

Garwood Council Takes Action on Cost Ordinances

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Specially Written for *The Westfield Leader*

GARWOOD – The Garwood Borough Council voted on ordinances Tuesday including those for bonding, wages, salaries and benefits.

An ordinance was passed, 4 to 2, to fix salaries as follows: Barbara Tweedle, Municipal Alliance coordinator (MAC), \$5,762; Glenn Sytko, director, of the Office of Emergency Management, \$1,200; Carol Lombardo, librarian, \$44,060; Bruce Underhill, police chief, \$122,176; and Leonard DiStefano, zoning code enforcement officer, \$6,000. The MAC position has increased about \$1,500, Councilwoman Sara Todisco said.

Council President Keith Sluka and Councilman Jim Matthieu voted against the resolution. Both agreed that raises should not exceed 2 percent. The police chief salary reflects a 3.1-percent raise.

Mr. Sluka said 2 percent is the norm in municipal government.

Mr. Matthieu noted that last year, Kathleen Pender of the recreation commission was told she could not receive a raise above 2 percent because the council would not give a raise higher than 2 percent to any employee. He asked the council to explain to Ms. Pender the reasoning for the police chief getting a raise above 2 percent.

One ordinance fixes salaries and wages of certain officials and borough employees effective January 1, 2012. Another, which was adopted, 6-0, fixes the minimum/maximum levels for salaries as follows: Municipal Alliance Coordinator, minimum, \$3,500, maximum, \$7,500; director of the Office of Emergency Management, minimum, \$1,000, maximum, \$5,000; librarian, minimum, \$40,000, maximum \$45,000; police chief, minimum,

\$112,000, maximum, \$125,000; zoning code enforcement officer, minimum, \$6,000, maximum, \$10,000.

Another ordinance passed, 5 to 1, that lays out the minimum/maximum of salaries and wages of a long list of other staff of the borough, including: mayor, \$1,800 to \$2,200; council, \$1,500 to \$2,000; planning board attorney, \$6,000 to \$9,000; public defender, \$4,600 to \$5,200; and the municipal attorney at \$14,495. The full list will be posted online at goleader.com. Mr. Matthieu voted against the ordinance.

The borough council approved a \$275,000 bond ordinance to authorize the acquisition of capital items for borough departments. The police department is applying for a \$42,000 grant, which, if accepted, would decrease the debt on the bond.

The capital items include police car computers, a Borough Hall building generator, portable generators, a repeater, Department of Public Works (DPW) radio upgrades, a recording sound system, a telephone system, a computer system, a police special SUV, building cameras, jaws of life, traffic signal upgrades and two fire department infrared cameras.

Taxes would be raised \$15 per year, during the 11-year bond term, on an average assessed home of \$100,000, Ms. Todisco told *The Westfield Leader* at the last meeting. This tax is in addition to the yearly taxes, which were \$105 per \$100,000 on the average assessed home this year, as well as the additional \$65 on average for a home assessed at \$100,000 for the 15-year general obligation bond to pay for the Athletic Field Complex passed in August.

The bond's interest rate would be 2.75 percent, Ms. Todisco told *The Leader*.

An ordinance amended the group medical insurance coverage, for which the borough will pay a stipend on a yearly basis to each eligible employee for the period during which coverage is waived under the State Health Benefits Program (SHBP).

"We have no employees getting the stipend. This was changed to comply with the Governor's reform," Borough Clerk Christina Ariemma told *The Westfield Leader*.

A contractor pay-to-play reform ordinance passed, which establishes that a business entity that makes political contributions to municipal candidates and municipal and county political parties in excess of certain thresholds shall be limited in its ability to receive public contracts from the Borough of Garwood.

The monetary thresholds of this ordinance are: a maximum of

\$200 per calendar year each for any purpose to any candidate or candidate committee for mayor or governing body, or \$400 per calendar year to any joint candidates committee for mayor or governing body, or \$200 per calendar year to a political committee or political party committee of the borough; \$400 maximum per calendar year to a County of Union political committee or political party committee; and \$400 maximum per calendar year to any PAC.

The council also approved as part of the consent agenda \$17,420 in compensation for members of the volunteer Garwood Fire Department.

During Hurricane Sandy, the Garwood Police Department fielded 150 emergency calls, and police had 2,500 service details, Police Committee Chairman Timothy Hak said. Daily calls were

up 253 percent.

Police Chief Bruce Underhill praised the Department of Public Works, First Aid Squad and the police department's response in providing aid during Hurricane Sandy. "The men and women in the department worked endless hours under difficult conditions, often putting their welfare in jeopardy in order to provide services to the borough," he said.

Chief Underhill announced dispatcher Joe Wilds has been diagnosed with cancer and asked the public and council to keep him in their prayers.

The borough could receive FEMA aid, for costs associated with Sandy, upwards of \$100,000, said Ms. Todisco, who serves as Finance Committee chairwoman. The committee currently is working on summing up all of the bills.

Construction on the Athletic Field Complex (AFC) is set to begin this Saturday, December 1, AFC Committee Chairman Louis Petruzzelli said. He said the contractor has 180 days to complete the site work and 210 days to complete the building.

The library will accept registrations for residents to visit with Santa and Mrs. Claus on Saturday, December 8. The library also will hold a reading by Eric Nierstedt, son of newly elected councilman Bill Nierstedt, of his novel "The Lightrider Journals" on Monday, December 17, at 7 p.m.

The borough will have its Christmas Tree lighting this Saturday at 5 p.m. at Borough Hall, with Santa and Mrs. Claus available for photos.

The council held an executive session prior to the regular meeting to discuss tax appeals and litigation. Borough Attorney Joseph Triarsi said during the next meeting, December 11, the council is expected to vote on a resolution regarding a settlement of a tax appeal.



MIRACULOUS PERFORMERS... Julia Linger of Cranford, left, and Samantha Lamparello of Watchung perform a scene from *The Miracle Worker* on stage at The Wardlaw-Hartridge School in Edison. The duo co-starred as Helen Keller and Annie Sullivan. Despite losing more than a week in rehearsal time due to Hurricane Sandy, the cast and crew put on a wonderful show.