN...Residents of Stewart Place in Fanwood spend their snow day last Friday trying to build the world's biggest snowman. They found out that the actual size of the world's biggest snowman is 113 feet, 7 inches tall. They were off by about 100 feet. Pictured, from left to right, are: Matt Hamill, Greg Farley, Riley DeProspero, Keara Farley, Kiera DeProspero, Stella Whitefield, Shaylin Farley and Bob Whitefield.

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