

County Taxes to Rise 5.5 Percent In \$438 Million Spending Plan

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

ELIZABETH — County taxes will rise in all but two of Union County's 21 municipalities under a \$437.7 million budget introduced by the Board of Chosen Freeholders last Thursday night.

To support the plan, taxes would be raised \$13.1 million or 5.48 percent over last year with the average increase per household calculated at \$68, according to county officials.

While the spending plan is \$2.3 million over last year, officials said the tax levy was reduced by \$2.37 million from the \$254 million in taxes proposed in the \$436.2 executive bud-

get released by County Manager George Devaney in February.

"I am very pleased with the outcome [of the budget]," said Al Mirabella, chairman of the board's fiscal affairs committee. He said while "no one likes to raise taxes" the reductions from the executive budget resulted in "a job well done" by county officials. "It's a hard process and these are challenging times," he said.

Mr. Devaney said taxes account for 54 percent of the total spending in the 2008 budget, down from 58 percent last year.

Locally, county taxes in Westfield will increase \$1.5 million to \$25.1 million, a reduction of \$234,693 from

the executive budget. The average assessed home in Westfield will see an average increase of \$147 to \$2,445.

In Scotch Plains, taxes will jump to \$14.2 million, an increase of \$429,816 over 2007, and \$132,121 lower than the executive budget.

Fanwood's county tax portion will jump \$115,320 to \$3.9 million, a \$36,384 drop from Mr. Devaney's budget. The average home in the borough will pay \$1,456 in county taxes, which is \$43 over last year.

Meanwhile, Garwood's share of county taxes will rise \$169,115 to \$2.2 million, a slight decline of \$20,379 from the executive budget.

Mountainside residents will pay \$6.4 million, up \$189,486 over last year.

Only Summit and Winfield will see tax decreases this year. Winfield, with just 1,500 residents, will pay \$60,739, down \$816 from last year. While Summit's county portion will drop \$21,036 from last year, its share of \$23.7 million is the fourth highest in the county behind Elizabeth, Union and Westfield.

Westfield taxes have the second highest, per-home total, trailing only Summit, which is just over \$3,000 per property owner. Mountainside is third at \$2,165, up \$71 over 2007.

Freeholder Angel Estrada said the tax levy was lowered from the executive budget in the areas of health insurance, Social Security and sick leave combined, and the Union County Vocational-Technical Schools, where savings of \$1.3 million, \$750,000 and \$322,740, respectively, were found. The Vo-Tech was able to obtain additional state funding. Another \$13 million reduction in the executive budget came by reducing the proposed capital budget, which had been \$53.7 million.

Under questioning from John Bury of Kenilworth, Mr. Estrada said there were no layoffs in this year's spending plan although some vacant positions have been kept open.

As announced earlier this year by Mr. Devaney, the county faced a \$26 million budget hole due to deficits at its three county golf operations and at Rumlens Specialized Hospital. Offi-

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Mahr and Council Not Ready to Act On Changes

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

FANWOOD — Mayor Colleen Mahr and the borough council on Monday discussed issues and reviewed written comments and proposed amendments submitted by the planning board related to the ongoing, downtown redevelopment plan.

Mayor Mahr said the planning board "opposes" an amendment that would allow professional office space to occupy as much as 25 percent of the first floor of buildings within the redevelopment area.

"They were pretty adamant," the mayor said, noting that planning board members do not want offices "encroaching" on retail space.

Councilwoman Donna Dolce echoed that sentiment. "You're trying to get foot traffic [downtown]; if you're putting in offices, that's not going to help that," she said.

"We have a small downtown and we need every available space for businesses that are going to bring in foot traffic," Ms. Dolce added.

Mayor Mahr said the planning board also had comments about "mid-block" pedestrian crossings, including a walkway connecting to the train station, and sidewalks and aesthetics along LaGrande Avenue.

The mayor said the borough's zoning officer, attorney and planner would work with the governing body to address the planning board's comments and "further define" what types of professional offices could be permitted under the amendment.

Although a public hearing on the redevelopment plan amendments is scheduled for the borough council's regular Tuesday meeting on June 10, Mayor Mahr said, at this point, the "council is not ready to make a decision on this" without further discussion.

In other business Monday night, the governing body reviewed a proposed amendment to the borough's land use ordinance.

The measure would "restrict" certain types of land uses — including nail salons and fast food and take-out



Fred Rossi for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times
 A TOWNSHIP FIRST...The weather cooperated for the first annual Scotch Plains Volunteer Picnic on Sunday, held at Brookside Park. Volunteer firemen, members of the rescue squad, members of the township's boards and commissions their families, Scotch Plains council members and a host of other town residents attended the event.

Lance Wins Nomination, Will Face Stender for Congressional Seat

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

AREA — State Senator Leonard Lance of Hunterdon County won Tuesday's Republican Primary and will face off against Democratic State Assemblywoman Linda Stender of Fanwood in the 7th District congressional race to succeed Republican Rep. Mike Ferguson.

Mr. Lance handily defeated six other candidates, including Kate Whitman, the daughter of former Governor Christine Whitman, Kelly Hatfield, the former Summit council president, and Martin Marks, Scotch Plains mayor. Mr. Lance received 9,982 votes, or 40 percent, followed by Ms. Whitman with 4,949 votes, or 20 percent, Ms. Hatfield with 3,787 votes, or 15 percent, and Mr. Marks with 3,137 votes, or 12 percent. Tom Roughneen, Darren Young and A.D.

Amar garnered the remaining 13 percent of the vote.

Ms. Hatfield won in Union County, with 43 percent, to Mr. Marks' 17 percent. She also received the most votes in Westfield, Garwood and Mountainside, while Mr. Marks easily won in Scotch Plains and won

Times that he intends to campaign "vigorously," and believes his views "are the views of the overwhelming majority of the people of this congressional district," pointing specifically to "fiscal responsibility, social moderation and strong environmental protection." He also said that Sena-



Raynor Denitzio for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times
 VICTORY AT LAST...State Senator Leonard Lance receives the Primary election results Tuesday night at his campaign headquarters in Flemington as Senator Tom Kean, Jr. of Westfield listens at right.

Fanwood by 22 tallies over Ms. Hatfield.

Mr. Lance won in Hunterdon County, with 63 percent of the vote, followed by Ms. Whitman's 18 percent. Mr. Lance also won in Somerset County with 3,793 votes ahead of Ms. Whitman's 1,944 tallies. Ms. Whitman won in Middlesex County with 24 votes to Mr. Marks' 13 votes.

Mr. Lance, speaking to supporters at the American Legion Hall in Flemington at 10 p.m., criticized the "do-nothing Democratic Congress," and said, "We cannot tax or borrow or spend our way to fiscal responsibility — and that is the contrast that exists in the General Election." He said he has the "experience and independence necessary to fight in Washington for the fundamental change that is necessary to improve our economy and make the lives of the next generation better than our own."

He told The Scotch Plains-Fanwood

tor John McCain, the presumptive GOP presidential nominee, "will run very well in New Jersey and he will carry this Congressional district overwhelmingly."

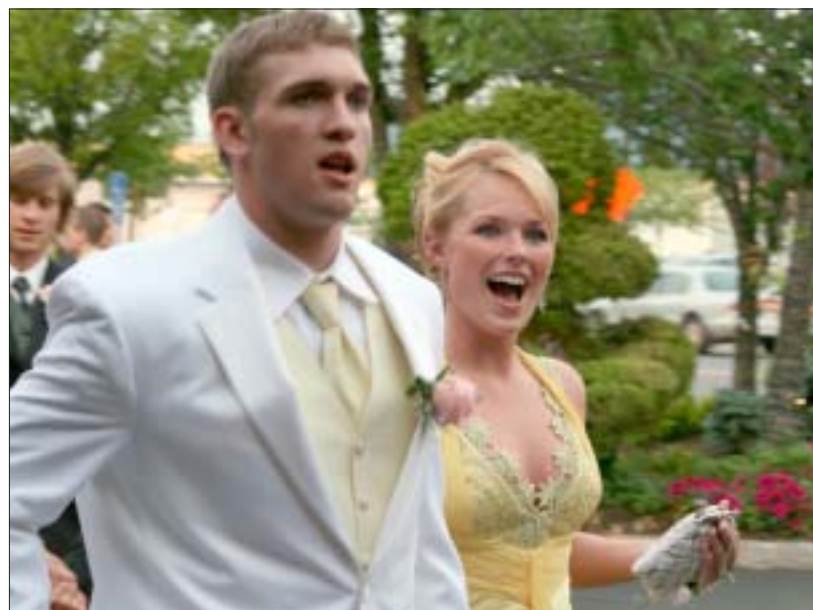
Ms. Whitman, speaking to supporters at her parents' home in Oldwick, said the high voter turnout in Mr. Lance's home of Hunterdon County "was a huge factor" in the voting. She congratulated the other candidates and said she was "proud of the campaign that we ran."

As for her political future, she told The Times, "We'll see what happens."

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SP Cleanup Permits Are Available Online

SCOTCH PLAINS — Spring Clean Up Permits are available at scotchplainsnj.com or from the Township of Scotch Plains Municipal Building located at 430 Park Avenue, Scotch Plains, NJ 07076.



Martin Sweeney for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times
 CELEBRATE GOOD TIMES...Scotch Plains-Fanwood High School seniors Keith Baker and Colleen Driscoll arrive in style at the senior prom, held on Friday, May 30 at the Pines Manor in Edison. See more photos at goleader.com/photos.

FW Boards Recommend More Residential Units

By DEBORAH MADISON
 Specially Written for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times

FANWOOD — The Fanwood planning and zoning board of adjustment, last Wednesday, discussed revisions to the Fanwood redevelopment plan, which was forwarded as recommendations to the council who discussed the plan at Monday night's council meeting (see story on this page). Mayor Colleen Mahr and the borough council act as the borough's redevelopment agency.

The downtown redevelopment area, bordered by Martine Avenue to the north and Second Street to the south, and flanked by South Avenue and LaGrande Avenue to the east and west, is currently being redeveloped by a public and private partnership between the borough's redevelopment agency and private developers. The project is in various stages of completion, with some land not yet purchased.

The most significant change to the plan is the addition of 35 residential units, which will be split among upcoming new developers who purchase the undeveloped land. This is a move recommended by the borough's planner, Stan Slachetka of T&M Associates. The remaining lots could be condominiums or apartments. The addition of these 35 units would raise the total density cap from 71 residential units to 106. When the revised, downtown redevelopment plan was initially discussed at public meetings in 2005, many residents living near the area were opposed to higher residential density.

Board member Peter Sayles expressed his opinion that this revision of the residential density cap was

contrary to what the board had told developers and the public in the past.

"It seems dishonest to add more units," Mr. Sayles said. "Every application we have had, we told developers that we only had a limited number of units available and gave them all away. The community spoke and said they wanted a certain number of units. Now we're suggesting to council that we need more units to lure developers."

The board discussed the effect more units would have on the community, and if the board should designate the amount of one- and two-bedroom units. The board decided to recommend the additional 35 units, but not to designate the number of bedrooms permitted for these units.

Also included in the revisions, the board decided to rescind their decision from May 19 to permit ground-floor office space. However, the board said retailers have the option to submit an application for a variance approval. At the May 19 agenda meeting the board was split on allowing office space and the planner advised them not to offer offices, but at the time the board decided to allocate 25 percent to offices.

During the council's meeting on Monday it was brought up that professional offices would not help increase foot traffic.

Other revisions included eliminating several driveway egresses and requiring open-view storefronts. Board members debated whether to assign commuter and resident parking designations at this time. The plan allows for a shared parking arrangement between developers. It was

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Michelle Conway for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times
 DANCE THE NIGHT AWAY...A few members of the Scotch Plains-Fanwood High School track and field team pose with their prom dates at Pines Manor in Edison last Friday. Pictured, from left to right, are: Cathy Harley, Martin Sweeney, Cassy Valdes, Jason Boff, Alana Salituro, Joe Ellis, Kate Johnson, Mike Chervenyak, Brittney Vecek and Mike Ragan.



Katie Rogers for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times
 OUT TO VOTE...Area candidates, Assemblywoman Linda Stender of Fanwood seeking the Democratic nomination for Congress and Scotch Plains Mayor Martin Marks seeking the Republican nomination for Congress, make their votes count on Tuesday during the Primary Election.

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