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SIXTY CENTS

Citizens Vow to Fight Against Closure of Muhlenberg Hospital

By JOHN MAGUIRE
Specially Written for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times

PLAINFIELD - An estimated 900 residents packed a public hearing on Tuesday evening at Plainfield High School to discuss Solaris Health Systems' closing of Muhlenberg Regional Medical Center as a result of them losing more than \$10 million per year in operations.

The crowd, with signs and T-shirts advertising their protest of closing Muhlenberg, called to save the hospital. Many citizens spoke passionately at the podium about the impact that the hospital closing would have on Plainfield and surrounding communities.

Representatives of the State Health Planning Board conducted the meeting with local and state representatives in attendance. Assemblyman Jerry Green (D) of Plainfield and Assemblywoman Linda Stender (D) of Fanwood represent Plainfield as part of the 22nd Legislative District. Mr. Green, deputy speaker of the State Assembly, said, "Muhlenberg did not look out for Plainfield."

Ms. Stender was not in attendance, citing a prior commitment - Mayor Colleen Mahr of Fanwood spoke on her behalf. The mayor noted the importance of the hospital to the region.

Councilman Kevin Glover of Scotch Plains stirred the crowd say-

ing, "Make this about Main Street, not Wall Street."

Carmen Salavarieta, a voice in the Plainfield's Latin community, called for more time to work out a compromise. Mrs. Salavarieta has been a member of the board of the Plainfield Health Center for 25 years. She cited the importance of Muhlenberg to the Latino community, and said the loss of the hospital would hit immigrants hard.

"They would take care of the people - papers or not," she said of Muhlenberg. According to Mrs. Salavarieta, many lower-income residents simply can't afford to have healthcare and Muhlenberg is a refuge for them. She recognized that the decision to close Muhlenberg is due to the hospital having to bear the financial burden of charity care, but said, "Give us time to work it out." She feared that many immigrants, "paperwork or not," without any means of transportation would not be able to afford costly cab rides to JFK Medical Center in Edison, and if they make it there, would not receive adequate care.

Other residents were angered by what they view is a systematic effort to deprive Plainfield of accessible healthcare. Jesus Delvi asked the board where the money to keep Muhlenberg open had gone.

"Westfield, Fanwood is where the money has gone," he shouted. With many cheering, he said, "We will fight to the end," and that "if Martin Luther King were alive, he would see the closure as a violation of civil and human rights."

Others were less emotional, but eager to point out that they thought closing Muhlenberg would have a devastating impact on the area. Using a domino analogy, Jim Uffer of South Plainfield said, "If Muhlenberg goes down, others will be affected."

"You have the power to keep this hospital open," he told the board, but went on to question whether they had the "vision and courage" to do so. "Never doubt that a small group of

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INTENSE...Approximately 900 citizens gathered at Plainfield High School on Tuesday night to protest and let state legislators know how they feel about the closing of Muhlenberg Regional Medical Center.

Scotch Plains Council Comes to Consensus On 6.25 Percent Municipal Tax Increase

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

SCOTCH PLAINS - Four of the five members of the township council agreed on Tuesday to finance this year's \$24.9-million municipal budget with a nine-point, or 6.25 percent, increase in the local property tax rate. The 2008 spending plan is expected to be introduced at the council's meeting on Tuesday, with a public hearing and vote set for June 11.

During an hour-long budget session that at times descended into a revisiting of last week's budget meeting when Mayor Martin Marks and Democratic Councilman Kevin Glover clashed, the council this week reviewed fresh proposals from Republican Deputy Mayor Nancy Malool on spending reductions and increased revenue assumptions in an attempt to reduce this year's municipal tax increase.

Using proposals put forth by herself last month and by Mr. Glover last week, along with suggestions from Township Manager Thomas Atkins, Mrs. Malool came up with \$140,500 in cuts from 20 different budget areas. She also recommended a more aggressive anticipation of 2008 revenue, specifically an additional \$100,000 for the township's open space trust fund, an additional \$85,000

for the reserve for sale of municipal assets, an added \$50,000 for the delinquent taxes reserve and an additional \$200,000 from the \$3.4 million cash surplus.

Combining the \$140,500 in budget reduction with the additional \$435,000 in revenue, Mrs. Malool said, would subtract six points from the 14.5-point tax increase originally pro-

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GOVERNOR IN SCOTCH PLAINS...New Jersey Governor Jon Corzine visited the JCC's Wilf Jewish Community Center in Scotch Plains last Sunday to join in the celebration of the 60th birthday of Israel. Pictured, left to right, are: Lou Beckerman of Scotch Plains, a Jewish Federation representative, and Gov. Corzine. Forrest Suchz, front, presented the Governor with an Israel 60th anniversary T-shirt.

Fanwood Eyes Fuel Costs, Possible Tower Revenue

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

FANWOOD - Mayor Colleen Mahr and the borough council on Monday night continued ongoing discussions about the proposed municipal budget.

The budget introduced last month totals about \$8.5 million in a year when Fanwood's funding from the state is expected to drop about 17 percent, revenues are declining and expenses are on the increase.

Borough officials have been holding a series of special meetings to analyze ways to reduce expenditures

and affect other changes aimed at minimizing the local tax burden; under the introduced budget, the municipal share would jump about 29 percent.

At Monday night's meeting, the borough's Chief Financial Officer, Fred Tomkins, said allowing cell phone providers to use Fanwood's existing communications tower could provide some help "on the revenue side." The borough currently uses the tower for communications for public works operations and emergency services.

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Mayor Mahr States Intent To Permit Prohibited Uses

By WAYNE BAKER
Specially Written for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times

FANWOOD - The borough council Tuesday night said the borough would soon permit professional offices on the first floor of buildings in Fanwood's redevelopment zone.

Additionally, Borough Attorney Dennis Estis said the borough would likely assume some financial risk to allow cellular antennas to be installed on a pole erected about two-and-a-half years ago.

Responding to a letter from Helen Ling, developer of the building at 226-234 South Avenue, requesting permission to rent space to a professional office, Mayor Colleen Mahr stated that the "council and mayor feel there is merit" to Mrs. Ling's request.

Other discussion during the meeting made clear that revisions to the

borough's redevelopment ordinance were being drafted to improve the chances of filling new spaces more quickly.

Recounting the borough's experience with a cell tower, Mr. Estis described difficulty with a regulation from the state's historic preservation office. After awarding a bid to place cellular antennas on a pole erected by the borough, the bidder raised a question about a payment to the state. Mr. Estis used terms like "got nowhere" when describing his experience with the state's historic preservation office.

The presence of a second interested party appears to have spurred an increased desire by the council to act. Mr. Estis described the payment as a one-time charge of not over \$10,000 to \$15,000. He said there

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SP Zoning Board Denies Grand St. Garage Expansion

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

SCOTCH PLAINS - The zoning board of adjustment directed a homeowner to dismantle an addition to his garage that had been built without first receiving a variance approval.

Anthony De Bellis of 1956 Grand Street had extended the front of his detached garage, which faces Union Avenue, about two years ago to provide him more room in which to build furniture and other items in an effort to make extra income.

"I'm not looking to get away with anything," Mr. De Bellis told the board at its meeting last Thursday. He said some medical problems and marital difficulties made it necessary for him to earn additional income, which he planned to do in the enlarged garage. He was seeking a side-yard setback variance for the garage addition.

Benjamin Tucker, a Union Avenue resident whose house is adjacent to the garage, read a letter to the board opposing the application, claiming that Mr. De Bellis was running a commercial business out of his garage and that the equipment and materials Mr. De Bellis stores in his garage were a "serious fire hazard."

The two neighbors argued briefly about why Mr. Tucker had sold Mr. De Bellis the lumber used in the garage addition and why Mr. Tucker had never complained about the garage prior to the hearing.

Joan Kaiser, a Grand Street resi-

Special Edition Of the Newspapers

Each spring, we provide this special newspaper edition and include a copy of our annual *This Is Westfield* publication. We hope you enjoy it.

This year, every resident in Westfield and Garwood are provided with this edition, along with our regular subscribers in all of the towns. We do this to enhance awareness and promote subscriptions.

Please subscribe at goleader.com/subscribe. We will earn your trust each week.

See page 2 for a special feature on Garwood.

Horace Corbin, Publisher

Businesses Honored at Scholarship Dinner

AREA - Over 70 people from the Scotch Plains and Fanwood business communities attended the 13th Annual Spring Fling Dinner Dance held on April 25 at The Westwood in Garwood.

The event, which was started in 1996, by the Scotch Plains Business and Professional Association (SPBPA), was co-organized this year for the first time by the SPBPA and the Fanwood Business and Professional Association (FBPA). All proceeds from the event go towards a scholarship fund, which will award four \$750 scholarships to Scotch Plains - Fanwood High School students.

The checks will be presented to the students and their families at the annual SPBPA/FBPA picnic at LaGrande Park in Fanwood on June 12.

Family Investors Company of Fanwood and Walter Chinoy, DMD, of Scotch Plains were recognized for their many years of service to their communities.

For more information, access visitscotchplains.com.



ACHIEVEMENT WINNER...Scotch Plains Planning Board member Alice Agran receives an award from Terence Maguire, president of New Jersey Planning Officials (NJPO), for her long and dedicated service to Scotch Plains at NJPO's April 25 banquet in Woodbridge.



COMMUNITY RECOGNITION...Fred Chemidlin of Family Investors Company in Fanwood and Dr. Walter Chinoy of Scotch Plains receive awards for community service from the business and professional associations of Fanwood and Scotch Plains. Pictured, left to right, are: SPBPA President Dr. Frank DiLollo, Mr. Chinoy, Mr. Fred Chemidlin and FBPA President Peter Chemidlin.

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