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SIXTY CENTS

Town to Host President Bush Friday at Westfield Armory

By PAUL PEYTON
Specially Written for The Times

WESTFIELD — Westfield will make history this week when President George W. Bush holds a Town Meeting-style appearance on Social Security reform this Friday.

Since word spread last weekend, the town and other elected officials, federal, state and municipal have been fielding hundreds of calls from individuals seeking tickets and news on possible disruptions.

The meeting will be held Friday morning around 10:40 a.m. at the

Westfield National Guard Armory on Rahway Avenue across the street from Westfield High School (WHS). Town officials have said the President is expected to stay in town until around 11:45 a.m.

Town Administrator Jim Gildea said prior to Tuesday night's Town Council meeting, the town's police and fire chiefs were informed of the President's visit on Friday. They were briefed by the FBI on Monday.

"The honor of having the President come to your town is a piece of history that you will never forget," Mayor

Greg McDermott said. "I look at it as totally a positive experience."

"I think it's a tremendous honor. It is very exciting. I think it is great for Westfield," the mayor added.

The trip was arranged in part by Congressman Mike Ferguson (R-7th) whose Congressional district includes Westfield. He said Westfield should be honored to have been chosen as part of the President's appearance schedule on Social Security reform.

"(Westfield is) one of New Jersey's great communities; a community of families and individuals," he said, noting that he felt Westfielders, as well as Union County residents, would have a lot to add to the discussion. It's a credit to Westfield, Union County, and our entire state" that the President is coming to town.

He said plans are to accommodate between 1,500 and 2,000 people at the event.

"We are going to get as many people in there as possible," said the congressman.

The orderly Town Hall style meet-

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WELCOME TO NEW JERSEY...President George W. Bush received a rousing welcome from the packed crowd in the Sheraton at Newark Airport on June 24, 2002. Congressman Mike Ferguson applauds as his wife Maureen looks on, beaming with pride.

Township's 2005 Municipal \$20 Mil. Budget Scheduled for Introduction

By FRED ROSSI
Specially Written for The Times

SCOTCH PLAINS — The Township Council will likely hold one additional budget meeting in two weeks before possibly introducing the 2005 municipal spending plan later this month, or in early April.

The council held its second budget meeting this week, with members reviewing several different sections of the proposed \$20.5 million budget submitted by Township Manager Thomas Atkins. The focus was on various insurance expenses, pension contributions and sewerage authority payments. Health insurance costs continue to rise sharply, with a 12 percent increase set for this year in line with the double-digit rises of the past several years.

Mr. Atkins told the council that new dental insurance options are being explored.

There is also a \$208,760 increase in group health insurance premiums for township employees and an increase of more than \$132,000 in police department salaries likely to result from negotiations currently underway on a new police contract.

After several years where no or little contributions were made to the public employees and the police and fire pension funds, the township will

be making significant contributions this year.

Township payments to the Rahway Valley Sewerage Authority (RVSA) are set to increase by more than 12 percent this year, to about \$770,000, and will likely rise 18 percent to 19 percent in 2006. The increased fees are to finance improvements to RVSA's facility in Rahway that were made necessary by various federal, state and court-ordered mandates.

Mr. Atkins said the initial cost estimates and municipal assessments for the upgrades were "greatly underestimated" by the sewerage authority. As a result, the township's assessment will likely rise from \$770,000

this year to more than \$900,000 in 2006 and as much as \$1.6 million in 2008. Last year, an initial estimate put the township's 2008 maximum fee payment at \$1.1 million.

The council's budget meeting took place hours after the winter's fourth snowstorm, and Mr. Atkins said he was "a little concerned" that another major storm this winter could result in an additional \$25,000 to \$30,000 being added to the budget.

The council will hold its next budget meeting on Wednesday, March 16, during which time it is expected to discuss revenue figures, state assistance levels and possible property

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Public Hearing Set for Tuesday On Fee-Based Spring Clean-Up

By FRED ROSSI
Specially Written for The Times

SCOTCH PLAINS — The Scotch Plains Township Council will hold a public hearing next Tuesday on an ordinance modifying the township's spring clean-up program by instituting a user fee-based system. It will require residents to purchase an annual permit if they wish to dispose of large household items.

Township officials supported the revamped program because costs have risen sharply in recent years and were projected to be at least \$300,000 this year under the existing program and as much as \$500,000 in future years. The new structure will be financed

only by those homeowners with a need to dispose of bulky household items instead of being funded by all property owners via property taxes.

Councilwoman Paulette Coronato said last week this was "a fairer way" of operating the program.

At the council's conference meeting on Tuesday, Township Manager Thomas Atkins said the cost of this year's permit would be \$60. He added that an intensive public education campaign would begin once the ordinance is adopted. He envisioned a mailing to all township residents explaining the changes as well as additional information on both TV-34 and the township's website.

In other business at Tuesday's conference meeting, the council discussed, and then decided not to pursue, a possible ordinance regulating peddlers and street vendors. A draft ordinance circulated by Township Attorney Douglas Hansen was in response to several concerns raised recently about a hot dog vendor on Martine Avenue outside the Highland Swim Club.

There are also two other hot dog and snack vendors regularly parked on local streets "one on South Avenue and one on Plainfield Avenue."

Initial discussion centered on possibly limiting such vendors to streets in non-residential zones, but it was pointed out that vendors would likely have difficulty selling their products if they were parked on a residential street instead of a more-heavily traveled road such as Martine Avenue or South Avenue. Mr. Hansen also

making the requested revisions. As a possible solution, Board Attorney Joseph Mega recommended that the board postpone voting on any application found to require revisions, giving the applicant an extra 30 to 60 days to make all necessary changes before a vote was taken.

Mr. Mega noted that applicants have the legal right to a decision within 120 days of submitting an application, meaning that any postponement of voting beyond the 120-day deadline would make it necessary to ask the applicant to waive this right.

However, Mr. Mega suggested that it would generally be in the applicant's best interest to comply with such a request, as failure to do so would force the board to deny the application without prejudice.

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CAN YOU DIG IT?...Another snowstorm on Monday kept these Scotch Plains residents busy digging to clear the way for their vehicles and walkway.

Fred Rossi for The Times

First Application Received Under Borough's New Redevelopment Plan at Council Meeting

By CHRISTIE STORMS
Specially Written for The Times

FANWOOD — The first preliminary step toward redeveloping property under Fanwood's New Redevelopment Plan was taken at Tuesday's Borough Council Agenda Meeting

held Tuesday night.

A motion was approved by the governing body to consider adopting a resolution next week that would designate members of the Marcovecchio family as official redevelopers for the proposed project at 222 South Avenue, under the conditions that they enter into an agreement with the town.

The redevelopment plan requires that applicants address the borough council before proceeding to the planning board.

The applicants already own the properties in the redevelopment area and their attorney, Ben Zander, discussed at length the applicants' goals to conform to the new plan, which went into effect a week ago.

Architect Sal Lauro displayed facade and floor plans, and then answered questions regarding the proposed mixed-use building. The building would feature one to four retail spaces on the bottom floor and two more floors for residential apartments above.

The overall structure would appear as only two and a half stories and would include Victorian details such as a clock and tower that can be seen from afar. Landscape design, rear

entry access and parking deficiencies were flagged as subjects for further discussion next week.

In other news, the council discussed the possible appointment of a new police officer, Robert Sanchez. In the past, the Public Safety Committee was involved in the hiring process, and Councilman Stuart Kline inquired why this system was no longer in place.

Councilman Jack Molenaar, who had an opportunity to meet Mr. Sanchez prior to the agenda meeting, said Police Chief Donald Domanoski and his staff are ultimately the ones who will work with the new officer.

The position was posted on the department's website at no cost to the borough, Councilman Molenaar said.

According to Mr. Molenaar, the police department received 10 applications and put them through a rigorous interview process. They ultimately decided Mr. Sanchez was the best choice.

Council members asked for more specifics regarding this hiring process. Joseph Pryor, Borough Engineer, apprised the council of several Public Works projects, including a proposed sophisticated system of traffic lights for Terrill Road to be implemented in 2006.

This will include new signals and sensors and new programming for not only the time of the day, but the day of the week. Lights will all be

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Fanwood Planning Board Approves Aboveground Hot Tub Application

By DAVID DANESE
Specially Written for The Times

FANWOOD — The Fanwood Planning Board last week approved a variance application for the placement of an aboveground hot tub in a North Avenue couple's backyard.

Due to the lack of a suitable piece of flat land located the minimum required distance of 15 feet from the property line, Jennifer and Gerry Cooney, of 370 North Avenue, had petitioned the board for permission to install the hot tub, which is to be used for therapeutic purposes by Mr. Cooney, on an existing patio that sits six feet from the property line.

Borough Engineer Joe Pryor noted that installation of the hot tub on the patio would eliminate any possible drainage-related concerns, and Board

Chairman Gregory Cummings reported that he had visited the proposed site and agreed that placement of the tub at least 15 feet from the property line was not feasible.

The petition was put to a vote and passed by a margin of 8-0, with board member Rosanne Tobey recusing herself because she is a next-door neighbor of Mr. and Ms. Cooney.

In other business, the board discussed its practices regarding the conditional approval of applications submitted by borough residents.

Zoning Officer Nancy Koederitz stated that some residents, whose applications had been conditionally approved contingent upon the completion of board-specified revisions to their applications, were obtaining building permits without actually

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Scotch Plains Friendly's Closes Doors After 33 Yrs.

By CHRISTIE STORMS
Specially Written for The Times

SCOTCH PLAINS — Friendly's Restaurant in Scotch Plains has closed its doors after almost 33 years in business. The closing took place less than five years after the Friendly Ice Cream Corporation shut down their Mountainside restaurant as part of a long-term financial restructuring plan.

Known for their Fribbles, Royal Banana Splits and other cold confections, Friendly's was a popular local eatery that also served up signature sandwiches and hot entrees in a family-friendly atmosphere.

Maura Tobias, Director of Public Affairs and Communications at the 69-year-old Wilbraham, Mass.-based corporation, stated, "It is always a tough decision to close a restaurant whether the closing is because of changes in the trade area or market changes. And the closing back in December of the Scotch Plains restaurant was no different."

Ms. Tobias also reported that the

corporation offered the Scotch Plains staff employment at other area Friendly's.

A recent annual report posted on the company's website revealed that an ongoing financial restructuring plan requiring the closing of several company-owned restaurants began in March of 2000. Since that time, the company has also eliminated some positions at corporate headquarters, but is also currently introducing new products and revitalizing existing restaurants in an effort to increase its customer base.

The Friendly Ice Cream Corporation, which operates more than 530 company and franchised restaurants throughout the Northeast, has not announced plans for future closings of restaurants in New Jersey. The two Friendly's that presently remain open in Union County are located in New Providence and Clark.

According to the Scotch Plains Tax Office, Friendly's still owns the South Avenue property, and no information has been released regarding a future tenant.



FRIENDLY FAREWELL...The Friendly Ice Cream Corporation decided to close the Scotch Plains restaurant, located on South Avenue, after 33 years of serving signature sandwiches, cold confections and treats to residents. The Mountainside location closed less than five years ago.

Fred Rossi for The Times

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