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## SP-F Board of Education Voices Objections to Proposed Reforms

By NORDETTE N. ADAMS  
Specially Written for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times

SCOTCH PLAINS — Discussion and review of recommendations made by four joint legislative committees in Trenton on property-tax reform dominated Thursday night's meeting of the Scotch Plains-Fanwood Board of Education.

BOE Business Administrator Anthony Del Sordi and board member Linda Nelson said that they attended public hearings on reform bills in Trenton last Thursday. Both shared concerns that legislators seem to be "fast-tracking" bills that may "adversely" impact the quality of education in New Jersey. The reform measures result from the state's effort to lower New Jersey property taxes, which rank highest in the nation.

"I believe many of the bills will be fast-tracked. I question the process," Mr. Del Sordi said.

They said that most people at the meetings did not have a chance to read the entire package of information received, and "the rush to pass the bills" suggests "plowing through" an agenda

regardless of public opinion.

"I think minds are already made up," Ms. Nelson said.

She read to the board the draft of a resolution the board intends to submit to the governor's office. The resolution states the board's concerns that the 98 recommendations from the state's four tax-reform committees would have "unintended consequences that may actually cause higher taxes for some communities, treat children unequally and adversely affect public school districts."

The recommendation that most troubles the board, members said, is the "super" county superintendent proposal, whereby each county school district would have an executive superintendent responsible for keeping school budgets under control.

Board President Thomas Russo asked, "Will they (the executive superintendents) have say-so over class size and building repairs?"

Board member Donald Parisi said that after reviewing 90 pages of the proposed legislation package, he didn't think the executive superintend

dent would have the power to force school districts to increase class size, nor did he think the "super superintendents" would concern themselves with details like building repairs.

"Based on what I'm reading, the superintendent would not be able to address the issues mentioned. I don't think we're talking about them being able to say things like 'your class size is too small. Increase your class size by four,'" Mr. Parisi said.

He said the new "super" superintendent would have great "arm-twisting powers."

Speaking of the parts of the bill he had read, Mr. Parisi said, "I see a lot of good stuff in here, but there's certainly room for improvement. What I'm regretting is that, in the name of urgency, we may be sacrificing some thoughtfulness."

He said that the board would talk to its legislators to make sure its "voice is heard," but "I don't hold out a lot of hope. I would be stunned if there are any amendments to these bills. It's clear these (public Trenton) meetings are for show."

Once Mrs. Nelson concluded her reading of the board's resolution, members approved it with minor changes. Mr. Parisi did not vote in favor of the resolution because he said he wanted the board's objection to BOE elections being moved from April to November separated from the rest of the resolution. He said he favors BOE elections being moved to November because more voters would come out to vote.

Other members said they felt the move to November would discourage good potential board members from running and that education elections would become embroiled in partisan politics.

Arguing that the move to November would increase the cost for individuals to run, Mr. Russo said, "I think people will be intimidated and won't run."

Acknowledging Mr. Parisi's point about increased voter participation, board Vice President Trip Whitehouse said he thought it was better to have votes from those concerned about education rather than general populace votes. "In April, you know the people who come out are more engaged," he said.

Mrs. Nelson told BOE members that voting on the budget would get separated if BOE elections move to November. That information swayed board member Sasha Slocum. She said she had leaned toward November elections being a good idea but had forgotten that if BOE elections move to

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## SP Board Denies Request To Park Truck in Condo Lot

By FRED T. ROSSI  
Specially Written for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times

SCOTCH PLAINS — Following an hour-long hearing that Chairman Jim Fawcett said made him "feel like I'm on 'The People's Court,'" the zoning board of adjustment denied a resident's application for a permit to park his plumbing truck in the lot of the North Avenue condominium complex where he resides.

Jon DeBaro, who rents a unit at Crestwood Commons at 2219 North Avenue, moved in last May and said he soon found several residents opposed to his oversized truck being parked in the lot or in his driveway. He told the board at its meeting last Thursday that soon after moving in, he was told by Edward McDonnell, president of the association, that the bylaws forbid a vehicle such as Mr. DeBaro's being parked on the complex's property.

When Mr. DeBaro called his landlord, she told him there was no such provision and that he was allowed to park his truck there. Mr. DeBaro also reported signs being left anonymously on his truck and front door warning him to move his vehicle.

Mr. DeBaro said that shortly afterward, he received a letter from the condominium's management company pointing out that the township zoning ordinance prohibited the overnight parking of a commercial vehicle in a residential zone.

Mr. DeBaro said he stores his plumbing supplies in a garage in Cranford, but is wary of leaving his truck there overnight due to theft concerns.

After Mr. DeBaro's testimony, Mr. Fawcett said the township ordinance that forbids commercial vehicles from



RESPONSE TIME...Fanwood participated in a Homeland Security Preparedness exercise at the Fanwood Train Station last Friday, December 8. Members of the Union County Emergency Response Team, law enforcement and other public safety professionals were present.

## Scotch Plains Public Works Director Indicted In Hunterdon County

By FRED T. ROSSI  
Specially Written for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times

SCOTCH PLAINS — Township public works director Charles Cerami was indicted in Hunterdon County on Tuesday for allegedly keeping more than \$200 from scrap metal sales during his tenure as public works director in Clinton Township.

The indictment in Superior Court in Flemington charged that Mr. Cerami sought to "obtain a benefit for himself" by keeping the proceeds from various scrap metal sales between May 2003 and September 2005 instead of returning those funds to the Clinton Township government. The Hunterdon County Prosecutor said Mr. Cerami faces a maximum fine of \$150,000, five to 10 years in jail or both.

Earlier this year, the prosecutor's office conducted an investigation of the public works department in Clinton Township, but it is unclear whether the indictment was connected to that inquiry. Mr. Cerami's departure from his former position was one in a series of sweeping personnel changes undertaken by the new mayor in Clinton Township.

Mr. Cerami succeeded Walter DiNizio as Scotch Plains' public works

director in February, after serving as director in Clinton Township since 2002. Prior to that, he was public works director in Belleville for about seven years.

During this fall's election campaign, Scotch Plains Democrats made an issue of how the township public works department was being managed under Mr. Cerami and also called attention to the earlier Hunterdon County investigation. Democrat Kevin Glover, who was elected to the

council in November, told *The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times* he did not have a comment on the indictment. "We have to let the facts come out," he said, although he added that the news "makes me somewhat concerned."

Mr. Glover said he was "curious how the administration is going to deal with it."

Attempts to reach Mr. Cerami, Township Manager Thomas Atkins and Mayor Martin Marks on Wednesday were unsuccessful.

## FW Council Honors Councilman Molenaar

By TED RITTER  
Specially Written for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times

FANWOOD — The borough council Tuesday night honored retiring Councilman Jack Molenaar, who decided to leave the governing body after a single term and return to the planning board next month.

Following a reception prior to its regular monthly meeting, the governing body approved a special resolution highlighting Mr. Molenaar's service to the borough since taking office nearly three years ago.

In addition to 11 previous years of service on the local planning board, Mr. Molenaar's activities as a councilman included chairing the Land Use and Historic Preservation Committee and the Public Safety Committee, serving as a member of the Downtown Redevelopment Agency and serving as the council's liaison to the Plainfield Area Regional Sewerage Authority, Fanwood Rescue Squad, Planning Board, Public Works and the Environmental Commission.

Council President Donna Dolce presented Mr. Molenaar with a framed replica of the borough's official seal and words of thanks from his fellow council members.

"No wonder you retired; you're exhausted," said Councilwoman Katherine Mitchell.

"I hold you in high regard, and I certainly will miss you," added Councilwoman Joan Wheeler.

Planning Board Chairman Greg Cummings said Mr. Molenaar has "been a great asset to the council and certainly the planning board over the years given his transportation and planning expertise."

"The council's loss is our gain in January," Mr. Cummings said. "I'm declaring victory and going home," said Mr. Molenaar, as he

thanked his colleagues. "My home is the planning board, and that's where I'm going. It's been a pleasure working with everyone here on the council; I've enjoyed all of it," he said.

After the meeting, Mr. Molenaar told *The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times* that his work on the ongoing downtown redevelopment effort is his most important accomplishment as a councilman.

"That was [the issue] I ran on," said Mr. Molenaar. "After going from being an idea to a plan...it's [now] under construction, and it's great to go

out and see that...and within three years; that just doesn't happen in New Jersey," he added.

In other business, Ms. Wheeler said the borough is "negotiating" with the former welfare program administrator in Scotch Plains "to possibly provide services here."

Ms. Wheeler said Fanwood residents are no longer able to access welfare programs and services at the Scotch Plains offices and, for the time being,

must now use the county's welfare program facility on Park Street in Plainfield. Residents can contact borough hall for more information.

During the meeting's public comment portion, local resident Joe Nagy asked the council to contact PSE&G to get "an explanation" of two recent power outages that affected parts of the borough.

Mr. Nagy requested that the council consider using grant money to establish a citizen's traffic committee and conduct a traffic study.

Pointing to increasing redevelopment activity, Mr. Nagy said traffic problems "are going to get more difficult before getting better."

"I know the solutions aren't all in our hands," he said. "[But] we're home," said Mr. Molenaar, as he

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"HANDS OFF OUR BENEFITS"...A bus full of teachers left Clark to join thousands in Trenton to protest proposed changes to their benefits on December 11. Some schools were closed throughout New Jersey this past Monday since thousands of teachers attended the rally.

## Union County 'At Top of List' for Pilot Admin. District

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

TRENTON — The Garden State Coalition of Schools has reported that statehouse sources have informed them that Union County is under consideration as the pilot program for a county administrative school district.

"People in the statehouse who should know are talking about this as a real possibility," said Lynne Strickland, Coalition executive director, when contacted yesterday.

"Sources are saying that Union County is at the top of the list," she said.

Ms. Strickland said based on the legislation, A-8/S-49, Union County would not be eligible because it contains two or more Abbott Districts — Elizabeth and Plainfield. She said 10 or 11 of New Jersey's 21 counties would be eligible under this provision.

Westfield Superintendent of Schools William Foley announced Tuesday night that "the legislation was changed in the middle of night (Monday) during a Democratic caucus and an Assembly vote. Union County will now be the pilot site for a county school district."

The bill states, "Upon the establishment of the county administrative school district, the boards of education of the public school districts, the board of education of any county vocational school district and the board of education of any county

special services school district may continue to exist in an advisory role."

If passed in the Senate and signed by the Governor, the legislation "would abolish local district-level administrative or supervisory personnel positions, including the district superintendent of schools."

"The county administrative board of education would instead appoint a district supervisor for each municipality in the county to oversee operations of the public schools located in the municipality...The district supervisor would work under the supervision of the chief school administrator," according to the legislation, sponsored by Sen. Bob Smith (D-Piscataway) in the Senate and Assem. John Wisniewski (D-Parlin) and Robert Gordon (D-Fairlawn) in the Assembly.

The legislation reportedly will be up for consideration in the Senate today.

Westfield BOE President Anne Riegel said in a letter to the editor: "Somewhere in the effort to reduce property taxes — a goal that seems to have been lost — legislation has emerged that punishes suburban school districts. Assembly Bill 8 calls for the Board of Chosen Freeholders to apply for participation in the pilot program to the Commissioner of Education, who will select one county to participate. Citizens of the chosen county have no opportunity to vote on the

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THE FANWOOD DEER...This unusual deer, called a "piebald," enjoys the day during Thanksgiving week underneath the power lines next to the Fanwood Nature Center.

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