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Scotch Plains-Fanwood BOE Hears Assessment Report

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

SCOTCH PLAINS – At the start of the Scotch Plains-Fanwood Board of Education meeting held last Thursday, a presentation regarding the district's state assessments was given and it was announced that on Monday, October 28, a special Candidates' Night for board of education candidates will be held at the Administration Building at 7:30 p.m.

Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum, Instruction and Technology Joan Mast addressed the audience, noting that the results of the district's testing were compared to surrounding towns within the same socio-economic status (SES), which include Westfield, Berkeley Heights, Summit, Cranford, New Providence and Mountainside. This group of towns is referred to in the report as the DFG1 (District Factor Group 1).

According to the report, the Language Arts Literacy (LAL) for the third grade is at 81.7 percent for the district, 82.8 percent for the DFG1 and 66.1 percent for the state.

In fourth grade, the LAL scores are slightly lower at 77.8 percent for the district, 78.6 percent for the DFG1 and 59.4 percent for the state.

Fifth-grade LAL scores were noted by Dr. Mast as something teachers are questioning as to what interventions are needed with a district score of 72.1 percent proficient. This, she reported, was as opposed to 79.6 percent for the DFG1 and 63.1 percent for the state. For the sixth grade, LAL scores are as follows: 86.7 percent for the district, 84 percent for the DFG1 and 66 percent for the state.

In eleventh grade, the district scored a 96.1 percent for LAL scores, a 97.5 percent for the DFG1 and a 96.1 percent for the state. According to the report, teachers and administrators are assessing both positive and negative score shifts for all the grades in the LAL over the last six years and noting changes in curriculum for each year.

In math, the third grade scored at 90.6 percent proficiency for the district, 90.7 percent for the DFG1 and 77.7 percent for the state.

The fourth grade scored 94.5 percent for the district, 91 percent for the DFG1 and 78.3 percent for the state. The fifth-grade students rated 92.2 percent for the district, while the DFG1 rated 91.7 percent and the state ranked at 79.9 percent.

Seventh graders in the district reached a total of 88.1 percent proficiency, while the DFG1 reached a total of 88.2 percent and the state came in at 63.5 percent.

Finally, eleventh graders in the district scored 88.3 percent proficiency in math, while students within the DFG1 averaged 91.4 percent and the state came in at 79.7 percent.

In conclusion, Dr. Mast noted, “Our math program continues to produce strong results, exceeding the DFG in many areas. We need to continue to engage all teachers, supervisors and principals to review the data to support the students in a thoughtful way.”

In other news, Superintendent of Schools Margaret Hayes reported on district goals for the 2013-2014 year. In her report, it was noted that technology goals have been met with the implementation of the PowerSchool student management system in addition to the new benchmarks added to assess middle- and high-school students' technology skills. This, she added, included competencies in Microsoft Office.

For the service learning goal, Superintendent Hayes noted that the shore relief effort from the high school, entitled “Stuff the Bus,” will be reported on soon by students from the Student Leadership Conference (SLC). This project involved students in grades 9 to 12 “stuffing” donated contents onto a bus and delivering these items to help Hurricane Sandy victims.

The superintendent concluded her goal report by adding that a framework has been structured to “create a plan to establish a science partnership with a school in another country for implementation during the 2014-2015 school year.”

The next board of education meeting will be held on Thursday, November 14, at 7:30 p.m. in the Administration Building on Evergreen Avenue and Cedar Street in Scotch Plains.

Police Merger

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method of achieving a merger, noting that no other towns in New Jersey with combined police departments have done it this way. Mr. Vastine preferred a simple merger or providing police services via a shared-services agreement, saying a Joint Meeting would mean a “new layer of government” that, if it proved to be unworkable, could result in “both towns being stuck in a situation they cannot get out of.”

Besides what he said were unanswered questions about actual savings and how the new department would be managed, Mr. Vastine said he was “not comfortable” with having Scotch Plains fund 75 percent of the cost of the merged department while having only a 33-percent voice — i.e., the sole Scotch Plains representative on the three-member management committee — in how the department is operated.

His Scotch Plains Township Council colleague, Michael Marcus, expressed similar sentiments, saying that a merger or a shared-services arrangement would be preferable to the Joint Meeting alternative. He said he did not like the concept of a three-person commission, with potentially politically-connected members, overseeing the police department. “Those decisions should be left to the professionals,” Mr. Marcus said.

Fanwood Councilman Anthony Parenti, a former borough police chief, described himself as “sitting on the fence” about the proposal. “I can go either way,” he said, adding that he wanted to get input from residents and the local police unions. He added that during his election campaign in 2010, no Fanwood resident had expressed to him any interest in a police department merger.

Fanwood Councilwoman Katherine Mitchell, a 15-year veteran of the governing body, said she had been a “long-time skeptic” of merging departments, but said on Monday that “we should at least explore the idea.” Her biggest concern, she said, has always been police response time and whether it would be negatively affected by a merger. Saying she trusted the judgment of the two police chiefs, Ms. Mitchell said she was “90 percent there”

when it came to favoring a merger.

Other members of both councils expressed support for the merger via the Joint Meeting route, pointing to the promised cost savings and increased deployments.

Residents who spoke for nearly two hours on Monday expressed concerns about a variety of issues, including whether the cost savings were substantial enough to warrant a merger of departments. Fanwood resident Jason Benedict — noting that Mr. Hanley, the financial consultant, had earlier said that the average property-tax saving for Fanwood residents would be about \$85 per year and \$80 for Scotch Plains residents — calculated that to be less than two dollars per week. He compared it to giving up “a cup of coffee for giving up our police department.” Amidst applause from some in the audience, Mr. Benedict said, “I don't know what I'll get tomorrow.”

Edward Saridakis of Scotch Plains worried that the Joint Meeting's operations will be politicized, especially if control of the two towns' governing bodies were to switch each year. Scotch Plains Deputy Mayor Colleen Gialanella said the intention of the township council would be to name Township Manager Jerry Giannis as its representative to the three-member committee. But Councilman Marcus pointed out that, under the Joint Meeting regulations, governing bodies are required to approve police department budgets, which he said puts power in the hands of three individuals and “weakens participation” by elected officials in the way departments are operated. Fanwood Councilman Dan Levine said the two councils did have the power to impose “budget metrics” that the Joint Meeting would have to conform with during its budgeting each year.

James Metz, an attorney representing both towns' police unions, expressed frustration that the bargaining units were not asked to participate more actively during the months of discussions leading to Monday's presentation. He described members as being “afraid” of their positions being eliminated as part of the merger.

Mayors Glover and Mahr both vowed at the end of Monday's four-hour meeting that further public sessions will be held and that subsequent meetings will provide more details about how a merger would work and how residents in both towns would be affected.

“There is a lot of homework to be done,” Fanwood resident Harry McNally told the two governing bodies.

SP Council

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cluding telephone calls that weekend from the Senger Place residents about the noise.

In other business, Mr. Giannis said he and others were reviewing bids and proposals from historical preservation consultants seeking to evaluate the condition of the Scotch Hills Country Club clubhouse. He said the council will discuss it at their conference meeting next month. The township manager also broached — albeit cautiously — the possibility of paid parking in the downtown business district as a way to address the problem of commuters illegally parking their vehicles there during the day.

“That's a decision for you — for you — to make,” Mr. Giannis said cheerfully yet pointedly as he gestured at the five council members.

The council also approved a \$103,500 contract for Reliable Wood Products LLC to load and transport leaves during this year's leaf pick-up program. Councilman William Vastine complained about the amount being spent, saying that “surely there is a less expensive way” to collect and dispose of leaves, which Deputy Mayor Colleen Gialanella called “the most expensive leaves in the world.”

Also at last week's meeting, the council unanimously reappointed Township Clerk Bonnie Lacina for another three years. Mayor Glover called her “the consummate professional,” while Councilman Vastine said that council members “trust Bonnie without reservation.” Deputy Mayor Gialanella told Ms. Lacina she was “very appreciative of what you do for us” while Councilman Louis Beckerman described her as “the best.” Councilman Michael Marcus called the resolution reappointing Ms. Lacina, who was named clerk in 2010, “probably the most pleasant act” in his three years on the council.

The council will hold its conference and regular business meetings next month on Tuesday, November 12.

FW Rec. Panel Forwards Skate Park Plans to Council

By CATHERINE WATSON
Specially Written for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times

FANWOOD — At Tuesday's meeting, Fanwood recreation commission members reviewed the recent public meeting about a potential skateboard park and determined to forward the issue to Fanwood's borough council. The commissioners also decided to hold off on plans to resurface LaGrande Park's ice skating rink.

Recreation Director Bob Budiansky listed concerns residents raised at last Thursday's public meeting on the skateboard park. Some residents felt other projects, such as repair of the Forest Road Park tennis courts, should take precedence over construction of a new skateboard park. Others worried about maintenance, safety, liability and the park's potential to attract skateboarders from outside the community.

Commissioner Anthony Carter reported that roughly 47 people attended the skateboard park public meeting. Ten spoke in favor of the skate park, 11 spoke against it, and three made neutral comments. He also noted that of the attendees who objected, six were opposed only to the proposed location.

Mr. Budiansky said the meeting attracted a disproportionate number of residents whose homes would border the proposed park, since they received mailed invitations. “The people who would benefit most from the skateboard park did not show up in great numbers, and that was unfortunate,” he said.

Skateboarder Garrett Boozer and his father, Greg, who did attend the public meeting, also were present at the recreation commission meeting. They brought along information about the benefits of skating in parks. Phyllis Mahoney of Pleasant Avenue also attended both meetings. She brought documents illustrating the

many times she has witnessed violations of the rules at Forest Road Park and expressed doubt that rules at the skateboard park would be adequately enforced. “I see a lot from my window,” she said, “and that's why I have concerns.”

The commissioners unanimously voted to forward the skate park plans to Fanwood's council for further consideration. They then discussed whether or not to resurface the ice skating rink with a resilient white coating, also used on airport runways and crosswalks.

The rink has been popular but too warm to use often, and commissioners hope a white coating would promote faster freezing. Fanwood has a grant from Union County to apply the coating, but would need to match the funds. The commissioners decided not to go forward with the application before researching alternative solutions.

SPMC

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Alan Augustine Park, with some also placed on Front Street as long as electrical power is available. The choice of lights — snowflakes versus decorations with a more religious overtone — was made with the thought that they could remain on the poles throughout the winter rather than having to be taken down after the December holidays.

The SPMC has contracted with Suplee Clooney, the Westfield auditing firm, to perform its 2012 audit, which must be completed by mid-November. Finding an auditing firm had proved to be troublesome after the firm that performed the previous audit, at a cost of \$2,200, wanted to charge \$5,000 for the 2012 audit. Suplee Clooney's fee will be about \$3,700.

Skate Park

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at the meeting were provided by development companies based on the dimensions of the space and the proposed budget.

After opening the meeting up for questions and comments, the commission heard from several concerned residents, as well as a few area youngsters and their parents who were supporting the commission's efforts to build the park.

When questioned by one resident whose home backs to the park, regarding what would prevent the new skate park from falling into disrepair, Mr. Budiansky responded by saying the park would be constructed of durable concrete and therefore built to last. He added that the Department of Public Works would be responsible for cleaning it up if debris from surrounding trees became an issue.

Several residents brought up the issue of the dilapidated tennis courts at Forest Road Park, questioning why the money proposed for the skate park could not be used to fix the existing courts instead.

“We don't have the money to do everything we would like to do,” Recreation Commissioner Joe Valente said. “It would take \$165,000 to repair the courts properly.”

North Avenue resident Jason Benedict's suggestion that locating the skate park in LaGrande Park might be better since it is a more central location and could draw more people to the downtown area was met with applause.

“The skate park is not the answer,” Michael Lewis of Beech Avenue said. “You are not going to get skateboarders off the streets by putting this here — all you are going to do is to give them another venue to skate (in). Why are we spending \$62,000 to do this when we could spend it here maintaining our own facilities?”

Other residents expressed concerns about safety due to increases in traffic at the secluded park, as well as teenagers from outside towns coming via the train to utilize the new facility.

Fanwood Councilman Kevin Boris addressed additional concerns from residents regarding potential liability issues if the borough were to be sued over an injury in the new skate park, stating that the municipality's existing insurance policy covers such incidents.

“The goal is to provide a service to a segment of the population in town that doesn't have any option otherwise,” Mr. Boris said. “There are a lot of kids in town that skateboard. We have jungle gyms for

little kids, we have soccer fields for kids that play soccer, but (there is nothing) for kids that skateboard.”

“I have a BMXer at home and all his skateboarding friends are there. They are good kids and I want a safe place for them to be able to go,” stated a Montrose Avenue resident.

In response to another parent who expressed disappointment over the lack of representation of other skaters and their parents, Mr. Budiansky pointed out that he only sent letters announcing the meeting to 55 to 66 residents who live within 200 feet of the park, not to the whole borough.

The commission plans to discuss the possibility of erecting the skate park further during its next regular meeting.

RVSA

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discussion it was mentioned that in no case did the board want to have any liability if energy prices drop.

RVSA has received a grant of about \$177,000 from FEMA for hazard mitigation. This grant was applied for by Anthony Gencarelli, the authority's manager of regulatory compliance, and RVSA was informally notified on October 8.

The prospect of a public-private partnership to operate the co-gen facility has disappeared; the authority has decided that the potential benefits from such a program at this time do not balance well with the costs. The authority sent a letter to Synagro, the one bidder on the program, on October 1 informing the latter of the decision.

RVSA's litigation did not advance much in the past month. The next mediation in the co-gen case is scheduled for Monday, December 23, and discovery related to the case has been delayed until March. RVSA continues to search for a third arbitrator, and hopes to find one who is a former judge. If it does not select one, the AAA (American Arbitration Association) will make the selection. Progress on the Passaic River litigation is awaiting a decision of whether the New Jersey Supreme Court will hear the Third Party Public Entity Group's appeal for their dismissal from the case.

The meeting also was attended by two visitors, identified by Mountainside Commissioner Rene Dierkes as Deanna Andre, a Mountainside councilwoman, and Mike Labisi, a Mountainside resident. They had toured the facility prior to the meeting.

VOTE

Tuesday, November 5TH



DAVID OLIVEIRA
for TOWN COUNCIL

Westfield's Third Ward