

Mahr Calls FW PBA Statements Regarding Layoffs 'Irresponsible'

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

FANWOOD — About 40 members of the public and PBA Local 123 police officers attended Tuesday night's regular borough council meeting, and nearly a dozen got up to publicly encourage the governing body not to lay off police officers.

However, as Mayor Colleen Mahr and Councilman Bruce Walsh said, "there is no such proposal" on the table, despite this year's budget challenges and ongoing efforts to mitigate them.

The PBA posted a flyer in the borough, encouraging residents to attend

Tuesday night's meeting and to speak out against the governing body's "proposal" to lay off six police officers.

At the meeting, police officer Tony Espinosa said budget "savings should not come at a cost to your safety."

Fellow officer Ron Grecco said police layoffs "can't happen."

"People's lives and safety will be in jeopardy," he said.

Local resident Rose Tzeretos said, "By cutting even one officer, I feel that comfort and security would be taken away from me."

Plainfield police officer and Fanwood resident Dino Caminiti said, "To have anything like a shortage of

manpower on the streets of Fanwood would not be a good thing."

When everyone had spoken, Mayor Mahr clearly stated, "We are not proposing to lay off six officers."

To clarify, the mayor said, "The chief of police responded to a directive," as did all borough departments, to show what would happen if their budgets were "hypothetically" reduced by up to 18 percent; this at a time when state aid to Fanwood could drop \$187,000, with revenues declining and expenses increasing.

"That was a discussion," the mayor said, adding that the PBA's claim of a layoff proposal "was a very irresponsible statement to make."

"There has to be a real dialogue at this point," Mayor Mahr said, telling the PBA and the community, "We're here to work with you."

Councilman David Valian also admonished the PBA for posting the flyer, calling it a "scare tactic;" he also criticized the PBA for not trying to "communicate" with the governing body about the issue.

Council President Joan Wheeler said, "We want this community to be as safe as it is today; that's our goal."

And Councilwoman Katherine Mitchell concluded, "I'm sorry that it's come to this point because we would never jeopardize public safety."

Regarding the borough's introduced municipal budget, which would require a local tax increase of about 29 percent to finance, the mayor said earlier in the meeting, "We have been working diligently to make this community better so we can do more without asking you to reach deeper into your pockets... we have to close

CONTINUED ON PAGE 12



RESCUED...Ken and Evelyn Troy of Fanwood count their blessings in appreciation after Mrs. Troy was saved from a heart attack by rescue squad and police department personnel on April 16 in her home. See story on page 12.



WALKING TO SAVE LIVES...Members of Student Movement Against Cancer (SMAC) at Scotch Plains-Fanwood High School raised more than \$120,000 for cancer research by taking part in the 12th Annual Relay for Life walkathon conducted over a 24-hour period on May 9. The event is sponsored by the American Cancer Society.

SP Municipal Budget Introduced; Tax Increase Will Be Eight Points

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

SCOTCH PLAINS — The township's \$24.6 million budget was introduced on Tuesday, and final calculations of this year's spending and revenue levels showed that the 2008 municipal property tax increase will be eight points, or 5.5 percent, instead of the nine points anticipated by the township council last week.

In briefly summarizing this year's spending plan, which will be voted on at the Tuesday, June 10 council meeting, Councilwoman Paulette Coronato said the governing body, in its deliberations over the past two months, was "hit with a double

whammy" of a new state-imposed property tax cap and a proposed \$271,000 cut in state aid. "We had to follow new rules with less money," she noted.

Mrs. Coronato said adoption of what she called a "fiscally prudent budget" will result in a \$96.80 increase in property taxes for local government purposes for the average assessed home of \$121,000.

She pointed to several budget areas where appropriation increases were beyond the control of the council, including a \$228,000 increase in group health insurance premiums, \$380,600 in additional contributions to state pension funds, \$140,000 in

police salaries and wages, \$150,650 more for debt service and \$142,400 in additional sewerage facility fees. Of the \$1,138,727 increase in appropriations this year, more than 95 percent was due to these and other mandated increases.

If state aid had been maintained at last year's level instead of being cut by the equivalent of about three tax points, this year's property tax hike would have been five points instead of eight.

The one-point reduction from what the council had agreed to at its final budget meeting a week ago resulted from what Township Manager Thomas Atkins described as "a more precise crunching of the numbers" by Chief Financial Officer Lori Majeski during the past week.

Her final figures showed a tax increase slightly above eight points. After consulting with council members, it was agreed that the final cut of \$35,000 needed to reach the eight-point figure should be found via increased revenue anticipation in various categories, Mr. Atkins told *The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times*.

In other business at Tuesday's meeting, the council approved the awarding of a \$1,660 bid to Applied Landscape Technologies of Montville to develop the new southside soccer field behind the firehouse at the corner of Martine Avenue and Raritan Road.

The complex will include a lighted

CONTINUED ON PAGE 12

Robert Sherr Retiring After Thirty Years as Health Director

By **LARISSA CURLIK**
Specially Written for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times

WESTFIELD — Robert Sherr retires from the Westfield Regional Health Department this week after serving for almost 30 years as the director of health. The department, under Mr. Sherr's direction, has evolved as a model of regional planning and shared services for eight New Jersey communities.

The regional health department provides public health and environmental services by enforcing state codes, laws and regulations established by the New Jersey Department of Health and Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The regional health department consists of a core staff of environmental inspectors that oversee environmental regulations, conduct restaurant inspections and assist in the department's clinics.

In addition to having a public health nursing supervisor, one full-time nurse in Summit, and a part-time nurse in New Providence, the department employs a staff of per diem nurses that assist with clinics and screenings throughout the year. The deputy registrar and registrar in Westfield also oversee the registrar of vital statistics in each town.

As director, Mr. Sherr was responsible for securing funding for the department, the oversight of all activities and ensuring the implementation of state-required programs.

"Through [Mr. Sherr's] guidance and drive we grew from a very small board of health serving 29,000, to eight communities serving 129,000 residents," said William Corbet, president of the Westfield Board of Health.

When Mr. Sherr initially took office as a health inspector in 1978, the department served Fanwood, Garwood, Mountainside and Westfield. Today, the department has expanded to include New Providence, Roselle Park, Springfield and Summit.

By growing in size, the department has expanded services despite the challenge of limited resources, Mr. Sherr said.

"Public health has changed and evolved from 1978, to what it is today. Initially, we primarily did things like environmental inspections and environmental complaints and nuisance complaints. We also held chronic illness screenings. That part has not changed," Mr. Sherr said. What has changed in the last 10 years is the increased role the department plays in developing plans to respond to bio-terrorism, such as anthrax or pandemic flu.

The state mandates that each town must have a health officer, but limited resources have made contractual arrangements between towns an economically favorable alternative to hiring more full-time employees.

"Everyone in the system saves money," Mr. Sherr said. In addition to getting better prices by bidding services out to more people, Mr. Sherr said sharing services "allows us to better use the limited resources that we have."

Now, the department is able to provide services, such as pest control, to municipally owned properties throughout the region. The department has also expanded its chronic illness programming to address issues such as cancer, diabetes and heart conditions in addition to its health

and flu shot clinics.

Mr. Sherr "was 20 years ahead of where we are at right now relative to where we're trying to go with municipalities economies," Mr. Corbet said. He earned his reputation as "the most respected health officer in the state," according to Mr. Corbet, by being a "very good financial manager, very good with other boards of health and town councils, and having the ability to bring in and train capable and hard working employees."

Megan Cornish will replace Mr. Sherr as the new health director. Ms. Cornish is currently the public health nursing supervisor and has worked in the department since last June.

Mr. Corbet said he expects to see an increase in the involvement of the board of health, which is made up of nine members, when Mr. Sherr leaves. In addition to assisting Ms. Cornish and reinforcing Mr. Sherr's past work, there will be "more of an outreach by the board members when we have health fairs and flu shot clinics," Mr. Corbet said.

Mr. Sherr, who will pursue private consulting after leaving the department, will be available on an hourly basis to assist Ms. Cornish as she transitions into the position.

"We will get Bob's input... particularly in the fall, as we prepare budgets for Westfield and the other towns we service because it is an extremely complicated process," said Mr. Corbet, who has worked closely with Mr. Sherr on the budget in the past.

In the long term, Ms. Cornish said she wants to continue to "attract more towns to the regional health department to make it strong."

SPBPA Network Night To Be Held on May 21

SCOTCH PLAINS — The Scotch Plains Business and Professional Association (SPBPA) will hold a business network night on Wednesday, May 21, from 6:30 to 9:30 p.m. at RWJ Fitness and Wellness Center, located at 2120 Lamberts Mill Road in Scotch Plains.

Attendees will be able to meet and network with business owners from the area. Light refreshments will be served. Admission is free for two people per SPBPA member and \$10 for additional guests and non-members. To respond, e-mail SPBPA@comcast.net or call Jean Ann Honig at (908) 663-2183. For more information about the SPBPA, see visitscotchplains.com.



LEAVING A LEGACY...Robert Sherr is retiring after 30 years as director of health for the Westfield Regional Health Department. He will be replaced by Megan Cornish, who currently serves as the department's public nurse supervisor.

Hearing on South Ave. Office Bld. to Resume June 9

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

SCOTCH PLAINS — The township's planning board will resume a hearing next month to consider a site plan application to build a two-story office building on South Avenue. D. Villane Construction is seeking approval for the building at the corner of South Avenue and New Jersey Avenue to house its offices and a meeting room for clients.



Attorney Robert Kraus

D. Villane's plan calls for a 1,580-square-foot building to be situated on the property, which is across South Avenue from the county public works facility and is triangular-shaped. At Monday's hearing, which was continuation from an April hearing, attorney Robert Kraus and architect Roger Winkle explained some of the revisions to the site and building plans that were made at the suggestion of the board last month.

Mr. Winkle's sketches included additional first- and second-floor windows, both actual and faux, and also details of the building's basement.

Randall Voinier, a traffic consultant, discussed some of the traffic safety studies he conducted, and told the board that it would be safe for drivers to turn right from South Avenue onto New Jersey Avenue, a turn that is at a 140-degree angle, and be able to react in enough time to cars exiting the parking lot of the Villane building. He also said the building, which would be situated close to South Avenue, would not have any effect on sight distances for drivers entering South Avenue.

New Jersey Avenue resident Michael Brennan, speaking in opposition to the application, compared the proposal to "putting lipstick on a pig — it's still a

pig. That's what this application is."

He also asked the board to decide on the application at Monday's meeting instead of continuing it at its June 9 meeting, when a professional planner is set to testify on behalf of D. Villane.

Board Chairwoman Maria Sartor, though, said it was important for the board to hear from all witnesses and experts before making a decision, and she said residents opposing the application were welcome to hire experts of their own to analyze the application.

SP Officials Recognized By State, Local Organizations

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

SCOTCH PLAINS — Two top township officials were honored recently, with Township Manager Thomas Atkins being named Business Administrator of the Year by the Gateway Regional Chamber of Commerce and Construction Official and Zoning Officer Robert LaCosta named Building Official of the Year by the

New Jersey Building Officials Association.

Mr. Atkins, who will retire from the township government this summer after 28 years of service, received his award at the Chamber's mayors' dinner on March 31 in Elizabeth, which is held each year and honors outstanding public servants in Union County.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 12



ISRAEL AT 60...Local political figures attended the Westfield Symphony Orchestra and Temple Emanu-El's joint effort last week to celebrate Israel's 60th anniversary. Pictured, from left to right, are: Cantor Martha Novick, Westfield Councilwoman JoAnn Neylan and Vicki Kimmins, Maestro David Wroe, Westfield Mayor Andy Skibitsky, Assemblywoman Linda Stender (LD-22, Fanwood) and Rabbi Douglas Sagal. See article on page 24.

PAGE INDEX

Regional	2-3	Obituary	8	Real Estate	13-20
Editorial	4-5, 10	Education	9, 21	Classifieds	20
Community..6-8, 10-11		Sports	13-18	A&E	21-24