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SIXTY CENTS

New Communications Tower in S. Plains Will Aid Area Fire and Rescue Squads

By FRED ROSSI
Specially Written for The Times

SCOTCH PLAINS — The 121-foot communications tower outside the Scotch Plains southside firehouse was put up when Dwight Eisenhower was President and before the first American astronaut was launched into outer space.

It is expected that, within a few months, a new tower will be in place to reflect the vast leaps in communications and technology over the past four decades.

Last week, the Township Council approved a \$484,900 bid from Procomm Systems Inc. to construct the new, 150-foot tower that will be situated next to the firehouse at the corner of Martine Avenue and Raritan Road. Last year, the council approved a \$530,000 bond ordinance to pay for the tower as well as improvements to the firehouse and a generator for use during any power outage.

"It'll be a more powerful antenna for radio transmissions," explained Township Manager Thomas Atkins. He told *The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times* that the new antenna will allow

township fire department and rescue squad personnel to communicate on the same radio frequency, which is

not the case at present.

The present equipment is not only old but outdated, given that the tower



COMMUNICATION UPGRADE...The 45-year-old communications tower at the southside firehouse in Scotch Plains will be replaced by the summer with a modern tower that will enhance communications among emergency services personnel.

Modifications in Bulk Waste Program Near in Scotch Plains

By FRED ROSSI
Specially Written for The Times

SCOTCH PLAINS — The Scotch Plains Township Council will likely introduce an ordinance this month to modify the township's spring clean-up program by instituting a user fee-based system that will require residents to purchase an annual permit if

they want to dispose of large household items.

Township Attorney Douglas Hansen provided the council at its conference meeting on Tuesday evening with a draft ordinance, which he called an "enabling ordinance" that formally changes the collection program to a fee-based system. The

details of the program's operation will be done administratively instead of by an ordinance.

Mr. Hansen recommended that the fee structure be set out in a range instead of a single amount to avoid having to amend the ordinance each time a fee increase is necessary.

The council will discuss further one area where there is still some disagreement, namely the question of how far in advance of a scheduled pick-up residents will be permitted to place their items at the curb.

Mayor Martin Marks emphasized that the spring clean-up program "is not going away, but will be handled differently."

In other business, Scotch Plains has filed its deer management control application with state officials and hopes to be able to soon award a contract to conduct the deer reduction program in the Ashbrook Reservation.

Township Manager Thomas Atkins told the council on Tuesday evening that, in conjunction with the deer reduction program, state and county officials are recommending that the council pass an ordinance to outlaw the feeding of certain wildlife, including deer.

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Township Budget Hike May Depend on NJ Aid

By FRED ROSSI
Specially Written for The Times

SCOTCH PLAINS — Last week, Scotch Plains Township Manager Thomas Atkins presented his recommended 2005 municipal budget, which calls for a 3.98 percent increase in township government expenditures to the Township Council.

While the council has not yet been furnished with anticipated revenue levels — which will eventually determine this year's property tax rate — Mr. Atkins said he is "trying to be optimistic that state aid levels will at least remain the same" this year as in 2004, when assistance from Trenton was increased slightly after being frozen for three years. But he acknowledged that state aid is "one of the major hurdles that could exist this year," given the multi-billion dollar deficit in the state budget.

The council will review the \$20.5 million budget proposed by Mr. Atkins during the next several weeks before its expected introduction in late March or early April. A public budget meeting has been scheduled for Wednesday, February 16, at 7 p.m.

The majority of the \$785,000 increase in recommended appropriations is due to increases in several non-discretionary mandated areas, including a \$208,760 increase in

group health insurance premiums for township employees; a combined \$163,875 hike in fees paid to the Rahway Valley Sewerage Authority, the Plainfield Area Regional Sewerage Authority and the Plainfield Municipal Utilities Authority; an additional \$106,033 in contributions to the police and fire retirement system; and an increase of more than \$132,000 in Police Department salaries likely to result from negotiations currently underway on a new police contract.

Mr. Atkins' budget proposal does not include the full allotment of funding for the township's spring clean-up program because the council is expected to modify the program to a fee-based system in which residents interested in taking part will have to purchase a permit in order to have their bulky waste collected.

It was anticipated that maintaining the program would have cost the township in excess of \$300,000 this year; the proposed budget includes less than one-third of that amount, primarily to pay for various administrative and other costs associated with setting up the initial year of the new program.

Funding is also included in the budget recommendations for various improvements to the municipal building, the public works building and the

new tower. The council has already awarded

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Special Services Up Three Percent In Projected 2005 School Budget

By MATT MARINO
Specially Written for The Times

SCOTCH PLAINS — Continuing a financially-oriented theme of late, the Scotch Plains-Fanwood Board of Education heard a budget-related presentation from the Office of Special Services at its meeting last Thursday.

The board was also treated to an informative presentation made by several Terrill Middle School students about their German classes.

Thomas Beese, the Assistant Superintendent in Charge of Special Services, discussed the various components of his department's budget estimates for the 2005-2006 school year. The total budget increase is projected to be approximately 3 percent.

Among other things, Dr. Beese and his office foresee an increase in tu-

Sprint Seeks Cell Tower On Recycling Center

By ELIZABETH CORRELL
Specially Written for The Times

FANWOOD — The telecommunications company Sprint wants to build a cell tower at Fanwood's Recycling Center, located on North Avenue.

Representatives from the company made a presentation to the mayor and council at Tuesday night's agenda meeting, requesting permission for the project.

Sprint representatives explained that they are in need of a tower to fill a gap in cellular coverage in order to provide reliable service for residents in the area that use their cellular phones inside residences.

They claim that their research shows that they cannot utilize existing towers or buildings because the locations or heights are not right for their needs.

The type of equipment they want to build would either be a "monopole" or a tower. Fanwood's current ordinance sets a maximum height of 130 feet. Sprint stated that the base of their proposed tower would be 50 feet by 50 feet, and would allow for a total of four cellular carriers to use the equipment.

Representatives answered questions from the governing body. Councilman Jack Molenaar voiced concerns about the subject and felt that the matter should be reviewed by the borough's planning board before a decision is made.

He also said that he feels "unsympathetic" towards the company's request, because Sprint's map showed that the main beneficiaries from the improved

service would be residents of Scotch Plains and Westfield, yet the tower would be built on Fanwood property.

Mayor Colleen Mahr stated that she and the council know that residents would have strong opinions regarding building a cell tower at the recycling center. She and the council will discuss the issue and will inform Sprint within weeks with an answer if they are willing to consider the project.

In other business, Fanwood police made a presentation regarding their request that the borough authorize a Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) to function in the area. This program, which exists state and nationwide, was established to provide citizens with training regarding what to do in the event of an emergency in the area.

Examples given included searching for a lost child, dealing with a major storm or how to respond after a terrorist attack. Participants are required to complete a 20-hour training course, and after completion, can choose to be an official volunteer on the team. The borough's Emergency Management Coordinator would be the only person that has the power to activate the team in the event of an emergency; no team member would be authorized to function on his own. The mayor and council will vote on a resolution instituting CERT at next week's council meeting.

The estimated \$220,000 project of building a pedestrian and bikeway bridge at Sheelen's Cross-

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Health Bd. Investigates Ringworm Outbreak; Groomer Closes Doors

By BETSEY BURGENDORF
Specially Written for The Times

WESTFIELD — The Westfield Regional Health Department began receiving calls last November regarding an outbreak of ringworm in local animals. Upon further investigation, it was determined that the majority of the cases were linked to The Dog Patch, a groomer formerly located on South Avenue.

The Dog Patch is now closed and the phone has been shut off. Gail Cheety, an investigator for the Board of Health who handles cases involving communicable diseases, stated that although the board was involved in the inspection and disinfection of the location, it was not responsible for shutting it down.

"Let's put it this way," Ms. Cheety said, "She (the owner) may have closed because of that (the investigation), but I can't say for sure."

The Board of Health does not routinely inspect pet groomers unless they receive complaints. After receiving numerous complaints, Ms. Cheety contacted the Westfield Veterinary Group, which confirmed that they were currently treating "a few" dogs that had been diagnosed with ringworm and had been to The Dog Patch.

Ringworm is a contagious fungus infection that can affect the scalp, the feet and the nails of animals and humans. Despite its name, it has nothing to do with worms. The name comes from the characteristic red ring that can appear on an infected person's skin.

Ringworm is difficult to prevent. The fungus is very common, and it is contagious even before symptoms appear. Longhaired dogs are especially hard to diagnose because the infected sight can be hidden under fur.

Ringworm is spread either by direct or indirect contact. People can become infected by direct skin-to-skin contact with an infected person or pet. People can also get ringworm indirectly by contact with objects or surfaces that an infected person or pet has touched.

The Health Department was not able to pinpoint the origin of the outbreak, but Ms. Cheety stated that to prevent it, "you really have to be up on it." She also stated that after the owner of The Dog Patch thoroughly disinfected her business no new cases were reported.

The Health Department also reported that one case of a human contracting the disease from The Dog Patch was reported.



DOGS WORST NIGHTMARE...The Dog Patch, a pet groomer formerly located on South Avenue, closed its doors in December after numerous cases of ringworm were reported to the Westfield Regional Health Department.

ition for out-of-district placements in the amount of \$168,533. Further, they believe that two positions — totaling \$120,000 in additional dollars — will be added: a learning disabilities teacher/consultant, and psychologist. According to information provided at the meeting, these positions would be at the elementary level.

Board member Trip Whitehouse questioned the increase in overall out-

"It's really great to see what happens in the classroom from the perspective of a student."

Board Member Betty Anne Woerner

of-district costs, particularly with regard to summer costs.

These costs are projected at \$400,000 next year, compared to \$375,000 this year and \$347,982 two years ago, officials said.

Mr. Whitehouse wondered about the efficiency of over \$50,000 more costs than those of two years ago.

In response, Dr. Beese stated that as the expenses have gone up, so has the need for additional services.

"Our programs are very expensive," he explained.

Another notable budget increase will come in the program concerning



TAKING TO THE NET...Scotch Plains Mayor Martin Marks went on the Internet Wednesday to champion his position calling for a New Jersey Property Tax Convention Referendum this November. For several years, Mayor Marks has been advocating in Trenton and throughout the state that the system needs to be changed. His 12 minute video, produced by *The LeaderTimes*, can be viewed at www.goleader.com/video.

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