

## Taxes Going Up Between Four And 13 Percent; WF Up 6.4 Percent

By PAUL J. PEYTON  
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

AREA - Homeowners in the county will soon receive tax bills with hikes ranging from \$400 to \$900 (or 4 to 13 percent) from last year.

Westfield taxpayers face an average property tax bill hike of \$655 (or 6.5 percent) for a total bill of \$12,238, according to tax information obtained by *The Westfield Leader* from the town's tax collector's office.

School taxes are going up \$334 to \$7,529, county taxes are up \$150 to \$2,448, and Westfield municipal taxes are up \$164 to \$2,150. The open space tax is up \$7. Town taxes are based on an average home assessment of \$183,500 in 2008 and \$181,500 in 2007.

School taxes account for 61 percent of the Westfield property tax, while the

county and town represent 20 and 18 percent of the tax bill, respectively.

"Overall, between county, school and town, it is not as bad as it could have been. Unfortunately, it's going to be worse next year," said Town Administrator Jim Gildea, saying that municipal pensions will not be exempt from the 4 percent cap on tax increases next year, as was the case in 2008.

Property taxes in Scotch Plains are going up 4.22 percent on average, according to the Scotch Plains Township Manager Tom Atkins. The increase, based on an assessment of \$121,000, is \$415.

The total township tax bill this year will be \$10,254. Broken down by tax entity, township residents will pay \$6,590 to the Scotch Plains-Fanwood Board of Education, an increase of

\$264 over 2007; \$1,840 to the township, a \$96 increase, and \$1,722 to the County of Union, up \$53 over last year.

The school tax accounts for 64.27 percent of the total township tax bill, followed by the municipal tax of 17.95 percent and the county, which represents 16.79 percent of the tax bill.

Scotch Plains residents will also pay open space taxes of \$77 to the county and \$24 to the township.

"It's (the 2008 increase) probably a little less [than in previous years]," he said. "We have seen years when [taxes] went up by \$500 to \$600."

"We have not been under 4 percent in years, unfortunately," he acknowledged.

Mr. Atkins predicted that in future years, many towns would face budget years like Fanwood did this year, resulting in "elimination of programs."

Garwood and Fanwood have yet to adopt their municipal budgets as both had to wait for the state to approve their extraordinary aid requests. Those numbers were announced July 11.

Based on tax rates supplied by Garwood's chief financial officer, Sandy Bruns, Garwood residents will pay \$7,794 in property taxes, \$887 or 13 percent more than 2007, based on an assessed home of \$100,000. This year, residents will pay an average of \$3,500 for their local school tax, \$173 over last year; \$1,640 to the county, a \$534 hike, and \$54 for the county's open space tax for a total of \$5,194, excluding the municipal tax, which will not be revealed until the municipal budget is completed in late August. Last year borough residents paid \$2,424 on average in municipal taxes.

At Tuesday's borough council meeting, Council President Kathleen Villaggio said the municipal taxes would increase \$177.

Garwood will receive \$250,000 in extraordinary aid. Mayor Dennis McCarthy has said while significant, it would not reduce tax bills.

In Fanwood, 2008 tax rates have yet to be sent to the town, according to

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## Garwood Council Presents Reduced Municipal Budget

By BETH BUDNICK  
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

GARWOOD — Garwood municipal taxes are expected to rise \$177 over last year under an amended municipal budget revealed at Tuesday night's borough council meeting.

The revised budget, introduced by Council President and Finance Committee Chairwoman Kathleen Villaggio, includes \$250,000 in extraordinary aid received from the state. Within this new budget framework, she said municipal taxes would rise \$177, a 65 percent decrease compared to the budget's initial calculation for borough taxes, which totaled roughly \$500.

"We got the \$177 [tax] by decreasing general appropriations and revenues going up," Ms. Villaggio said. General appropriations were reduced

## Westfield Tax Bills to Be Mailed This Month

WESTFIELD — The town has received its tax rate for 2008-2009. Tax bills are being prepared and will be mailed out by the end of the month, according to Westfield Tax Collector Susan Noon.

According to the state statute, taxpayers have 25 calendar days from the date the bill is postmarked to make payment. Payments received after the 25-day period will accrue interest back to the original due date of August 1, 2008. Please note that the November 2008, February 2009 and May 2009 tax payment due dates will not change due to this late tax billing.

Those persons who would like to be reminded of the tax payment due date by e-mail each quarter, should go to the town's official website at westfieldnj.gov and click on e-alert e-mail updates and enter their e-mail address and register under "tax department notifications." They will get a confirmation e-mail indicating that they have registered correctly.

The office of the tax collector will be open on Friday August 1, 2008 from 8:30 a.m. to 7 p.m. for the collection of property taxes. Please contact the tax office with any questions or concerns at (908) 789-4051, extension 4050, or by e-mail at taxcollector@westfieldnj.gov.



IN MEMORY OF...A special ceremony for Megan Beck took place July 17 at Tamaques Park. Megan was a Westfield High School graduate who passed away from cancer in January 2005. Pictured are the many who attended this event where a statue was unveiled and dedicated to Megan.

## Regional Health Director Cornish Tackles Restaurant Regulations

By SARA MAGNOLA  
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD — Megan Cornish is now in her third month since being appointed acting health officer for the Westfield Regional Health Department, whose jurisdiction encompasses Fanwood, Garwood, Mountainside, New Providence, Roselle Park, Springfield and Summit, in addition to Westfield.

"Every day is different," Ms. Cornish told *The Westfield Leader* of her multi-faceted position. Prior to her recent promotion, she was the department's nursing supervisor for about one year, and beginning in 2004 she held the position of nursing coordinator for the Morris County Health

Department.

The Westfield Regional Health Department is responsible for responding to environmental complaints, collecting vital statistics, providing educational programs, holding routine health screenings and performing restaurant inspections to ensure that New Jersey's State Department of Health and Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) rules and regulations are being followed throughout the region.

Ms. Cornish's predecessor, Robert Sherr, went into partial retirement this spring, after serving in the department for almost 30 years. He currently provides support and guidance to Ms. Cornish on a consulting basis, and will continue to do so until the start of 2009.

"We're in touch a lot," Ms. Cornish said. "Even if I don't call him, he calls to make sure everything is okay. He's been wonderful."

The same is true of the community, who, according to Ms. Cornish, has been equally "wonderful" through-

out the transition.

Among the many challenges she faces, she said one of the largest has been enforcing and implementing new methods of restaurant inspection to be in compliance with new state-mandated changes.

"Before, the law said we would go in and make sure [the establishment] was clean and people were washing their hands," Ms. Cornish told *The Leader*. "Now we're actually looking very specifically into how the food is prepared, [including] temperatures and making sure there is no cross-contamination, so it is a much more involved process."

All inspections are unannounced and restaurant owners and managers are required to let the inspectors inside when they show up. In keeping with the new state guidelines, inspections now must be conducted while food is being served, so the inspectors see first-hand that everything is being done to code, which Ms. Cornish said is "better for the commu-

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BARGAIN BONANZA...Shoppers take advantage of Westfield's Sidewalk Sale, which took place July 17-20. Passer-bys perused tables of merchandise that lined the sidewalks for great deals, despite the 90-degree weather last weekend.

## WHS Bond Project Nearing Completion with Repairs

By CHRISTINA M. HINKE  
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD — The Westfield Board of Education is nearing completion of the Westfield High School (WHS) bond project that was started in 2000. Last Tuesday, the board approved a bid to Tekton Development Corp. in the amount of \$399,000 to make improvements to the high school ceilings and corridors.

The guidance and main office area was renovated. The auditorium was revitalized with an all new sound and light system, new seats were put in, now including over 1,000 seats, and areas that are handicap accessible. Mr. Berman explained that the auditorium has about 50 to 75 seats less than before to make room for handicap seating areas, the lighting and sound equipment, and the orchestra. "We gave more room for the orchestra," he said.

As part of the bond project approved Tuesday, the auditorium lobby will receive a makeover. The wood walls will be sanded and re-stained and the lighting will be updated and brighter. The cost for the lobby is \$61,000 of the \$399,000. Mr. Berman said since the bid came in at a good rate that the board had funds to pay for the auditorium lobby renovation. As is mandatory, the bid was the lowest to come in.

"I'm very happy with the contractor because he is doing Lincoln School," Mr. Berman said.

The bond has one more project to fulfill, installing air conditioning in the high school. Mr. Berman said the board is working on the bid specification and expects to send it out in the next two weeks.



REMEMBRANCE... (From the archives of May 29, 2003) Grand Marshal Alfred Riker of Westfield, the chaplain of the Martin Wallberg Post of the American Legion, gave the opening prayer and benediction at the 2003 Memorial Day ceremony, which was held indoors. Mr. Riker also was slated to be the parade's Grand Marshal. Mr. Riker passed away on Monday, July 21.

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