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SIXTY CENTS

Twp. Council Approves Mun. Budget; Property Taxes to Increase 4.7 Percent

By FRED ROSSI
Specially Written for The Times

SCOTCH PLAINS — The township council on Tuesday evening gave its unanimous approval to the \$20.8 million municipal budget, which will be financed in part by a 4.7 percent increase in municipal property taxes. The council's vote came after a public hearing that lasted nearly one hour and included a presentation by Mayor Martin Marks, who outlined some of the reasons for the \$834,307

increase in township appropriations this year. The mayor also repeated his call for a state constitutional convention to reform the property tax system. More than one quarter of the appropriations increase for 2005 is due to yet another substantial hike in group health insurance premiums, which are rising \$233,000. Mayor Marks lamented the fact that, unlike in much of the private sector, township police department personnel do not contribute to the cost of their

health insurance premiums.

He said this was proposed to the police union during recent contract negotiations, but was rejected. The police and the township administration will settle the issue in arbitration.

Other areas of significant increases this year include additional contributions to police, fire and public employees' pension funds; higher fees paid to the Rahway Valley Sewerage Authority and the Plainfield Area Regional Sewerage Authority; in-

creased utilities and gasoline costs and higher salaries and wages for the police department.

Mayor Marks pointed out that most of the expenses associated with the spring clean-up program have been deleted from the budget since the program has been revamped to a user fee-based system requiring residents to purchase an annual permit if they wish to dispose of large household items.

Acknowledging that he has "been shooting my mouth off a bit" about property taxes — a reference to comments he made to state legislators last week when he called them "do-nothing, self-promoting cowards" in failing to address property tax reform — Mayor Marks decried what he called the "bipartisan failure over the years" by both Democrats and Republicans on the issue and called again for a constitutional convention to address the problem.

"The Legislature is never going to solve the problem," said Mayor

CONTINUED ON PAGE 12



MUSCLING GOOD DEEDS...Leaders Don Leblanc of Cub Scout Pack No. 30 and Peter Buckley, right, of Boy Scout Troop No. 330 use a rope and muscle to drag tires from the Rahway River in Clark. Please see story on Page 2.

Mayor Marks Defends Comments Made During May 6 Tax Summit

By PAUL J. PEYTON
Specially Written for The Times

SCOTCH PLAINS — The phone rang off the hook this past weekend at the home of Scotch Plains Mayor Martin Marks after he called Trenton legislators "self promoting cowards" for failing to take action on property tax reform.

Mayor Marks was one of 200 mayors who participated in a summit on property tax reform held last Friday in Lawrenceville.

He defended his comments, reported in daily newspapers over the weekend, stating they were intended to "ruffle the feathers a bit" of Trenton lawmakers.

"If the shoe fits, I stand by my word," the mayor told *The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times*.

He said mayors around the state who contacted him "were pleased as punch" by his comments.

Mayor Marks said both Democrats and Republicans in the Legislature have put forward their own plans for tax relief but neither supports the other's program. He said the proposals on the table amount to "just political positioning" during an election year.

Assemblyman Jon Bramnick (R-21, Westfield) objected to Mayor Marks' comments without specifi-

cally addressing concerns over the actions of individual legislators.

"Broad-based comments like that I don't think are helpful," said Assemblyman Bramnick.

"Name calling is not good, period," he added. He noted that he attempted to pass a motion to have an open discussion on property tax reform during a General Assembly session but was denied by the Democratic majority.

Calls to Assembly Speaker Albio Sires (D-33, Hudson), Senator Tom Kean, Jr. (R-21, Westfield) and Assemblywoman Linda Stender (D-22, Fanwood) were not returned.

The mayor also had harsh words for acting Governor Richard Codey, who he called "our biggest road block to reform." He said that in his role as Senate President, Mr. Codey failed to move forward on legislation last year for a ballot question on a Constitutional Convention.

"His lack of action speaks volumes about his lack of interest in property tax reform," said Mayor Marks.

The mayor said he was hopeful acting Governor Codey would post legislation that would place a ballot question endorsing a Constitutional Convention before voters this November.

A spokesman for Acting Governor Codey said Mr. Codey does not comment on legislation that has not reached his desk.

The spokesman said Mr. Codey believes the Constitutional Convention should focus on spending.



PARTICIPANTS FOR PRAYER...Local religious and political leaders participated in the annual National Day of Prayer on May 5 in Scotch Plains' Alan Augustine Park.

Fanwood Borough Council Recognizes Cops, Public Works Director on Their Retirements

By MEREDITH MANNINO
Specially Written for The Times

FANWOOD — In conjunction with National Police Week, May 15 to 21, members of the Fanwood Police Department are headed to Washington, D.C. to pay homage to officers from around the country who died in the line of duty.

At Tuesday night's Borough Council meeting, Fanwood Police Corporal Martin Haluza and Corporal Stephen Sanislo were honored. Both officers will retire in June.

Corporal Haluza is a 27-year veteran of the Fanwood Police Department and Corporal Sanislo has served Fanwood for over 35 years.

Corporal Haluza and Corporal Sanislo thanked the council and the residents and praised their fellow officers' dedication.

Additionally, Police Chief Donald Domanoski presented several officers with letters of commendation and letters of recommendations for exemplifying leadership and profession-

alism in the line of duty.

Also honored Tuesday night were Girl Scouts Katherine Van Haasteren and Jennifer Bauer, on their achievement of the Gold Award, the highest award in the Girl Scouts.

Councilwoman Donna Dolce, an active Girl Scouts volunteer, presented the two Fanwood girls with the award. In the spirit of empowerment, Councilwoman Dolce encouraged the girls to remain tenacious and strong.

"Don't ever give up," she said. "Maybe someday one of these girls can step in my shoes or the mayor's."

Councilman Stuart Kline presented the Eagle Scout Award to borough youth Neil Pratt. Mr. Neil's organization and implementation of the St. John's Baptist Church in Scotch Plains, renovation was recognized.

Officials noted that May 15 through 21 is National Public Works Week. It was also reported that Public Works Director Raymond Manfra is retiring after 43 years of service.

During the public portion of the

meeting, Clinton Dickson was introduced as the new Director of Public Works. Mr. Dickson was formerly the Director of Public Works in Garwood.

Proclamations for May approved by the governing body included Rescue Squad/EMS Month, National Public Works Week, Historic Preservation Week, Arbor Day, and National Day of Prayer.

Council President Katherine Mitchell honored borough resident Joan Wheeler in celebration of National Nurses Week.

Ms. Wheeler is the Associate Administrator at Runnells Specialized Hospital of Union County in Berkeley Heights, and is the Recording Secretary for Soroptimist International, a volunteer service organization which seeks to improve the lives of women and girls in local communities and throughout the world.

"She epitomizes nursing," said Councilwoman Mitchell.

Officials announced that a design has been selected for the new historic Fanwood sign. The new sign will be unveiled in the fall outside of Borough Hall.

The council announced that Fanwood partnered with Arcadia Publishing, a publisher of town biographies, to distribute a historical biography of Fanwood. Also, it was noted that the Fanwood Memorial Library renovation project is underway and that Fanwood Recreation Department sports camps are accepting applications for the summer.

During the public portion of Tuesday's meeting, Republican candidates for Borough Council, Michael D'Antuono and Maureen Mawby, addressed the council.

Mr. D'Antuono asked about the former Dean Oil site.

"Is there a pending sale of that property?" he asked.

Mayor Colleen Mahr answered that there was a pending sale, to which Mr. D'Antuono also inquired about financial statements and environmental testing of the site. Mayor Mahr said the property must be properly remediated with approval from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

Mr. D'Antuono expressed his concern about changing this area from a commercial to a residential zone.

Ms. Mawby initiated conversation about the new senior center at Forest

CONTINUED ON PAGE 12

Hearing on Cooper Road Island Development to Continue In June

By FRED ROSSI
Specially Written for The Times

SCOTCH PLAINS — The township's zoning board of adjustment's consideration of an application by a developer to build a single-family house on a portion of the island on Cooper Road in Scotch Plains will be continued at a special meeting next month when it is expected that neighborhood residents who oppose the proposal will have an opportunity to express their views.

The board held its first hearing on the application by Mark Lustbader of West Orange, on behalf of HUB Realty, in January, when it was revealed that the property — originally believed to be 39,338 square feet in area — was actually smaller when rights-of-way along Cooper Road were excluded. The neighborhood is an R-1 zone, meaning that lots are required to be at least 40,000 square feet in size. The property, presently owned by AT&T, is on the western side of the island; the township owns the eastern half.

At last Thursday's meeting, revised site plans were presented to the board that showed several significant changes from the initial set submitted four months ago. The applicant's attorney, Robert Kraus, said the size of the property now amounts to 33,405 square feet — more than 15 percent smaller than the required lot size for the R-1 zone. The new plans call for a 6,000-square-foot portion of the northern edge of the property along the westbound lane of Cooper Road to be ceded to the township for possible road widening purposes.

Addressing the shortfall in lot size, Mr. Kraus said he had contacted township officials to gauge their interest in either selling a small portion of the

adjacent township-owned lot, which would enable the AT&T property to be in conformance with lot size requirements, or acquiring the AT&T lot, but was informed by Township Attorney Douglas Hansen that there was no interest in either option.

Mr. Kraus told the board last week that total lot coverage would amount to just under 11 percent, and noted that local regulations allow for a maximum of 20 percent total lot coverage. He said the 60-foot setbacks on all sides of the house were in compliance with township requirements.

Chris Kastrud, a professional engineer, outlined the revised site plans, noting that the proposed driveway had been moved about 120 feet, from near the western juncture of the east-

bound and westbound lanes of Cooper Road, to a spot across from Wellington Downs on the eastbound side of Cooper Road.

In January, concerns were raised about the original placement of the driveway and possible risks to vehicles traveling on Cooper Road as well as cars exiting the driveway. The proposed house now would face the eastbound lane of Cooper Road. Elizabeth Dolan, a traffic consultant, testified on behalf of the applicant that the new driveway placement would allow for maximum visibility and site distance.

The applicant's professional planner, Elizabeth McKenzie, called the site "a unique piece of property" and maintained that the lot size variance

CONTINUED ON PAGE 12



BUSINESS OFFICERS...The Scotch Plains Business & Professional Association has elected its new officers for the coming year. Pictured, left to right, are: Treasurer Steve Hoeckele, Vice President Ray Pardon, Outgoing President Steve Goldberg, President Lisa Mohn and Secretary Lena Olsen.



ADDRESSING THE ISSUES...GOP gubernatorial candidates met last week at an informal event hosted by the Mountainside Republican Club to meet the public and share their ideas on how to better New Jersey. Doug Forrester addresses residents, while Bill Sanders, Chairman of the Mountainside Republican Club, looks on.

PAGE INDEX

Regional	2-3	Obituary	11	Real Estate	14-21
Editorial	4-5	Education	9,10	Classifieds.....	22
Community ...	6-7	Sports	13-18	A&E	23-24