

FW Gets \$325,000 In Aid; Garwood, Cranford Rejected

By PAUL J. PEYTON
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

AREA – Area towns completed their municipal budgets this month following the state’s announcement of extraordinary aid awards. The state awarded a total of \$17.7 million to 80 towns. Fanwood and Kenilworth were the only towns in Union County to share in the pot of money, as the state denied requests by Cranford and Garwood.

According to DCA spokesman Chris Donnelly, 108 of the state’s 566 municipalities applied for a total of \$83,045,355. He said the \$17.7 million award represents a reduction of \$9 million from last year.

Twenty-nine of the state’s 40 districts received grants received funding. Of that amount, 21 were in Democratic-controlled districts, 13 were in Republican districts, and the remaining six were legislatively split.

According to a list of the grants, Fanwood received \$325,000. The 22nd Legislative District, which includes parts of Middlesex County, as a whole received \$825,000. Assemblywoman Linda Stender, a Democrat from Fanwood, represents the district. The neighboring 21st Legislative District, represented by Republicans, was not awarded any additional aid. Both Cranford and Garwood are in the 21st district.

As *The Westfield Leader* and *The Times* previously reported, Fanwood has said the money would be used to reduce a \$750,000 tax-levy increase in the budget.

“Our focus is that we have redevelopment projects on line, but that will take a few years. We are trying to stop taxes from skyrocketing in the meantime,” Fred Tompkins, Fanwood chief financial officer, told *The Leader/Times* when reached for comment Monday. He said the borough felt a spike in taxes might have caused the redevelopment projects to “stymie” as developers “would not want to come here.”

Mr. Tompkins said the state looked favorably on the borough’s successful application for shared-services grants. “Fanwood has been a model for the state,” he said.

Cranford, which sustained an estimated \$25 million in damage from an April Nor’ Easter, had applied for \$1.3 million in relief. The township also cited a \$27-million downturn in tax ratables over the past two years.

“It’s very disappointing,” said Cranford Township Committeeman David Robinson, who heads the finance committee. “I can’t offer any explanation why we didn’t get it. I think we were a prime candidate because we had extraordinary circumstances.”

He said this was the first time Cranford has applied for extraordinary aid. The township sought assistance due to the “extraordinary circumstances” faced due to the township’s ongoing long-term flood-control project and the decline in commercial ratables along Walnut Avenue and the Cranford Business

Park on Commerce Drive, located near exit 136 off the Garden State Parkway.

Mr. Tompkins, who represents other towns, said no town in the state that had flood problems received extraordinary aid, as there are other funding sources such as FEMA for disaster aid.

Garwood applied for \$400,000 this year, according to Christina Ariemma, borough clerk. The borough received \$210,000 in 2006 and \$200,000 in 2005.

State Senator Tom Kean Jr., a Republican from Westfield who represents the 21st district, said the distribution of grants should be “non-partisan” in nature and based on merit.

“I will continue to fight for merit-based decision making in the distribution of state funds,” he said.

According to the Department of Community Affairs website, the program “provides additional state aid to address a municipality’s extraordinary need because of severe fiscal crisis outside of the municipality’s control” and is “intended only for extraordinary, non-repeating circumstances that result in a significant property-tax increase.”

Towns applying for this year’s program were required to complete an eight-page application including information on the steps they took “to eliminate the need for aid in this and subsequent years” such as “cost-cutting measures” and efforts to receive grants.

The 36th district in Bergen County, represented by Democratic Senator Paul Sarlo, received the most money, \$2.4 million; followed by the fifth district in Camden County, represented by Senator Wayne Bryant, who was indicted on corruption charges earlier this year, which was awarded \$2 million. District 27 in Essex County, represented by State Senate President Richard Codey, netted \$1.3 million.

District 16 in Somerset County, represented by Senator Walter Kavanagh, received \$1.3 million, the highest for a GOP controlled district.

Department of Community Affairs spokesman Chris Donnelly said the DCA “reviews each municipality’s application, annual financial statement, budget and audit to determine the circumstances and fiscal posture, outside the control of the municipality, [that] is causing an inordinate increase in the municipal property tax.”

“We look at tax-collection rates, ratable base, tax appeals, level of surplus, appropriations and all other pertinent financial information to make our determination,” he said in an e-mail after contacted by phone for comment.

\$17,700,000 in State Extraordinary Aid: A Breakdown By District

District	Senator	Party	Amount (\$)	County
1	Asselta	R	340,000	Atlantic
2	McCullough	R	850,000	Atlantic
3	Sweeney	D	1,050,000	Salem
4	Madden	D	300,000	Camden
5	Bryant	D	2,010,000	Camden
6	Adler	D	575,000	Camden
7	Allen	R	50,000	Burlington
8	Bark	R	0	Burlington
9	Connors	R	150,000	Ocean
10	Ciesla	R	60,000	Ocean
11	Palaia	R	0	Monmouth
12	Karcher	D	190,000	Monmouth
13	Kyrillos	R	200,000	Monmouth
14	Inverso	R	250,000	Middlesex
15	Turner	D	0	Mercer
16	Kavanaugh	R	1,250,000	Somerset
17	Smith	D	750,000	Middlesex
18	Buono	D	525,000	Middlesex
19	Vitale	D	250,000	Middlesex
20	Lesniak	D	75,000	Union
21	Kean	R	0	Union
22	Scutari	D	825,000	Union
23	Lance	R	225,000	Hunterdon
24	Littell	R	600,000	Sussex
25	Bucco	R	0	Morris
26	Martin	R	350,000	Morris
27	Codey	D	1,300,000	Essex
28	Rice	D	0	Essex
29	James	D	0	Essex
30	Singer	R	0	Ocean
31	Doria	D	0	Hudson
32	Sacco	D	0	Hudson
33	Kenny	D	0	Hudson
34	Gill	D	525,000	Essex
35	Girgenti	D	100,000	Passaic
36	Sarlo	D	2,350,000	Bergen
37	Weinberg	D	800,000	Bergen
38	Coniglio	D	300,000	Bergen
39	Cardinale	R	1,000,000	Bergen
40	McNamara	R	450,000	Passaic

STATE AID... The State Department of Community Affairs (DCA) has released a list of extraordinary municipal aid awards. The chart above depicts each district, the amount it received and the senator (with party affiliation) who represents it. Districts 1, 2, 7, 8, 12 and 14 are split districts represented by both parties.