



Paul Lachenauer for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times
PANCAKE BREAKFAST...Lance Booth helps make pancakes at the Lions Club Pancake Breakfast Sunday morning at Scotch Hills Country Club in Scotch Plains.



CUB SCOUTS HONORED...Cub Scout Pack No. 34 Webelos II Scouts of Scotch Plains were awarded the Arrow of Light, Cub Scouting's highest honor, on February 21 after completing all their necessary requirements. Each Scout was presented with a hand-crafted arrow decorated to show their individual rank achievements. Scouts, pictured from left to right, are: Ryan Duthie, Ian Joshua, Mac Ferrone, Dylan Bordman, Ethan Berkman, Owen Ferrone, Eric Cunningham, J.J. Dionisio, Matthew London, Griffin Nobile, Sean Lage and Tyler Strzalkowski. In background are Den Leader Amy Ferrone on the right and Assistant Cubmaster Ned Ward on the left.



Photo courtesy of Jerry Giamis
IN NEED OF REPAIR...Scotch Plains Councilman Mickey Marcus inspects the roof at Scotch Hills Country Club. Residents attended Tuesday's council meeting to express their displeasure over what they feel is the council's inaction regarding repairs to the club. An historical architect currently is evaluating the condition of the building, its roof and its foundation before recommending how to proceed.

WF Council Discusses Preliminary Budget

By DOMINIC A. LAGANO
Specially Written for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times

WESTFIELD — At its regular conference session on Tuesday, the Westfield Town Council received a preliminary budget proposal from Finance Policy Committee Chairman Sam Della Fera and Town Administrator James Gildea.

"We have a proposed budget," stated Councilman Della Fera. "It's one I know that I am very proud of. The Finance Policy Committee is very pleased to recommend it to the mayor and our fellow council members."

If approved, Westfield's budget for 2014 will be approximately \$38,745,396. Taking into account the town's projected revenue of \$12,476,246, the tax burden for Westfield residents will be \$26,269,149.95.

According to Mr. Gildea, the increase in spending for the municipal budget is less than 1 percent. The budget meets the state's requirements of the 2-percent tax levy cap law.

The owner of a home assessed at \$179,850, the average assessment in the town of Westfield, will see their taxes increased by \$78, or \$6.50 a month.

"We do a lot of good things in this town with this budget," stated Mr. Della Fera. "It continues what has been our policy of fiscal restraint and also maintains and, in some respect, improves the services we're providing to the citizens of Westfield."

Salaries and wages for town employees are below 2006 levels, due to attrition through retirement and the conversion of 22 jobs from full-time to part-time positions. Mr. Della Fera also stated that the number of employees has dropped from a high of 250 employees to 200.

Mr. Della Fera then announced that the town intends to hire one police officer and one firefighter as a result of these savings. "I think we have provided the people of Westfield the best public safety that we can afford over the past few years. We've faced a lot of economic challenges. The good news is we can afford a little more this year thanks to our efforts in recent years," he said.

According to Mr. Gildea, the budget will not be formally adopted until the next borough council meeting in order to give the council time to peruse the proposal.

After its approval, the 2014 bud-

get will be available online at the town's website, westfieldnj.gov/.

During the regular public meeting, the council passed two resolutions honoring the Westfield Volunteer Rescue Squad and a local Girl Scout troop.

Squad President Reid Edles, Vice-President Lynn Feldman, Treasurer Robert Dougher, Captain David Ozga and Deputy Captain Steve Becker of the rescue squad were present to accept a copy of the resolution from Mayor Andy Skibitsky, announcing March 2014 as Westfield Volunteer Rescue Squad Month.

According to the resolution, the squad has provided no-fee emergency medical care and transportation to the residents and visitors of Westfield for more than 63 years. In 2013, the rescue squad volunteered over 38,000 hours of service and responded to 2,289 calls.

Ms. Feldman, the squad's fund drive chairwoman, appealed to the audience to fulfill its fund drive goal for 2014. "First, we wish to thank the people of Westfield who donate very generously to the Westfield Volunteer Rescue Squad... We rely completely on donations... besides money, we always need people so feel free to come and volunteer. So thank you very much and you will be getting your fund drive letter in the mail very shortly," Ms. Feldman said.

The council also passed a resolution proclaiming the week of March 9 Girl Scout Week in the town of Westfield.

"March 12 is the 102nd anniversary of the Girl Scouts in the United States of America," stated Mayor Skibitsky. "Throughout its long and distinguished history, Girl Scouting has inspired over 50 million girls and women to strive for the highest ideals of courage, confidence and character."

Members of the local troop were present to accept a copy of the resolution.

In other news, the council approved the demolition of single-family dwellings located at 1717 Boulevard, 1430 Boynton Avenue and 616 Leigh Drive.

The next town council conference session open to the public is scheduled for Tuesday, March 18, at 7 p.m. at the municipal building, located at 425 East Broad Street. The conference session will be immediately followed by the council's regular public meeting at 7:45 p.m.

Lubarsky Interview

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"We had planned for at least a three-month campaign; it became a four-month campaign" in the community to pass the referendum. The Mountainside Citizens Action Committee has been attending community events to educate the community on the referendum.

"We really tried to provide them (community) with the specific information that's relevant to them—property values; the idea that a no vote is not going to make this go away. A no vote is only going to create a more expensive project," she said.

"This is an opportunity for the public to bring their taxes that they are paying back to our district," Ms. Lubarsky said.

She said the district had originally planned to utilize a state grant, but the district learned that the grant would exclude all interior improvements and that the district would be required to pay interest payments on the grant as the state is borrowing money to fund the grant. Interest payments would also have to be included within the district's operating budget.

State officials told the district that if it went with debt service the state would pay 40 percent of the cost, exterior and interior.

"That's when we had to change gears because we couldn't afford to lose \$5 million (per the grant) of 40 percent discounted money," she said. "Because that would have cost the district almost double to make those repairs" if the district had gone with a grant instead of bonding. She said debt service bonding gives Mountainside "the most bang for the buck."

When asked what would happen if the state does not provide the funding, Ms. Lubarsky responded, "they (the state) has never reneged" on this type of financing, according to the district's bond counsel.

"This is a contract that we are entering into with the state," she said. "I don't know what would happen if the state defaults."

Ms. Lubarsky said *The Times'* editorial last week that said the district was not forthcoming with information, "was extremely damaging and not true" and was "unfair."

She said videos on the district's website, flyers and past *Times* articles are just a few methods the district has been using to communicate with residents about the bond referendum.

When asked how the borough's schools became in such disrepair, Ms. Lubarsky said in 2010 when Governor Chris Christie took over he made "severe cuts in state aid" at the same time there was a "big increase in educational mandates" including technology. She said the dis-

trict "had to make difficult choices," which were, "do you fund mandated programs or do you repair buildings?"

"Because the state mandates were immediate needs," the district put a band aid on some of the repairs "and you moved onto the next year crossing your fingers," she said. "And this happened year after year after year. We are definitely not the only district in this situation who had to make these difficult choices."

"And so the buildings continued to deteriorate and while you attempt to make your education programs improve, all of a sudden the physical plant is having an impact on the education," she said.

Ms. Lubarsky said the district could not use surplus funds since the Christie Administration took the funding that was not dedicated because Mountainside did not have a maintenance fund at the time, but has recently established a maintenance reserve fund.

Ms. Lubarsky said. When asked if the district was planning to do solar energy on the roofs, Ms. Lubarsky said, "It isn't something we considered because we only wanted to do the essentials. And there is enough energy cost savings built in, that \$127,000 that we will realize annually" in roofing and lighting improvements and the new Deerfield heating system.

"These repairs and renovations have to be completed regardless of the outcome of the referendum and this is an opportunity [for taxpayers] to pay less to do them (per state funding)," she said.

See Bond Pro Forma letter on page 5.

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SPF BOE

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Star-Ledger. He also was named Gatorade Player of the Year. James thanked the board for the honors and thanked his family and coaches for being supportive. Jeff Kogel, the SPFHS head track coach, also was honored for being inducted into the New Jersey State Interscholastic Athletic Association (NJSIAA) Hall of Fame.

No solution was offered to the problem brought up at the last board meeting about establishing a drop-off and pick-up spot for Brunner Elementary School students. Superintendent of Schools Margaret Hayes said, "We've had some discussions on the matter, but have yet to come to a determination."

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this year. Councilman William Vastine said he opposes non-partisan elections and believes in direct elections of the mayor by the people.

Residents also expressed their displeasure during the public comment session for what they feel is the council's inaction regarding repairs to the Scotch Hills Country Club. Many people in the audience carried 8 1/2-inch by 11-inch signs which read "Save the Roof." The Scotch Hills Country Club, formerly known as the Shady Rest Golf and Country Club, was the first African-American owned and operated country club. An historical architect currently is evaluating the condition of the building, its roof and its foundation before recommending how to proceed.

Mayor Glover said, "We listened to a lot of passionate pleas tonight" from residents to act. He asked Mr. Giamis why it was taking so long to repair the building given that the project was approved last fall. Mr. Giamis said he is in discussions with Robert Lyons, the township engineer, and was still waiting to receive the architect's report. Mr. Giamis also said the majority of the council did not provide the appropriate authorization for him to move forward with repairs. "Don't say I'm stonewalling. I find that offensive," Mr. Giamis said. Residents had accused Mr. Giamis of "stonewalling" earlier in the meeting.

Mr. Vastine read a prepared statement, which said responsibility for not moving more quickly does not fall on any one individual. Mr. Vastine said there are multiple "e-mails and rumors" serving as "the-

atrical manipulation" to have the public believe that "council did not want to save this building." When the council was controlled by the Democratic Party it "could have solved this problem last year; they had the votes, but they didn't do it."

Mr. Marcus said he recently inspected the building with Mr. Giamis and agreed with the township manager that the architect's report was needed before any next steps are taken. Mayor Glover demanded Township Attorney Jeff Lehrer conduct a formal vote on his resolution to move forward immediately with repairs. The resolution was defeated by a vote of 3-2, with Mrs. Gialanella voting along with Mayor Glover.

Mr. Giamis said after the meeting that he expects to receive a full report from the architect in about four weeks.

In other discussions, Mrs. Gialanella proposed placing a cap on salaries and raises paid to the executive officers of the township. Mr. Lehrer and Mr. Giamis said there are legal issues involved that they need to investigate. Mr. Vastine proposed establishing an ad hoc committee to study the Downtown Commercial Business District. Mrs. Gialanella agreed that a "vision is needed for the district" but she said she believes two council members should be co-liaisons to the ad hoc committee to "keep the politics out of the process."

The council awarded a 2014 recycling collection service contract to Giordano Company, Inc., for \$151,920, with an option to renew for two one-year extensions.

Fanwood Council

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with the supplier of their choice unless they choose to opt-in. Commercial operations also must choose to opt-in. Other residents will be opted into the program automatically, and would need to opt-out should they choose not to participate.

Councilman Levine further said that the council wants to focus efforts on clear communications with Fanwood residents before pursuing CEA to ensure that residents understand and approve of the arrangements.

After the special meeting, the council heard presentations from Mr. Sullivan, Mr. Tompkins, Mr. Bondar, and Councilwoman Mitchell.

Mr. Sullivan reported that complaints in the borough had increased somewhat from the previous year, but most were due to signage violations reported by one individual or to property concerns between residents. Part of the surge came, in fact, from the 17-year cycle cicada emergence, he reported. He said he expects complaints to decrease again next year.

Mr. Sullivan also reported an uptick in commercial interest in Fanwood. Revitalization downtown and other zoning changes have encouraged increased numbers of reviews for commercial properties, he said.

Mr. Tompkins previewed budget concerns. He said that the borough remains well within the state mandated 2 percent tax levy cap, though it is closer to 4 percent on the municipal front. There is still "money in the bank," he said, and no need to revise the budget at present.

Resident Michael Lewis expressed concern that numbers could change negatively when information from the school board comes in. Mayor Colleen Mahr told Mr. Lewis that the council would soon be communicating with the school board and the county to get a more complete picture of the situation.

Mr. Bondar said that road work will hopefully resume on Tuesday, April 1, weather permitting. He also reported that projects on Vinton Circle and Burns Way were the major roadwork goals for 2014.

Councilwoman Mitchell reported that Fanwood's library has selected an architect to conduct a study about renovating the library building. The library would fund the \$14,000 study, but seeks assurance that work recommended by the study could go forward with financial support from the borough.

Council members agreed that a meeting to discuss budget priorities and planning over the next five years would be necessary, as funds are tight and many upgrades are needed throughout the borough.

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Paul Lachenauer for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times
PANCAKE BREAKFAST...Scotch Plains Mayor Kevin Glover greets members of Boy Scout Troop No. 104 at the Lions Club Pancake Breakfast held Sunday at the Scotch Hills Country Club in Scotch Plains.