



OUR 49TH YEAR - ISSUE NO. 25-2008

USPS 485200 Periodical - Postage Paid at Scotch Plains, N.J.

Thursday, June 19, 2008

Published Every Thursday Since 1959 www.timesnj.com

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SIXTY CENTS

## Mahr: State 'Ridiculous Ramp-up' For Pension Fund Forces Layoffs

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

FANWOOD - At a special meeting Tuesday night, Mayor Colleen Mahr announced that a "community-wide meeting" regarding the borough's budget will be held on Wednesday, July 9, at 7 p.m. at Forest Road Park. In making the announcement, the mayor said she has called the meeting "to sort of separate fact from fiction and explain why we're even looking" at the issue of municipal employee layoffs.

"The Borough of Fanwood has received some extraordinary [press] attention in our attempt to be prudent and to communicate to all our em-

ployees [about] the situation we're in," Mayor Mahr said.

The borough sent layoff notices to every municipal employee last week (see page 4), as the governing body continues its efforts to finalize an \$8.5 million budget this summer. Mayor Mahr said the decision to send out the layoff notices was "misinterpreted in ways we could not have foreseen." She said it was "incorrectly reported" that the decision "was because of our state aid numbers."

Rather, the mayor pointed to a "loss in revenues" and "significant increases in our pension obligations" due to the state's "ridiculous ramp-up schedule" for refunding the pension

system. "This is why we're in the situation we're in," Mayor Mahr said.

"The public needs to understand that even if we get extraordinary [state] aid, that just gets us to the 4 percent cap on the [municipal tax] levy; we're still facing a significant tax increase," she said.

As introduced, the borough's spending plan would result in a municipal tax hike of nearly 30 percent without state aid. Borough Administrator Eleanor McGovern said the state spending plan agreed to in Trenton earlier this week likely means that Fanwood will receive only about 75 percent of the aid that came in last year, not including any extraordinary aid for which the borough also applied.

"So we've basically been told to look at what [we] got last year and knock off 25 percent," said Mayor Mahr, adding that borough Chief Financial Officer Fred Tomkins, "is going to start running the numbers" in order to determine specific aid amounts. "It's confusing because state aid is made up of so many different pots of money," she explained.

"As soon as we get the figures, we'll have them prepared for everybody," Ms. McGovern said.

"Twenty-five percent less of anything, in these days, is a tremendous reduction," Council President Joan Wheeler said.

"Any tax increase is not something the public wants to see," said Mayor Mahr, adding, "We are [also] affecting employees' lives, that's for sure."

The mayor said she is holding the July 9 meeting to make it clear to the public "where we are today" in terms of the borough's revenues, pension obligations and state-mandated costs "that we don't have any control over."

"This is not a spending problem," Mayor Mahr noted. "Our spending is flat."

Also Tuesday night, the governing body approved a resolution renewing a shared services agreement with Scotch Plains. Under the agreement, Fanwood's tax collector works for Scotch Plains for approximately eight to 10 hours per week. "Scotch Plains pays us for these services," Mayor Mahr said. "We've been doing this now for two years."

Following the meeting, the mayor and council met in an executive session to discuss issues relating to collective bargaining agreements and "matters relating to public safety and property."

## Legislators Wrangle Over State Budget in Trenton

By BETH BUDNICK  
Specially Written for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times

TRENTON - Governor Jon Corzine and the State Legislature agreed on \$32.8-billion budget for the 2008-2009 fiscal year Monday. This budget includes cuts in state aid to municipalities, such as Fanwood's loss of funds "that we don't have any control over," according to Mayor Colleen Mahr (see Ted Ritter's article on this page).

Such measures are a part of Mr. Corzine's "Financial Restructuring and Debt Reduction Plan." Mr. Corzine said measures such as the budget cuts were to account for the "\$30-billion in debt and staggering unfunded pension and healthcare liabilities" that New Jersey has "amassed," according to his website.

Particularly important to Fanwood, the budget cuts include \$170 million



READY FOR GRADUATION...With the turf project almost complete, the new Scotch Plains-Fanwood fields are in great shape for this year's graduation ceremony. Work on the track will begin after graduation.

## Council Receives Proposals For Firehouse Renovations

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

SCOTCH PLAINS - The township council is expected to receive next month more concrete cost estimates for the significant renovations being proposed for the two firehouses.

Architect Michael Giambalvo and Fire Chief Jonathan Ellis spent nearly an hour on Tuesday night reviewing with the council the details of the planned improvements to the facilities, located at the corner of Martine Avenue and Raritan Road and behind the municipal building.

The northside building, which was built in 1948 as a public works garage and then renovated into a firehouse in 1969, has had no significant renovations since then, while the 50-year-old southside building has only undergone minor repairs over the years.

The southside firehouse is slated for a major renovation, Mr. Giambalvo told the council, including new floors and ceilings, refurbished bathrooms, a renovated and upgraded kitchen, new flooring and lighting in the garage, a new air conditioning system and a keyless entry system.

Plans for the northside firehouse call for a small addition at the rear of the two-story building to house an area for

additional storage on the ground floor and a new kitchen area upstairs. In addition, new walls, ceilings, floors and a new air conditioning system will be installed, the entire parking lot will be repaved, the exercise area will be renovated and the insulation will be replaced.

In what Chief Ellis called an effort to ensure "continuity of government," in the event the municipal building is inoperable, space will be available in the northside firehouse for the police department's dispatcher, so that law enforcement efforts are not interrupted.

Additionally, the firehouse will have space for computers that will back up the municipal building's system in the event of a computer problem in the main building. Both buildings' exteriors will be refaced as well, Mr. Giambalvo said. Both facilities will be more environmentally friendly by fea-

ture flooring and ceiling made from recycled materials and more energy efficient through the use of modern electrical systems.

Chief Ellis said he was not sure whether soliciting one bid for the two buildings or separate bids for each facility would be more feasible. He did tell the council that the work would not be done concurrently. Councilman Kevin Glover asked for a timetable on how the work would be done so that interruptions to the fire department's activities are kept to a reasonable minimum.

At its regular meeting next Tuesday night, the council will hold what is likely to be a lengthy public hearing on an ordinance to establish a Special Improvement District (SID) in the downtown and nearby areas, including Park Avenue, Front Street, Terrill Road, East

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## Turf Installation Expected To Be Completed by Aug. 15

By KATHERINE VOWELL  
Specially Written for Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times

SCOTCH PLAINS - Scotch Plains-Fanwood Board of Education officials said last Thursday that the installation of turf at the high school's football and soccer fields would be completed by mid-August. Voters in the two communities approved a \$2 million referendum in 2007.

The board's facilities committee presented an update on the project, where the funding director of the turf committee presented a \$20,888 check to Business Administrator Anthony Del Sordi for the project.

Mr. Del Sordi said the district is "within the time frame to have both fields completed by August 15." He also said construction on the track would continue after the graduation ceremonies are held. Mr. Del Sordi presented board members and the public with a slideshow highlighting photographs taken throughout the construction process.

"Managing a project of this scope is no small effort," Superintendent of Schools Margaret Hayes said. "The

rains certainly delayed the project, but he [Mr. Del Sordi] stayed the course."

In other business, the meeting began with an instructional update on the Jump Start program, where Hope Swartz, program supervisor, introduced two teachers, Bernadette Hoyer and Alyssa Schuchard, who presented an overview of how the program is constructed.

"We strive to create a high quality learning environment," Ms. Hoyer said. "We provide a balance between child-initiated and adult-initiated activities in our program," the goal being to prepare children for making their own decisions.

The Jump Start program is based on learning through play. Each classroom has set up designated learning centers where children are able to use their individual creativity and imagination to develop life lessons. The art center, dramatic play, toys and games center, reading and writing center, and the snack center all help to promote self-help skills and work on

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REVIEWING THE FACTS...Fanwood Mayor Colleen Mahr reviews a document during a special meeting Tuesday night. The session was the latest in a series of special budget meetings held by the governing body during the past few months. Council President Joan Wheeler is seated at left; Councilman David Valian is at right.

## Layoff Notices Go Out to All 66 Borough Employees

By PAUL PEYTON, KATIE ROGERS  
Specially Written for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times

FANWOOD - The borough's 66 full- and part-time employees received a notice last week of the possibility of layoffs due to rising budget costs and lower revenue projections.

Layoffs, if they occur, are "expected to be permanent," according to a copy of the letter sent by workers and obtained by The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times.

"This letter will serve as official notice that the Borough of Fanwood will engage in a reduction of [work] force in your department commencing on or about August 1...The reason for this this layoff stems from economic and budgetary reasons," according to the letter.

Mayor Colleen Mahr said, in a phone interview with The Times on Friday, that despite some media reports, the borough would not be cutting its entire workforce. "We are not going to decimate [the] Borough of Fanwood. This [the notice] is our way to communicate with our employees that we are in very hard fiscal times."

"We hope it [layoffs] will be very minimal," the mayor said. "I'm here five years and this is the most difficult process we've had." She called the possibility of layoffs "emotionally painful."

The two-term mayor blamed the potential layoffs on lower revenue projections, state program mandates, a 30 percent hike in pension costs, rising fuel and utility costs, and a cut in state aid figures.

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AWARDS...This year's winners of Fanwood-Scotch Plains Rotary Club scholarships attend the award luncheon on June 11 at Pantagis Renaissance Restaurant. Pictured, left to right, are: back row, Scotch Plains-Fanwood High School Principal David Heisey, Marc L'Heureux, Ryan Bridge, SP-F Superintendent Margaret Hayes, Robert Kraus and Blanchard Hiatt; front row, Ming Lu, Bailey Cordinol and Lindsay Traiman.

## Scholarship Winners Named By F-SP Rotary Club

SCOTCH PLAINS - The Fanwood-Scotch Plains Rotary Club members were joined for lunch by the winners of this year's rotary scholarships, on June 11, at the Pantagis Renaissance Restaurant.

School Superintendent Margaret Hayes and Scotch Plains-Fanwood High School Principal David Heisey were also present to congratulate the students.

The students each gave a brief talk as to the colleges they would attend, their goals in life and some remembrances of their years in high school.

The Fanwood-Scotch Plains Rotary Club annually awards scholarships to deserving senior students, along with a prize to the valedictorian and salutatorian.

from state aid to municipalities. This year's state aid appropriations reduce funds to municipalities below 10,000 in population by 25 percent, and the amount by municipalities with populations over 10,000 by 2.42 percent.

"It's a tight budget and a strong budget that reflects tough economic times," said State Senator Nicholas Scutari (D-22, Linden). One result of a tighter budget is that "municipalities must tighten their belts," he said.

Mr. Scutari also said this year's budget was "almost historical" in its reductions of spending by a Democratic majority.

Officials stated that that aid reduction itself should not result in more than a \$100 increase over 2007 average residential property taxes as cal-

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FUN IN THE SUN... After last week's heat wave, grandfather and grandson, residents of Scotch Plains, enjoy the day in Tamaques park.

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