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Fred T. Rossi for *The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times*
SUPPORTING WOMEN'S HEALTH... Scotch Plains Mayor Alexander Smith and Fanwood Mayor Colleen Mahr attend Saturday's Go Red for Women's Heart Health Month event at the Jewish Community Center on Martine Avenue in Scotch Plains. The program was held to raise awareness about women's heart health. Heart disease is the number-one killer of women (and men) in the U.S.

Health Bd. to Address Sub. Abuse, Ped. Safety in '19

By MICHAEL BONACCORSO
Specially Written for *The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times*

WESTFIELD – Board of Health President, Dr. Lawrence D. Budnick, said Monday that the board should focus on three broader public health categories in 2019 for promoting policy, sponsoring public initiatives and providing information to keep residents informed. They are deterring teen substance abuse and promoting and protecting pedestrian safety, with the third pertaining to a Westfield Board of Health bylaw review.

Dr. Budnick said the board should concentrate on deterring “teen nicotine use” within Westfield. Health board member Sharon Dorry, a registered nurse, said the “vaping trend” is rampant in Westfield High School. Students who are athletes or who are aware of the “dangers of smoking tobacco” do not categorize “vaping to be as dangerous,” stated Ms. Dorry.

The vaping de-stigmatization has led many teens to become addicted to nicotine or the “vape,” Ms. Dorry said. “Even student athletes, I know, have begun vaping and just cannot quit,” Ms. Dorry said.

Ms. Dorry said the vaping trend is hazardous to all teenagers involved. However, the fact that even students who are supposed to be or are health conscious have begun the trend without hesitation is definitive to the lack of information about “vaping hazards.”

Dr. Budnick said the town passing an ordinance barring flavored vaporizers or “favored oils” (nicotine-filled vaporizer fluid) could deter younger consumers from finding the appeal. He said studies are finding that teenagers who begin vaporizing are “more likely” to smoke cigarettes at an older age.

Programs have been enacted within the Westfield school district to “speak with middle-school-aged children” about the dangers of vaping and “why not to begin,” stated Ms. Dorry. The “concept,” she said, is to reach students before they are introduced to vaping in high school or have begun.

School administrators have discov-

ered vaping is more prevalent amongst high-school students than middle-school students, stated Ms. Dorry.

Marijuana’s pending recreational legalization in New Jersey will be a second focus for the board of health as it applies to substance-abuse deterrence, stated Dr. Budnick. Health Officer Megan Avallone said the problem is that there is not enough information surrounding the nefarious side effects of marijuana abuse amongst any cohorts.

Dr. Budnick stated that from “what he has read,” automotive accidents in “legalized (marijuana) states” have “increased 6 percent.”

Westfield Board of Health Vice-President Elizabeth Talmont said law enforcement will police intoxicated drivers similarly to those intoxicated on prescription medications. Law enforcement’s ability to detect “high drivers” is hindered as no formal or accurate test exists, stated Ms. Talmont.

Councilwoman Jo Ann Neylan said Mayor Shelley Brindle and the town council will discuss ways to keep marijuana dispensaries from operating in the downtown business district. Councilwoman Neylan stated that to her knowledge ordinances “have already been passed” prohibiting marijuana-oriented businesses.

Dr. Budnick said the board also must remain vigilant on the opioid epidemic by continuing to assist parents, community leaders and all involved in identifying the warning signs of opioid addiction and locating programs to help those addicted.

On the pedestrian safety goal, board member Thomas K. O’Neill said, “Promoting pedestrians walking more leads to healthier living.”

Dr. Budnick said the board’s bylaws are more significant to future board operations than dealing with the public. However, he said keeping efficient operations and the board’s actions significant to the community through effective “bylaw considerations” will benefit Westfield residents for years to come.

Mountainside Discusses 2019 Capital Projects

By KATE BROWNE
Specially Written for *The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times*

MOUNTAINSIDE — The borough council discussed the scope of the municipality’s capital projects at its work meeting on Tuesday. Mayor Paul N. Mirabelli explained that a temporary capital budget was necessary because of the time constraints imposed by the terms of the community’s bonds. The mayor anticipates the final budget for 2019 will be introduced in March and adopted in April.

Infrastructure improvements, which will be funded, include phase four of the storm-sewer upgrade project, approximately \$40,000 for pothole repair, and paving Barton Drive and Partridge Road. Additionally, a new sound and video system will be installed in the municipal courtroom. The new system will allow prisoners to be arraigned via a live video feed to the Union County jail rather than transporting them to the jail located in Elizabeth.

In addition, the entire municipal computer system, including the seven servers, and the systems used by the finance and police departments, will be upgraded. According to Borough Administrator James Debbie, all of the data and systems will be moved to the Cloud. Mr. Debbie noted that the borough’s insurance provider had recommended the transition because of the age of the equipment and the Malware and other virus-detection systems that Cloud computing provides.

Frank Masella, director of pool operations for the Mountainside Community Pool, made a presentation during which he advised that the Berkeley Heights pool had been purchased by the YMCA. As a result, that pool will be closed for the summer of 2019. Mr. Masella recommended, and the council unanimously agreed, that all residents of Berkeley Heights be invited to join the Mountainside Pool this summer at the resident member rate.

In addition, Mr. Masella indicated he had been approached by representatives from the Westfield Y’s swim team who asked the borough to con-

sider allowing the team to rent the Mountainside Pool for its early-morning summer practices. The council asked Mr. Masella to keep borough officials updated. Mr. Masella also explained that several borough residents had asked for a new category of membership which would consist of two adult residents and would cost \$325 a season. The council agreed and asked Mr. Masella to prepare a resolution regarding same for consideration during the Tuesday, February 19 public meeting.

In other business, the governing body voted to approve a raffle application from Benjamin Franklin Elementary School in Westfield to contribute \$300 to Governor Livingston High School’s Project Graduation, and to authorize the Mountainside Fire Department to apply for a New Jersey State Volunteer Fire Assistance Grant.

Fanwood

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from Borough Hall to the Carriage House compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Currently, the accessibility standards are not being met and the entranceway is not easily accessible for the disabled.

A proclamation recognizing February as Black History Month in the borough was read and accepted.

The next Fanwood council meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, February 19, at 7 p.m., at Borough Hall, located at 75 North Martine Avenue. The meeting is on Tuesday due to the Presidents’ Day holiday on Monday.

SP Council

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read a proclamation congratulating Scotch Plains Music Center on Park Avenue on its 50th anniversary. The mayor read a proclamation declaring February as American Heart Month.



Courtesy of Borough of Fanwood
GO RED!...Somerset Patriots’ mascot Sparky has a hug for Melissa Padulsky at Saturday’s Go Red for Women’s Heart Health Fair held at the Jewish Community Center of Central New Jersey in Scotch Plains.

Hartz Planner: Twp. to See \$2.76 Mil. In Tax Revenue

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

CRANFORD – Updated demographic data and the costs and revenue associated with the rezoning application for 750 Walnut Avenue, where the owner, Hartz Mountain, seeks to convert commercial and industrial uses to residential zone for 905 planned apartments, was provided Wednesday to the planning board by planner Keenan Hughes, an expert in planning hired by Hartz Mountain. He said the municipality and school district in total would see a \$2.76-million net-positive impact in tax revenue on a yearly basis as a result of the apartment complex.

The municipality would see \$660,000 in tax revenue yearly, based on Mr. Hughes’ projections, while the school district would see \$2.1 million in tax revenue yearly.

In terms of the impact to the public schools, a range of 100 to 135 public-school children was projected to be moving into the 905 apartments, Mr. Hughes calculated based on two different methodologies. He took data from apartment complexes in Cranford — Riverfront at Cranford Station, Woodmont Station at Cranford, and Cranford Crossing. Those comparisons yielded 52 public-school children in phase 1 of the construction, and 110 public-school children at full build out. He also used a statewide Rutgers study updated in November 2018 that focused on multi-family housing, he said.

Mr. Hughes, in his application of the Rutgers methodology, yielded 70 at phase 1 and 135 public-school children at full build out. He said he took the data from the Rutgers study, which showed school-age children (which includes children who may not be attending public schools), and calculated out 85 percent, which is the percentage of children in the Cranford community who attend the public schools. He also noted that about 40 to 50 percent of children in multi-family developments typically are in the Kindergarten to grade 5 age range per statewide population studies.

Chris Chapman, a planning board member, asked, “if that larger population is going to that one school facility, it would have a larger impact on that one school facility?”

“There may be some other solution provided by the school district; I don’t know,” Mr. Hughes said. The township currently has neighborhood schools for grades K to 8 in the community, and in this area of the township that property would either be in the Walnut/Livingston Avenue School or the Hillside Avenue School district.

In comparison to Mr. Hughes’ school-population impacts, a study conducted by Ross Haber Associates, which was hired by the school district, estimated 353 students would enter the school system at the project’s full build out, as outlined in a report dated May 2018.

In Mr. Hughes’ opinion, he said empirical evidence is the best resource

to identify projections. Statewide and regional data, he said, sometimes are difficult to control.

In his calculations for the fiscal impact analysis, Mr. Hughes said both the municipality and the school district would experience a net-positive impact by Hartz Mountain’s 905 apartments proposed when considering his projections of total population added by the 905 apartments. He estimated that there would be a total population of 1,622 residents at full build out. In terms of public school population, he estimated 110 public school children, using empirical data.

The school district’s net-positive impact would be \$2.1 million per year, after full build out of the apartments, based on his calculated \$14,179 cost per pupil in the public schools. The school district’s cost per pupil, he said, is \$18,296 per the state department of education, and approximately 77.5 percent of that cost is funded by local property taxes, so after extracting taxes he said the cost per pupil for the project would be \$14,179.

Karl Pehnke, the traffic engineer hired by Hartz Mountain, also returned to provide an update of traffic data based on a new survey conducted on October 30, 2018. He said the data showed a higher flow of vehicular traffic heading northbound on Walnut Avenue in the morning than his previous counts, but he said he felt it was an “anomaly.” Board member Peter Taylor commented, “or it could be reality.” The count was 524 versus 415 previously.

Mr. Pehnke said his conclusion is, “we can design safe and proper access into the site.”

He said the timing of the traffic signal at the corner of Raritan Road and Walnut Avenue could be changed to accommodate an improved traffic flow, as well as adding left-hand-turn lanes on Walnut Avenue, heading towards downtown Cranford, into the property. The turning lanes would be designed to hold 10 vehicles, he said. Walnut Avenue would be widened to accommodate the lanes, and would be accommodated by using the land at 750 Walnut Avenue and not the residents’ properties across the street on Walnut Avenue, Mr. Pehnke said.

The property is bordered by the Conrail line on one side. “We do not intend to connect to the residential neighborhood across the rail line,” said James Rhatigan, the applicant’s attorney, in response to a question posed by resident Jim Carvalho. Mr. Carvalho also asked why one of the owners of the property was not listed on the zoning application. Mr. Rhatigan said if one of the subsidiary owners is not on the application, then “it’s an oversight” and he would correct it.

Hartz Mountain will continue on Wednesday, February 20, at 8 p.m., with a planning board workshop meeting to be held at 7 p.m. The Cranford Planning Board is to have its own experts present at the 8 p.m. meeting.

SP Council Faces Increased Budget Expenditures In '19

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

SCOTCH PLAINS – After four years of essentially flat municipal budgets, the township council this year faces a less certain environment as it starts to finalize a 2019 spending plan that could include an increase in municipal property taxes, according to Township Manager Al Mirabella.

At a four-hour budget meeting on Monday, the council and Chief Financial Officer Ted Georgiou met with the heads of the police and fire departments and the township library along with the directors of the construction, engineering, recreation and public works departments to discuss their spending requests.

Since 2015, township expenditures have not increased significantly while the municipal portion of the property-tax levy has been similarly flat. It currently stands at \$1,507 per \$4,100 of assessed property value. But Mr. Mirabella told *The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times* that a \$218,000 increase in pension obligations — an amount equal to about two tax points — will need to be considered as this year’s budget is finalized in the coming weeks. Furthermore, increased investments in public safety, including more police and fire personnel, and a possible new branch and brush

pickup in the fall, also are affecting spending and tax decisions. “It will be more of a challenge” to keep expenditures down this year, he said.

“After four years, there are things out of our control that we have to deal with,” Mr. Mirabella said, while adding that the overall operating budget and township employees’ salaries will be “relatively flat” this year.

The council plans to introduce the 2019 budget on Tuesday, March 19, with a public hearing and vote set for Tuesday, April 16. Mr. Mirabella said this year’s budget process started last September when the various departments submitted their spending needs, which were then reviewed by the manager, Deputy Manager Margaret Heisey and Mr. Georgiou.

Last year’s budget totaled about \$25.7 million, which besides some \$15 million in property taxes was funded by about \$3.4 million of municipal surplus, \$4.9 million from various miscellaneous sources including construction code fees and \$2.227 million in state aid, which the township is seeking to see increased, Mr. Mirabella told *The Times*.

The council also will be considering this year’s proposed \$2.7-million capital budget, which Mr. Mirabella said will “likely be pared down” by the council prior to its adoption in the spring.

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