

FW Introduces \$8.5 Mil. Budget With \$1.3 Mil. Hike in Local Taxes

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

FANWOOD — Mayor Colleen Mahr and the borough council, at a special meeting last Wednesday night, introduced a proposed municipal budget, with appropriations totaling nearly \$8.5 million, of which \$5.9 million would be raised in local taxes, a \$1.3 million hike from last year.

The borough plans to apply for "extraordinary aid" from the state. Last year, the borough received \$325,000, which was dedicated to lowering the local property tax rate.

"If we get [this aid], we'll get the [tax rate] back down again," the borough's Chief Financial Officer Fred Tomkins said.

Borough officials are still coming to grips with an announced plan by Governor Jon Corzine to cut Fanwood's state aid by nearly \$187,000, or about 17 percent.

But, at Wednesday night's meeting, Mayor Mahr said, "How our budget is being affected is not just a Fanwood thing."

The mayor added that the state cuts amount to an "assault on small towns," with "no regard for efficiency" and efforts to share services. She said, like Fanwood, other small towns are also facing "jaw-dropping" budget increases.

SP Board to Continue Cooper Road Hearing

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

SCOTCH PLAINS — The planning board hopes to finish a hearing, which is a continuance from a February meeting, next month on a major subdivision application on Cooper Road that has drawn opposition from an adjacent neighbor, who contends that if the application is approved, it would make it 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 plans to build a house on one of the two new lots and leave the other lot vacant for the time being. Both homes on the lots on Cooper Road would remain.

William Butler, attorney for Vincent DeLisi, who lives at 1230 Cooper Road, claimed, at Monday's meeting, that Mr. DeLisi's 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.

Mr. DeLisi is seeking to have the board compel Mr. D'Amore to extend Eton Row into Mr. DeLisi's property in order to improve access should Mr. DeLisi eventually decide to subdivide.

Hal Simoff, an engineer, planner and expert on street design and traffic, testified on behalf of Mr. DeLisi. Mr. Simoff told the board that extending the Eton Row cul-de-sac into

emphasized that the introduced budget — which would require a tax increase of about 29 percent to finance — will not be the budget ultimately adopted by the governing body a few months from now.

"Everything is on the table," Mayor Mahr said. "I'm not talking merger [with another town], but people up and down the state are taking a hard look at things they may not have



NOT CHICKEN...The Fanwood Easter Bunny waves to the crowd Saturday at Forrest Road Park.

considered before."

The mayor said she plans to hold a town hall meeting in April, with an eye toward explaining the budget situation to residents and getting their input.

"The community has to be engaged... to understand the magnitude of the problem," Mayor Mahr said. There will also be a final public hearing on the budget July 16, prior to adoption.

Mr. Tomkins said that while the budget is "flat" on the appropriations side, the reduction in state aid, coupled with increasing state-mandated expenses and reductions in other revenue, pushes up the "levy side" of the budget.

"It is the intention of the mayor and council, between now and July, to go through the budget and try to find areas where there are shared-services [opportunities] and other savings," Mr. Tomkins said.

He said reducing services is not something "anyone really wants to do." However, Mr. Tomkins said, "If you want services, it may cost you more; if you want lower taxes, you might need to give up some services" as they currently exist.

During the public comment portion of the special meeting, resident John Marquardt suggested that the borough conduct a survey of the public, before the mayor's town hall meeting, to get initial "feedback" on how to proceed with the budget. He said residents might be able to "suggest what [budget] areas might be cut if [extraordinary] aid does not come

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John List

John List, Murderer, Dies at 82 After 18 Yrs. In Prison

By **DEBBIE HOFFMAN**
Specially Written for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times

TRENTON — John List, the Westfield man who murdered his wife, three children and mother in 1971 in their Hillside Avenue home, died on Friday, March 21, at St. Francis Medical Center in Trenton, at the age of 82. He served 18 years of a life prison at New Jersey State Prison in Trenton. "The Mercer County Medical



SPRING IS THE THING...Children scramble for rewards and parents enjoy their time in nice weather during the annual Easter Egg Hunt last Saturday at Forrest Road Park in Fanwood.

SPFBOE Adopts \$77.8 Mil. Budget; \$67.8 Mil. Tax Levy Heads to Voters

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

SCOTCH PLAINS — The Scotch Plains Fanwood Board of Education last Wednesday adopted a 2008-2009 school budget totaling \$77,775,487. The budget has a total general fund of \$74,220,000, a special revenue fund of \$1,211,493, and a previously approved debt service of \$2,343,994. The expense tax levy is \$67,753,660, a number that will be presented to voters on Tuesday, April 15.

The proposed tax levy would have a tax impact of \$153 per average home in Fanwood (a percentage increase of 2.80 percent) and \$271 per average home in Scotch-Plains (a percentage increase of 4.29 percent), Budget committee chairman Donald Parisi said in a slide presentation.

Mr. Parisi explained how this budget process differed from previous years, stating that there was a new school funding formula — which places a 4 percent cap on property taxes, there was the first increase in state aid since 2001-2002 and it establishes a statewide expenditure level.

Mr. Parisi said the first step in making any reductions to meet the 4 percent cap is reviewing "all items furthest from the classroom." He listed cutting health and dental benefits

costs, four elementary teaching positions, one Scotch Plains-Fanwood High School position (ROTC), one central office clerical position and tuition reimbursement. His presentation reflected that "reductions in all original budget requests" were found in the areas of transportation, aides, substitutes, supplies, and equipment in the music and world language departments.

The reductions in elementary staff positions, he said, are supported as a "bubble of elementary students move on to the middle schools." This inflation in middle school enrollment "supports the need for modular classrooms," a cost that is built into the budget. From 2003-2007, the district saw a total increase of 462 students. "Our enrollment is stabilizing," Mr. Parisi said.

He listed capital improvements

within the budget as the "paving of the high school parking lots" and the "first replacement phase of windows for Brunner School."

Curriculum Committee Chairman Sasha Slocum continued the slide presentation, announcing that the middle and high schools will receive new textbooks and that the summer curriculum work would take place in the areas of world language, social studies, math, language arts and science.

The six audience members did not make any opposing comments about the budget.

Additionally, Board Vice President Linda Nelson announced that the "negotiations teams for the Scotch Plains-Fanwood BOE and the Scotch Plains Fanwood Education Association (SPFEA) have signed a memoran-

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Council Examines Spending Side of 2008 Budget Proposal

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

SCOTCH PLAINS — Township Manager Thomas Atkins reviewed for the township council multiple appropriations categories in this year's municipal budget, including several where the spending level is beyond the control of the local government.

Mr. Atkins had met last week with department heads to discuss the \$24.9 million in spending requests he has submitted to the council, and asked each department to prepare for the possibility that his proposals could be reduced as council members further review the budget.

At a two-hour budget meeting on Tuesday, Mr. Atkins told the council he had received six separate department requests for new personnel, none of which he approved. He said such a

move would have resulted in several hundred thousand dollars in additional spending for 2008.

"We don't have the latitude" to fund any new positions, he told the council.

Turning to specific line items in his appropriations proposals, Mr. Atkins said fee payments to the two sewerage authorities would increase this year, with fees paid to the Rahway Valley Sewerage Authority (RVSA) increasing by \$107,000 but rising by about \$700,000 next year.

This year's lower fee is due to a credit that is being distributed to the utility's 11 member towns. The \$372,000 credit reduces this year's initially-expected fee increase of about \$450,000, but with Scotch Plains' total fee this year being about

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Council OK's Paper St. Sale Despite Fair Price Question

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

SCOTCH PLAINS — The township council on Tuesday approved two ordinances that vacate the township's rights to two paper streets on the Terrill Road property where the former Club Malibu nightclub was located.

The council's 4-1 vote, with Democratic Councilman Kevin Glover voting no, came after an extended discussion about whether the municipal government received a fair price for the pieces of property.

Council members questioned Township Attorney Brian Levine about some of the details of the \$5,000 that will be paid to the township by RGK Real Estate LLC on behalf of Advanced Auto Parts, which will open a store on the property.

Mr. Glover said that, initially, township officials were prepared to vacate

the properties without receiving any payment, but that he had pushed for some remuneration. Still, he said he was "certain we could have gotten more," and called the \$5,000 "pretty insignificant," given the township's financial constraints.

After township Democratic Party Chairman Richard Samuel said the government could have gotten more and pointed out that other parties had expressed an interest in buying the properties for more than \$5,000, Mayor Martin Marks said the vacation was "different than relinquishing land. We're relinquishing a right of way."

He said that even if the township wanted to sell to outside parties, it was prohibited from doing so by state statute.

Mr. Levine explained that the township doesn't technically own the two

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PLENTY OF ROOM...The newly renovated Union County Performing Arts Center in Rahway is spacious and luxurious as evidenced while the Scotch Plains-Fanwood High School Jazz Band practices there on March 19.

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