



Alex Taner for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times

**APPROVED...**During a special meeting held March 14, the Westfield Board of Adjustment voted unanimously to grant several variances being requested to allow Urban Outfitters to renovate and occupy the building at 154 East Broad Street. The facade of the historic Westfield Trust Company building, pictured above, will remain unchanged. The meeting was attended by Arthur P. Attenasio, attorney for the property owners, who is shown appearing before the board.

## Urban Outfitters to Occupy Historic Westfield Trust Bld.

By SARA MAGNOLA-TANER  
Specially Written for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times

WESTFIELD – During a special meeting held March 14, the Westfield Board of Adjustment voted unanimously to grant several variances being requested to facilitate a lease agreement between Poly C LLC, Serf Realty LLC, and Urban Outfitters to renovate and occupy the historic Westfield Trust Company building at 154 East Broad Street at the corner of East Broad and Elm Streets.

According to Edward Glackin of Colin Development LLC, the building has been vacant since the previous tenant, Wachovia Bank, left in 2008.

“Despite our marketing efforts, we had trouble finding a tenant,” Mr. Glackin said. “Urban Outfitters is the only tenant that would preserve the outside integrity of the building.”

The proposed lease was dependent on the Board of Adjustment granting variation relief from the town’s land use ordinance that only allows for storage in a basement. The proposed plans – developed by architect Dennis Flynn – incorporated the original bank vault as retail space, as well as an employee break room, and a manager’s office, all located on the basement level.

The plans compared the building as it was during a field survey conducted in 2008, to what Urban Outfitters would design. The upper level mezzanine, which was previously closed in and used as office space, would be used as retail area as well as some storage. The main level would also be used as retail space. The survey shows that there was already a break room located in the basement, as well as the safe deposit box area and the vault.

Liam Sullivan, development manager for Urban Outfitters, told the board that it was the “uniqueness and character” of the building that they found appealing. “It is our intent to preserve the integrity of the building,” Mr. Sullivan said.

When questioned by board member Mark Doherty about why using the basement was a necessity, Mr. Sullivan explained that having the offices and storage downstairs would allow for more retail space upstairs, as well as the ability to open the mezzanine up, and uncover original architectural details.

Store design manager Joe Kenney discussed the proposed renovations in further detail, telling the board that the side windows and grates, as well as the cornices would remain as is, and the exterior would be painted off-white. The side windows flanking the front entrance would be lowered to street level, and the entryway vestibule would be renovated, including the addition of taller, grander front doors.

The other variances being sought for the renovations were from ordi-

nances prohibiting a barricade sign, which would temporarily be erected to protect pedestrians from the construction areas, as well as ordinances prohibiting the proposed placements of the permanent exterior signage.

The front sign would be added right above the entryway, and the two signs on either side of the building would be located between existing signs and the windows, in what Mr. Kenney described as the most “logical placement.” All three signs would be raised slightly away from the wall, and illuminated by lights from below. Additionally, a call box would be added at the East Broad Street side entrance, for those requiring the use of the accessible entrance. Interior renovations would include removing faux marble, and exposing the original concrete ceiling, as well as terracotta walls. The oculus would also be maintained.

When questioned by board members whether the site would have been considered without the use of basement, Ms. Sullivan responded by saying, “We probably would have passed, or needed to add a full second floor, which wouldn’t have maintained the character.”

Paul Grygiel of PPG LLC, Planning and Real Estate Consultants, cited the atypical triangular shape and position of the building, causing “everything to be on display” and justifying the need for the sign variance.

“This is a creative reuse of an existing building that can be used for a new purpose,” Mr. Grygiel said. “It would be a benefit to the downtown to have retail in a currently empty building.”

Board Chairman William Heinbokel described the application as a “unique opportunity, designed perfectly to fit in our downtown.”

He said the building was originally designed for the basement area to be included in the gross floor area. With the grand stairs leading down to the vault, which had previously been used for staff areas and patrons by the bank, Urban Outfitters is “reestablishing something that is designed to occur in the space,” Mr. Heinbokel said.

Board member Francis Smith added that, “The signs are scaled appropriately for the building size, which is larger than others.”

The board unanimously approved the application, with the condition that proposed new HVAC units located on the roof not be visible from the street level, and that the building is painted off-white, as was presented in the plans.

Poly C LLC and Serf Realty LLC has owned the building since 2008 when it acquired it for \$2.7 million, according to the New Jersey Tax Assessors’ website. Taxes on the building are \$45,500, which is assessed at \$566,000.



Betsey Burgdorf for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times

**SPRING HAS SPRUNG...**For once, the weather was finally in sync with the first official day of spring.

## Scotch Plains-Fanwood BOE Hears Report on Technology

By KIMBERLY A. BROADWELL  
Specially Written for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times

SCOTCH PLAINS – A technology report was given last Thursday evening at the Scotch Plains-Fanwood Board of Education meeting by district Assistant Superintendent of Schools Joan Mast.

According to the report, there are a total of 2,432 computers within the district. In her report, the assistant superintendent noted that there were 747 computers at the high school, 951 at the middle schools and 721 in the elementary schools. She also noted there were 33 computers in the central office and that the computer totals include both faculty and student computers.

It also was reported that computer software such as AutoCAD 2007, Lego Robotics for engineering in middle school, Logger Pro 3.3 for high-school science and Final Cut Express for video editing currently was in use for students. Other software also was noted for ongoing classroom use in the subjects of digital photography, mathematics, web development and design, literature, social studies, language arts, music and special education.

In her report, Assistant Superintendent Mast stated that there presently are 11 physical servers that include Mac, Dell and HP and 12 virtual servers. It also was noted that all schools in the district have a “wireless environment.”

She reported that the district currently uses 130 printers, 49 iPads and 216 LCD projectors. It was noted that many teachers use the LCD projectors for classroom teaching.

The assistant superintendent reported that during the 2010-2011 school year, servers and networks went from physi-

cal to virtual and that more laptops were brought into the classrooms. She also noted that during the present school year, Scotch Plains-Fanwood High School was updated with Macs and that for the 2012-2013 school year a focus will have to be placed on updates for the middle schools.

Linda Materna, World Language chairperson for the district, also spoke at the meeting. She noted that, “just within the last three years there have been so many improvements.” She also said students currently use many Internet-based programs within the classrooms, including E-pals, a penpal site; penpalnews.com, to read news from other countries, and many other real estate, mapping and news sites. She noted that all teachers have LCD projectors and that high-school teachers use their new Macs to foster students creating iMovies and digital programming.

At the conclusion of the meeting, the assistant superintendent introduced four full-time members of the Technology Department, including Marco Vasquez, Help Desk coordinator; Emilia Treglia, Technology Support specialist; Matt Nalducci, Computer Support technician, and Ann Chen, coordinator of Data Analysis and Assessment.

The next board of education meeting is scheduled for tonight, March 22, at 7:30 p.m. in the Administrative Offices at Evergreen School, located at Evergreen Avenue and Cedar Street in Scotch Plains. This will be the public hearing on the 2012-2013 budget. According to Business Administrator James Davis, adoption of this budget will follow the public hearing.

## Scotch Plains Budget

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tional full-time police officers.

The budget preserves funding for various municipal services including spring yard waste pick-up, the fall leaf collection program and curbside residential recycling. One area that will see a reduction in spending is required pension payments to the state’s public employees retirement system and the police and fire retirement systems, which will decrease by \$161,855 this year.

Financing sources for this year’s budget include \$2,227,587 in state aid, a level unchanged from last year; \$14,442,223 in property tax revenue; \$570,000 in anticipated construction code fees, \$1.6 million in miscellaneous revenue; \$725,000 from delinquent taxes and \$15,000 from interest on investments, down from \$20,000 in 2011. And \$2.24 million of township surplus funds will be used to balance the budget.

At its budget meeting last Thursday, the council agreed to use \$100,000 in surplus funds from the sanitary sewer utility as a revenue source, a move that knocked a penny off the municipal tax rate increase from 3.8 cents to 2.8 cents. Mayor Malool called the move a “symbolic gesture” to show taxpayers “that we’re listening.” She told *The Times* the \$100,000 level was “not a reckless move,” pointing out that Mr. Marion and Chief Financial Officer Lori Majeski did not raise objections

from a fiscal standpoint.

The proposed 2012 capital budget amounts to \$1.6 million in funding for a variety of projects including road and street improvements, storm sewer upgrades, fire department equipment upgrades, some parks improvements, an upgrade of the police department’s 9-1-1 system, vehicle acquisition for the public works department and some upgrades for Scotch Plains Television.

In other business, Mr. Marion said the curbside yard waste collection program will get underway on Monday, April 23. Leaves, limbs, brush and gumballs can be placed at the curb beginning on Friday, April 13. Residents with questions can call the Department of Public Property hotline at (908) 233-6707. New Jersey American Water’s annual spring fire hydrant flushing program is scheduled to begin in Scotch Plains on Monday, April 9, and finish by May 10.

The council also approved the \$85,400 budget for the Scotch Plain Management Corp. (SPMC), which will fund the bulk of its budget via a \$400 annual assessment on the 164 commercial property owners within the business district. Other revenue sources this year will come from about \$12,000 in unexpended funds from last year and \$7,800 in revenue anticipated from selling advertising in SPMC’s *Simply Scotch Plains* magazine.

## SPMC Announces Campaign

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be available from the municipal government to relocating businesses and the creation of a marketing portfolio describing the Scotch Plains business district.

Fifthly, Mr. Biagini and another staff member from FirsTEAManagement will attend the International Council of Shopping Centers annual convention in Las Vegas in May. Some 1,500 retailers and 30,000 attendees are already registered, according to Mr. Biagini, who will be paying for himself and his staffer to attend on behalf of not only the Scotch Plains business district, but also five other special improvement districts his firm represents.

FirsTEAManagement will sponsor a booth where the printed marketing efforts will be available to prospective retailers. Mr. Biagini hopes to make initial contact with possible recruits via the retailers website in advance of the Las Vegas convention and then meet with them at the show in order to gauge the seriousness of their intentions before serious discussions of relocating in Scotch Plains

takes place.

“My role in this,” he told *The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times*, “is to try to attract business to Scotch Plains. I’m not a real estate broker or an attorney, and I won’t be closing any deals. I am facilitating” the recruitment effort.

The SPMC will split much of the cost of the five aspects of the program with FirsTEAManagement’s other client towns but SPMC — besides the approximately \$1,000 it will expend on membership in the website and the cost of the booth at the Las Vegas show — will spend in the neighborhood of \$2,000 on the marketing brochure alone.

In other business, SPMC’s revamped website went online on March 1 at prdein.scotchplains.com. The site now includes contact information for more than 400 businesses as well as a listing of available vacant properties, names and contact information for board members, a viewable version of the SPMC’s magazine, *Simply Scotch Plains*, the group’s television commercial and photographs from recent events.



Courtesy of Bill Sherman

**SALUTE...**Troop No. 104 welcomes 20 new Boy Scouts in a “New Scout Investiture” ceremony held Monday. The scouts received their “Troop Colors” (neckerchiefs) and were awarded their Scout Rank badges (the first step along their Boy Scouting trail). Troop No. 104 meets at 7:30 p.m. at the All Saints’ Episcopal Church in Scotch Plains every Monday that school is in session. Those interested are invited to stop by or contact troop leaders at T-104-Leaders@yahoo.com.

## Fanwood Council

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percent levy cap, a cap that has since been cut in half.

Due to “manipulation” by the governor and state Legislature, Fanwood’s PFRS (Police and Firemen’s Retirement System) contributions dropped \$134,570 in 2012, Mr. Tompkins said. He cautioned council members to expect these figures to rise in the future. The borough also is aided, on the revenue side, by anticipating its first PILOT (payment in lieu of taxes) money from the Elite Properties construction in downtown Fanwood. The borough will see \$50,000 in this year’s budget. It can expect \$100,000 next year.

After the budget was finalized, three individuals — two police staff and one public works employee — announced their retirements. Accordingly, the borough passed a resolution that permits Fanwood to pay the workers’ retirements over a five-year period instead of absorbing an additional \$55,000 expenditure at once. The borough can pay one-fifth each year.

Councilman Tony Parenti, the borough’s former police chief, said the finance committee “did an excellent job” and also thanked department heads for working towards a successful product.

Resident Joe Nagy, when informed that the \$7.67 increase does account for pension and healthcare figures, said the borough had done “an extraordinary job.”

When asked to explain Fanwood’s success, Mr. Parenti simply said the community “knew how to manage its finances.”

Mr. Tompkins said Fanwood “had a sense of knowing it had to shrink the size of its operation before the state mandated it...We did it sooner and were ahead of the game.”

In his engineering report, Antonios Panagopoulos said the borough “had an issue” with a Herbert Avenue project after the low bidder — Jenicar Builders Contractors Co., Inc. — defaulted on the contract.

A letter received by the borough said the company was not operating any longer; Mr. Panagopoulos said “their heart is not in the business anymore.”

Jenicar has a connection to former Perth Amboy Mayor Joseph Vas, who was sentenced to prison on corruption charges last April. According to a press release on nj.gov, Jenicar pleaded guilty in August 2010 to third-degree “conspiracy to commit

official misconduct” and was ordered to pay a \$45,000 fine. Vas had admitted that between May and November 2002, he accepted approximately \$25,000 in masonry and paving work at his home, free of charge, from Jenicar.

The borough should not incur any additional costs because of the defaulting. A bonding company can step forward and take over the job, hiring its own contractor. The borough would pay the bonding company what it would have paid Jenicar.

The council conducted nearly an hour of presentations and proclamations to begin the meeting. Among them, former two-term Councilwoman Joan Wheeler was lauded. She said she “learned the value of serving the community” during her six years on council. Councilwoman Katherine Mitchell, who was often mistaken for Mrs. Wheeler’s sibling, said that she gained a “new sister” and a lifelong friend through time spent together.

Officials also honored Ian Lewis, a member of the Fanwood Rescue Squad; flying cross-country, he performed CPR on a woman who had collapsed aboard the flight. The plane executed an emergency landing, and the woman survived. The council proclaimed March 20 as Ian Lewis Day.

The governing body additionally proclaimed April 2012 as Historical Society Month and officially appointed Adele Kenny as Fanwood’s first Poet Laureate.

## Chris Marion

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Mayor Malool said she was not in favor of hiring an executive search firm to hire the next manager. In 2009 the township contracted with Jersey Professional Management (JPM) for \$10,000. The recruitment effort for a new manager was discussed in private session by the mayor and council on Tuesday night.

Scotch Plains Democratic Party Chairman Lou Beckerman described Mr. Marion as “a very able administrator.”

“He was very good at implementing stuff. He did his job well,” Mr. Beckerman told *The Times*. He also described Mr. Marion as “well spoken, well respected and a pleasure to deal with.”

## SP Reduces Tax Increase

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citizen, you should,” Mr. Glover said.

“It’s not going to make a big difference at all to most taxpayers,” Mayor Malool said. “As far as I’m concerned, it was a gesture or token to show that we understand these economic times and recognize how high property taxes are in general.”

Mr. Glover said he did not understand the purpose of maintaining a surplus in the sewer utility fund when that money would not affect the township’s bonding and could very well be returned to taxpaying households feeling the strain of the current economic climate.

Mr. Vastine stated that he felt it would have been more prudent to use up that surplus over the course of several years by offering residents a stable sewer utility user fee, just as the council had done in the past.

Referring to the Rahway Valley Sewerage Authority (RVSA) and Plainfield Area Regional Sewerage Authority (PARSA) that treat the town’s water supply, he said, “There’s no responsible reason to spend away the surplus when you know that the collection rates are down and you know that our rates from RVSA and PARSA are going to go up.”

“Taking \$100,000 out of our municipal surplus is not going to wreak financial havoc nor is it going to affect our financial status 10 years down the road,” Mr. Glover said. “I’m not suggesting we do this every year. I’m suggesting we do this for the reasons you maintain a surplus: to have funds available that...you can draw on for unexpected expenses or difficult times when your revenue either goes away in its entirety or gets cut.”

Mr. Marion agreed that he and Lori Majeski, the town’s chief financial

officer, had enough of a hold on the sewer utility fund balance generation and regeneration this year that \$100,000 represented a relatively nominal figure. Had the council proposed transferring \$200,000, Mr. Marion said, he would have been a bit more wary.

Mr. Glover said he ultimately wanted to push to reduce the municipal tax rate increase even further.

“I’m willing to strike an opening lobby compromise so that the taxpayers can get some relief,” he said. “I believe we can still do better... I think, aggressively, we can get down to a 1 percent increase.”

Mr. Glover said he planned to present some resolutions over the course of the week following this Thursday’s budget workshop meeting as to what areas of the municipal budget the township might also be able to cut that would reduce taxpayer costs without hurting the township’s overall financial viability.

Mr. Marion believes enough work has gone into developing this year’s municipal budget that he thinks anyone would be hard-pressed to reassess what revenues can be expected for different items on the municipal budget.

“I think we did a good job anticipating financial revenues and taking a longer-term financial perspective,” he said. “I think this is a solid budget.”

The council voted to introduce the budget Tuesday night and is slated to meet with other department heads tonight, March 22, at 7 p.m. The mayor and council will hold a public hearing and final vote on the budget on Tuesday, Tuesday, April 17.

## Home Values Have Dropped: Shouldn't Property Taxes?

SCOTCH PLAINS – Is a property tax appeal right for you?

In the last five years, home values in Union County have dropped dramatically. As the real estate market is depreciating, your property taxes have been increasing. As a taxpayer, you have the right to appeal your property-tax assessment as a means to reduce your real estate tax obligations. As a taxpayer considering an appeal, you should understand that you must prove that your home’s assessed value is legally “unreasonable.” With a successful tax appeal, your lowered tax assessment will be set for three years, which can amount to considerable savings. The best way to succeed in appealing your taxes is to present your claim to the courts through expert tax and legal counsel with local knowledge.



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Spector Foerst & Associates has been assisting families with real estate and tax issues for more than a decade in our local community. Mr.

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