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Fanwood Council Discusses Utility Increases, Hetfield Bridge Repair

By MAGGIE DIGGORY
Specially Written for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times

FANWOOD — Mayor Colleen Mahr began Tuesday night's Fanwood Borough Council agenda meeting by reading correspondence regarding proposed rate increases from both Elizabethtown Gas and New Jersey American Water.

"I think I'll take a stance against both of those," said Mayor Mahr, with both utilities proposing "pretty significant" rate increases.

"They're looking at 12 percent (New Jersey American Water)," continued the mayor.

Mayor Mahr asked borough attorney Dennis Estis to draft a response to both utility companies opposing the rate increase. Furthermore, the mayor said she and another council member plan to attend a public meeting regarding the issue on July 13 in Maplewood.

The agenda meeting was primarily focused on the 2009 Capital Budget. Proposed expenditures include renovation of the aging municipal building, as well as other improvements to the borough in the coming year.

"I was not at the last meeting but have met with Fred (Borough Financial Officer Fred Tompkins) to express my concerns about the depth of the expenditures. I propose a pared down budget. I want to keep projects regarding the roads, curbs, sidewalks, downtown improvement and inspections regarding these projects," said Mayor Mahr.

The council discussed the urgency of certain projects over others. For example, the council decided to move forward with awarding a contract to Kupper Associates of Piscataway to repair the retaining wall in the borough's municipal building complex.

"Is there any benefit to getting one large survey of municipal hall? We don't want to move on anything until we know what to do with it all," said Councilwoman Joan Wheeler.

Borough Engineer Joseph Pryor's report on public works included two Department of Transportation (DOT) grant applications he filed electronically at the end of June. The first pertained to repairing Watson Road. The second attempt was to get money for sidewalks on Midway Avenue under a "Safe Streets to Transit" grant application.

Mr. Pryor's report also included a resolution to authorize the borough to release funds to pay for half the cost of materials (estimated at $20,000) for the Hetfield Avenue Bridge repair. The work involves milling and repaving later this summer to be done by the county.

Scotch Plains has been asked by Fanwood to pay for half of the materials, noted Borough Clerk Eleanor McGovern.

"They have to do the repair to the bridge. This came about before the 18-wheeler turnover," said Ms. McGovern.

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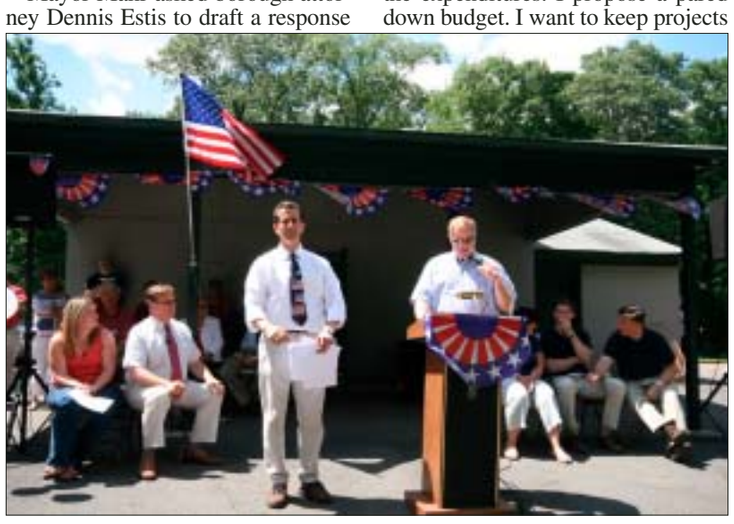

Greg Ryan for *The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times*

DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE…GOP Candidates for State Assembly in LD-22 – former Scotch Plains Mayor Martin Marks and his runningmate Bo Vastine – read the Declaration of Independence to scores in the audience on July 4, at Brookside Park in Scotch Plains. They are joined in the reading by several officials including Scotch Plains Mayor Nancy Malool and former Bogota Mayor Steve Lonegan.

Christina M. Hinke for *The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times*

LIGHT IT UP...A composite of fireworks' photos shows the variety of colorful blasts on display July 4, during the Independence Day celebration at Nomahegan Park in Cranford.

Cranford Springfield Ave. Bridge to Close For One Year During Re-Construction

By CHRISTINA M. HINKE
Specially Written for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times

WESTFIELD — Starting sometime this month, the county-owned Springfield Avenue Bridge located by the Cranford Canoe Club will begin yearlong construction to replace the 103-year-old structure. The county stated in its press release that the bridge is "rated as being functionally obsolete." The State of New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) had required Union County to prepare a "bridge alternatives analysis" for the bridge, according to minutes of a Cranford Township Committee agenda in January.

During its closure, detours will direct traffic to other county roads including Kenilworth Boulevard, Michigan Avenue and North Avenue. These county road detours are to help "keep as much of the through traffic off the local streets as possible," said Mark Smith, deputy mayor and commissioner of public works and engineering for Cranford.

The start of construction had been pushed back from June because the township's engineer Richard Marsden, Jr. had found fault with part of the detour plan, specifically trucks using Orange Avenue with a turn that is too difficult to navigate, Mr. Smith said. So, the engineer had talked to the county about other possibilities on county roads.

The bridge sits right between the downtown of Cranford and Nomahegan Park and is a route that bears an average daily traffic flow of approximately 17,000 vehicles, according to a Union County press release.

"I would imagine Orchard would get a good bit of traffic" by cars trying to navigate around the bridge, Mr. Smith added. "I think it's going to be a mess," Mr. Smith said about the traffic.

Canoers who rent canoes from the Cranford Canoe Club pass under the Springfield Avenue bridge as the start and end to their some three-mile journey along the Rahway River for possible sightings of baby deer, turtles and other animal life. The closure of the bridge would put a halt to this route the Canoe Club offers as the mainstay of its business. The opposite direction is a half-mile with very little nature life to see, according to a worker at the club, Jimmy Venia.

He said the timing of the construction, taking place in a year when the economy is at it lowest in decades, is "a little inconsiderate" and will "negatively affect the business."

Area families come to the club to take a canoe out on the Rahway River. "It's a moderately-priced activity and a good thing to do on the weekends," he said. "It's going to hurt them [families] as well."

Cranford's Recreation and Parks Director Stephen Robertazzi said the proprietor of the canoe club pays the township a seasonal fee, which was already paid up front. "I think he's going to be OK," he said of the business manager.

Marbro, Inc. of Montclair, the contractor awarded the $2.3-million county contract, is planning to replace the bridge, reinforce it with concrete footings, walls, decks and sidewalks, as well as having steel support beams. Decoratively, the sidewalk parapet walls, abutments and wing walls will be finished in stone veneer masonry, similar to the bridge northwest along Springfield Avenue near Hampton Road. The sidewalk will have an ornamental railing.

"I'm sorry to see the existing bridge go because it adds character to that area of town, but I recognize the need

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Raynor Denitzio for *The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times*

FAMILY FUN... Doug Muenzen and his four-year-old daughter, Stephanie, build a "robot" out of tin foil during Fanwood's third annual "Party in the Park" held on June 30. The event, which preceded a showing of *Wall-E*, served as the kick-off for the borough's summer film series and featured rides, games, prizes and food.

Fred Rossi for *The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times*

NOT KANSAS...Amina Moore as the Wicked Witch of the West, Rebecca Lewis as Glinda the Good Witch (center) and Catherine Coughlan as Dorothy perform in the STARS production of *The Wizard of Oz* last weekend at Alan Augustine Park in Scotch Plains. STARS, or Student Thespians Are Recreating The Stage, is a summer theatre group of students from Scotch Plains and Fanwood.

Freeholders Hire Private Company To Manage County Golf Courses

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

ELIZABETH — The Union County Board of Chosen Freeholders approved a five-year, $421,000 contract with Illinois-based Kemper Sports Management to provide golf course management at Union County's two public courses, Galloping Hill in Union and Ashbrook in Scotch Plains.

The contract follows what officials said was golf operating losses of $500,000 in 2007 and $700,000 in 2008. The county freeholders approved the closing of Oak Ridge Golf Course in Clark earlier this year due to what officials said was an operating deficit of $410,000.

Al Faella, director of parks and community renewal, said Kemper was one of two companies that bid on the county contract. RDC Golf Corp., owner of the Forsgate Country Club in Monroe Township, also submitted a proposal.

Kemper manages 70 courses in 28 states, including Heron Glen in Hunterdon County and courses in New York, Maryland, Pennsylvania and Virginia.

"By a large margin, a unanimous margin, the recommendation was made to go with Kemper for many reasons. Some of which are their experience in managing public courses, collaborating on the first tee program for our youth and managing other similar type public courses," Mr. Faella said.

He said the county would be able to "take advantage of the purchasing power that they (Kemper) have by buying in volume and passing those discounts onto the things that we purchase."

As part of the contract, Kemper will receive 5 percent of any additional revenues generated over the golf operations budget to be set by the county.

Mr. Faella said the county wanted a private firm to manage clubhouse operations, which he defined as "non-maintenance-related golf services" such as food and beverage sales. He said the county wanted to look for "new approaches to its existing golf operations and to move from significant losses towards profitability."

The freeholders, he said, authorized $3.2 million in improvements at Galloping Hill and Ashbrook golf courses through a bond ordinance in December 2008. The improvements include installation of an irrigation system at Ashbrook and construction of a learning center and driving range at Galloping Hill.

The county put together a Blue Ribbon panel to review the proposals. The panel included Kevin Vitale, general manager of Baltusrol Golf Club in Springfield; John Sumas, general counsel at Wakefern Corp. and treasurer of the Suburban Golf Club in Union Township, and Joe Tato, an attorney who serves as president of the Fairmount Country Club in Chatham and is a member of Baltusrol.

Mr. Faella, Mike Yuska, the county's purchasing director, and Matt DiRado, assistant county counsel and an attorney with Decotiis, Fitzpatrick, Cole & Wisler of Teaneck, represented the county on the panel.

Mr. Faella said representatives of Kemper and RDC met with the committee for a four-hour interview and a tour of Galloping Hill on June 22.

During the public portion of Thursday's meeting, Judy Winter of Cranford asked how a golf management company would impact the costs of golf fees, "because it seems like you are having double management," she said.

Mr. Sullivan said Kemper would only manage the county's clubhouse operations. "It has nothing to do with the golf fees, has no impact of the cost for a cart or the cost of a round of golf," he replied.

"This is our proposal to, frankly, increase the professionalism and the management of the courses themselves and, in the end, increase our revenue and make the golfing experience a much better one for the golfers in Union County," Mr. Sullivan said.

He said the golf fees are determined by county staff and approved

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Scotch Plains Second Block Party Is This Weekend

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

SCOTCH PLAINS — The township's Cultural Arts Committee, with help from the Scotch Plains Management Corp. (SPMC), will kick off its summer concert series tonight with the Second annual Block Party at Alan Augustine Park adjacent to the municipal building.

SP Block Party July 17, 2008

Tonight's event, which runs from 7 to 9:30 p.m., will have inflatable children's rides, face painting, clowns and games, as well as a disk jockey and dancing.

"There will be plenty of stuff for the kids to do," said Councilwoman Mary DePaola, the council's liaison to the cultural arts committee. She told *The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times* that local businesses would provide food at a "nominal charge." Mrs. DePaola said more local businesses are involved in this year's event primarily because of the involvement of the SPMC, which is subsidizing tonight's party with a "substantial" contribution.

Park Avenue, in front of the municipal building, will be blocked off from vehicular traffic to provide space for the event. In addition, there will be a classic car show in the parking lot next to the municipal building.

At last week's township council meeting, Mrs. DePaola said several of her children had recently asked her if last summer's block party was going to be repeated because "they loved it last year" and "wanted to do it again."

For further information, call (908) 322-6700, extension 1223.

Jessica Jaskula for *The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times*

WELL DONE…Scotch Plains-Fanwood PTA presidents were honored at the Board of Education (BOE) meeting June 25, for their efforts during the last school year. PTA Presidents pictured are: Karyn Steele (PTA Council President), Lisa Ciarrocca (Brunner School), Laurie Prusik (Coles School), Lisa Dunlap (Evergreen School), Jeanne Cleary (McGinn School), Marianna Clausen (School One), Joan Caramico (Terrill Middle School), and Jill Markovits (SPFHS), along with BOE President Trip Whitehouse.

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