

Former Mayor/Councilman Johnston, Councilman Populus Remembered

By PAUL J. PEYTON
Specially Written for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times

REGION — The Scotch Plains and Fanwood communities are mourning the loss of former Scotch Plains Mayor and Councilman Robert Edward “Whitey” Johnston, 82, of Whiting, who died on Wednesday, April 24, and former Fanwood Councilman William E. Populus, Jr., 83, of Fanwood, who passed away on Friday, April 26.

According to his obituary, Mr. Johnston was born and raised in Providence, R.I. He and his family had been residents of Scotch Plains for more than 50 years, before settling in Whiting in 2015. Mr. Johnston attended junior high and high school at the Providence Country Day School, R.I., where he was a four-year, four-letterman. He played baseball, basketball and football and participated in track.



William Populus

Mr. Johnston graduated from Hobart College with a bachelor’s degree. He also played baseball there. Since the age of 9 he had been vacationing at his family’s cottage in Cape Cod, Mass. He was the telecommunications

manager worldwide for the Exxon Corporation for many years.

Active in the Scotch Plains community, he was a member of the Jaycees, Kiwanis, and Masonic Lodge. He played softball for many years on the St. Bartholomew Old Timers League, and enjoyed playing rounds of golf with his friends and family.

Mr. Johnston served on the Scotch Plains Township Council and was mayor (the Scotch Plains council appointed mayors prior to 2000). He was the chairman of the planning board for 20 years, was a committee member of the Senior Housing Project in Scotch Plains and continued to be a trustee for Senior Housing.

“Throughout all of his endeavors, Whitey helped and volunteered for over 50 years with his wife, Sally, who was instrumental in the coordination of the Miss New Jersey and America Beauty Pageants,” according to his obituary.

The Johnstons were members of the All Saints’ Episcopal Church in Scotch Plains for many years and served as Eucharistic Ministers.

He was predeceased by his parents, Edward and Gala; his sister, Linda Tinney; his son, Robert Edward II; and his nephew, David Mulligan.

He is survived by his wife, Sally;
CONTINUED ON PAGE 10



Susan M. Dougherty for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times

THANK YOU, MAYOR JOHNSTON...Hundreds of people paid their respects at Saturday’s funeral service at the All Saints’ Episcopal Church in Scotch Plains for former Scotch Plains Mayor, Councilman and Planning Board member Robert Johnston. Among the attendees, at least seven Miss New Jerseys, Mayor Al Smith and other local politicians. Mr. Johnston’s wife, Sally, is President Emeritus of the Miss New Jersey Education Foundation.

Borough Plan. Bd. Postpones Talks on Habit. Space Ord.

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

FANWOOD — A discussion regarding a possible ordinance to restrict habitable dwelling space, originally scheduled for April 24, was postponed during last week’s Fanwood Planning Board meeting. It was noted that a meeting regarding further discussion of the proposed ordinance will be announced in the near future.

Last month, a lengthy discussion was held as members of the planning board discussed the ordinance to restrict how many residential units per acre can be built within the borough. Currently, the borough’s land use ordinance has height restrictions and front setback restrictions, but no restrictions on units per acre. The discussion was prompted at the request of borough council members.

A resolution was unanimously passed upon first reading, at a council meeting at the beginning of March, to limit the habitable dwelling density for future housing projects within the borough to 36 units per acre. It was noted at that meeting that other surrounding towns have averaged 40 units per acre, while the borough proposes 36.

According to members of the borough’s Downtown Redevelopment Agency, which has the same

members as the borough council, the resolution has come about because of recent inquiries regarding dwelling projects that the borough has seen.

Some planning board members were in favor of the new ordinance, while others were not.

Many board members had specific questions regarding the new ordinance and asked for professional Paul Grygiel of Phillips, Preiss and Grygiel to be present at the next planning board meeting to further discuss the proposed ordinance.

It was noted that there are approximately a half-dozen projects that might be coming before the board soon that could be affected by the new ordinance. Those projects include 1 South Avenue, 2 South Avenue, 40 South Avenue, 105 South Avenue and 193 South Avenue.

Originally, the borough council was looking to pass upon second reading the new ordinance at its April 15 meeting, but then decided to table the discussion until the planning board could further discuss it with professional planners.

The next planning board meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, May 15, at 7:30 p.m. This will be a special meeting regarding the Fanwood Animal Hospital.



Christina M. Hinke for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times

ROCKIN’ FOR AUTISM...One of more than a dozen bands entertains the crowd at Sunday’s Rockin’ For Autism fundraiser at LaGrande Park in Fanwood.



Fred T. Rossi for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times

GETTING UP CLOSE...Kids of all ages, and even some adults, had the opportunity to climb aboard various types of heavy equipment at Sunday’s annual Touch-A-Truck event at the Watching Reservation.

Scotch Plains-Fanwood BOE Passes 2019-2020 Budget

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

SCOTCH PLAINS — The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Board of Education adopted the 2019-2020 school year budget last Thursday totaling \$103,244,494.

A total of \$71,947,781 in school taxes will be raised in Scotch Plains and \$20,601,717 in Fanwood. Finance Committee member Debora Brody introduced the budget upon its second reading and proposed adoption of the spending plan.

Members of the audience were

asked if they would like to address the board regarding the budget and no one came forth.

The general fund for the budget is \$99,103,937.

In addition, the board unanimously voted, as part of the budget, to reimburse all travel and related expenses in accordance with statutes, for a maximum of \$200,000. The expenditure includes all staff and board members.

It was reported that \$41,881 was expended through February 28, 2019.

Last month, a detailed presentation of the next school year’s school budget was given by Deborah Saridaki, the board’s business administrator and board secretary.

Ms. Saridaki said during last month’s presentation that the budget included a 2.35-percent increase in salaries, as well as a 4.89-percent increase in employee benefits.

Ms. Saridaki also noted that approximately seven additional teachers were included in the new budget, in the areas of elementary education, basic skills, speech, special education and student aides. The budget also included new textbooks for elementary Language Arts, Algebra II online editions and Geography for sixth grade.

In other business, it was noted that the week of May 6 to May 10 would be recognized as “Staff Appreciation Week.”

In other business, it was noted that board member and past Board of Education President Nancy Bauer had been nominated to the position of vice-president for the Garden State Coalition of Schools.

It also was announced that Scotch Plains-Fanwood High School student Chris Bagdonas recently earned the rank of Eagle Scout. Chris also is responsible for recording all of the board of education meetings for re-broadcasting. All board members congratulated him.

It was noted that on Wednesday, May 29, at 3:30 p.m. in the Evergreen Elementary School, the district will hold its retiree and staff recognition ceremony.

Also, a student recognition ceremony will be held at Evergreen School on Monday, June 10, at 7:30 p.m.

The next board meeting will be held on Thursday, May 9, at 7:30 p.m., in the administration building at Cedar Street and Evergreen Avenue in Scotch Plains. Subsequent meeting dates include May 29, June 13 and June 27. There are no meetings scheduled for July.

Freeholders Adopt Budget; Taxes to Go Up \$6.3 Mil.

By PAUL J. PEYTON
Specially Written for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times

COUNTY -- The Union County Freeholder Board last Thursday adopted the 2019 county budget of \$490,197,756, with \$367,295,299 to be raised in taxes, an increase of \$6.3 million over last year.

According to a spreadsheet released by a county spokesman, homeowners in nine of the 21 municipalities in the county will see taxes either stay flat or decrease from last year.

Locally, Westfielders will pay an average county tax of \$3,928, an increase of \$31 over last year. Cranford taxpayers will pay \$2,613, up \$23 from 2018. The average homeowner in Scotch Plains will pay \$2,716, down \$8 with the average Fanwood resident paying \$2,351, down \$6. Mountaineers will pay \$3,113, down \$55, with Garwood homeowners paying \$2,079, down \$3.

Summit residents will pay \$4,935, down \$32. Taxes also will drop slightly in Clark, New Providence, Plainfield and Winfield. Berkeley Heights, Elizabeth, Hillside, Kenilworth, Linden, Rahway, Roselle Park, Springfield and Union will see increases.

The amounts to be raised are as follows: Westfield, \$40,813,766; Scotch Plains, \$22,034,059; Fanwood, \$6,323,653; Garwood, \$3,738,803; Mountaineers, \$9,101,194; Cranford, \$23,630,733; and Summit, \$37,153,311.

In addition, an open tax totaling \$10,950,230 also is collected as follows: Cranford, \$703,568; Fanwood, \$187,815; Garwood, \$111,108; Mountaineers, \$271,895; Scotch Plains, \$655,345; Westfield, \$1,216,046, and Summit, \$1,105,257.

“The overall result (from this year’s county budget) is a tax increase of just 1.75 percent. This is an average

tax increase of \$17, the lowest in nearly 20 years,” said Freeholder Vice-Chairman Alexander Mirabella, chair of the board’s fiscal committee.

Jim Bennett of Summit, a critic of the freeholders in the past over county budgets, said he was happy the budget came in under cap. “Congratulations, keep it going,” he told the board.

He also urged the board to combine the county police and sheriff’s departments, “saving potentially 75 badges, and the savings could result in the millions.”

Mr. Bennett urged the board to sell the now closed juvenile detention center property in Linden. He said the sale of Runnells Specialized Hospital in December 2014 was “prudent because there is no reason for government to be involved in running a hospital.”

“Government needs to concentrate on its core functions,” Mr. Bennett said. He said proceeds from the Runnells sale, however, should have been used to “amortize” county debt, which he said now stands at \$600 million.

“Instead you distributed the windfall to municipalities for infrastructure projects and other spending,” Mr. Bennett said.

He also said the county’s open space fund needs to be “either dissolved or used for open space.” Mr. Bennett said the trust fund has been used to fund county staff salaries for sports programs.

Freeholder Chris Hudak noted that a portion of the sale of Runnells was used “to retire any debt that was attached to that facility” as required by law.

On talk of eliminating county police, Mr. Hudak responded that “there are at least five other counties (in New Jersey) that have law enforcement agencies.” He said Camden County has set up a metro police unit

CONTINUED ON PAGE 10



Christina M. Hinke for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times

SPREADING THE WORD...Bella, Keira and Alessandra of Park Middle School hand out brochures for their school service project to spread awareness about Autism at Sunday’s Rockin’ For Autism fundraiser at LaGrande Park in Fanwood.

PAGE INDEX

Regional	2-3, 18	Education	9, 18
Editorial	4-5	Sports	11-18
Police	16	Real Estate	11-13
Community ...	6-8	Classifieds	16
Obituary	6	A&E	19-20



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