



# THE SCOTCH PLAINS-FANWOOD TIMES

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'La 'le Phdraig Shona Dhuit'

## Brookside Park Plans In Discussion Phase

By DEBORAH MADISON  
Specially Written for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times

SCOTCH PLAINS — The chairman of the Scotch Plains Recreation Commission, James Walsh, assured a group of citizens at Monday night's meeting that rumors on the proposal to redevelop Brookside Park contained misinformation. The proposal was only in a preliminary discussion phase, he stated.

A group of eight Scotch Plains residents, calling themselves Friends

of Brookside Park, appeared before the Recreation Commission at their meeting to voice their concerns about rumors of a proposal to redevelop the park. A spokesman for the group, Shawnee Path resident Steven McNally, told *The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times* that the residents had numerous concerns regarding the felling of trees at the 23-acre park. They had also heard rumors that the township had plans to redevelop the park in the near future, with additional ballfields and a recreation center.

Mr. McNally said that he represented approximately 25 neighborhood residents who had met about four times to discuss the proposed plans to redevelop the park.

Mr. McNally provided *The Times* with a schematic drawing of a proposed layout for new ballfields and a recreation center, which he obtained from the township. Brookside Park lies between Scotch Plains Avenue and Hatfield Road and runs alongside Shawnee Path.

Lisa McNally told *The Times* that residents went to the park and counted over 40 mature trees that had recently been cut down in an area where the commission was proposing to construct new fields. The residents came to the meeting looking for some answers and information regarding the status of the proposed plans, Scotch Plains resident Tim Wagner said.

Mr. Walsh told the residents that those trees were close to the existing softball field and the decision to remove them was for safety reasons only.

"After the incident in Westfield (a girl who was struck and killed by a falling branch in front of Westfield High School), we decided to remove trees that were dangerously close to the ball field," Mr. Walsh told Mr. McNally and the other residents.

When asked about the status of the plans to redevelop the park, Mr. Walsh told the residents that the process to redevelop any park was lengthy and involved many years of planning. He added that the commission has discussed many potential sites for a recreation center, but that did not mean that they were anywhere near implementing a plan. He said that the commission has had preliminary discussions with the council, but that is as far as it has gone. Mr. Walsh said the layout, designed by the township's engineering consultants, had to be drawn up before discussions could even begin, but that the rumors that work had already begun was misinformation.

"We don't know what is misinformation and what isn't," Scotch Plains resident Ken Lipstein told the commission. "People got upset when they saw the cutting work in progress where soccer fields were intended."

Mr. Walsh reassured the residents

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Cathy Smith for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times

SAVE BROOKSIDE PARK...More than 100 Scotch Plains residents gathered at Brookside Park on Saturday to protest plans by the township to build a recreation center, artificial turf soccer field, baseball field and parking lot. The township recreation commission announced Monday that plans are only preliminary at this time.

## Lobbyist Arraigned Today On Stalking Charges of Assemblyman Joe Cryan

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

ELIZABETH — A woman charged with stalking State Democratic Committee Chairman, Union County Assemblyman and county under-sheriff Joseph Cryan will be arraigned today in State Superior Court in Union County.

Executive Assistant Prosecutor Robert O'Leary said Karen Golding, 36, who was arrested at a statehouse-parking garage on February 6, will appear before Judge Joan Robinson Gross. Ms. Golding has been charged with third-degree burglary and fourth-degree stalking, which "covers multiple victims," Mr. O'Leary said.

If convicted, she faces five years for the burglary charge or a probation and 18 months on the stalking allegation. The case is still under investigation.

Mr. O'Leary said the stalking charges involved a "series of threatening letters and phone calls to several different victims," including newly sworn head of state Democratic Committee, Union County Under-sheriff and State Assemblyman Mr. Cryan, of Union Township.

Mr. O'Leary said two detectives from the Union County Special Prosecutions Unit arrested Ms. Golding after she was observed allegedly breaking into Mr. Cryan's county-issued car. He said Union County was the lead investigative unit due to the fact at least some of the stalking charges occurred in the county. He said the state police, who have jurisdiction over the statehouse, were contacted afterwards about the arrest.

Steve Jones, a state police spokesman, said state police have jurisdiction over certain state buildings but not the parking garage where the ar-

rest was made.

Ms. Golding appeared before Superior Court Judge John Triarsi, who set bail at \$5,000. Mr. O'Leary said Ms. Golding contacted Governor Jon Corzine, who had someone pay her bail. Ms. Golding paid the bail and was released the same day. Ms. Golding worked on Governor Corzine's 2000 U.S. Senate campaign.

*The Westfield Leader* and *The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times* requested a copy of the police report of the Golding arrest. Mr. O'Leary responded back in an e-mail that "police reports are exempt and not public record under OPRA (Open Public Records Act)." He later said in a phone interview that there was no report. "We couldn't give that out even if we had one" due to departmental procedure.

Governor Corzine, in a statement, said he agreed to "loan \$5,000 to Karen Golding" to pay her bail.

"He agreed to the loan after he spoke to a law enforcement official and received assurance she was not a danger to herself or anyone else," according to a statement released by the governor's communications staff.

Scott Kisch, a former aide to Governor Corzine who is employed by the New Jersey Commerce, Economic Growth & Tourism Commission, brought the money to Ms. Golding.

"I reacted as a human being responding to someone in need. I have a friendly relationship with her family and she worked on my campaign. However, in light of my position as governor, I realize this was a mistake. I did not adequately weigh the impact this situation could have on my position as a public official and the fact that it could divert attention from the important issues facing the state," the governor said.

State Republicans pounced on the governor's decision to pay the bail. GOP State Chairman Tom Wilson released the following statement:

"Jon Corzine's payment of bail money for Karen Golding doesn't just reek of bad judgment and conflicts of interest but raises the specter that Governor Corzine's actions were intended to prevent something more damaging from coming to light. Why else would a sitting governor bail-out a lobbyist?"

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## Council Addresses Vandalism On Canterbury Drive

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

SCOTCH PLAINS — Mayor Martin Marks promised a township resident that he will meet with the police department about acts of vandalism that have occurred recently on a street above Route 22 at the base of the Watchung Reservation.

At the town council's meeting on Tuesday evening, Canterbury Drive resident Lorette Burstein spoke to the council about repeated incidents of vandalism to cars parked on her street. She said her family's cars have been struck several times and that neighbors' cars have also been targeted.

Mrs. Burstein said she suspected that the vandals enter Canterbury Drive from Glenside Avenue, drive down her street and throw bottles and other objects out of car windows before leaving via Dickens Lane, which leads to westbound Route 22.

She told the council that in the four

years that she has lived in her home, she has never seen a police car in her neighborhood and asked the mayor to look into the possibility of using an unmarked police car in an effort to apprehend the vandals.

The mayor told her he would speak to police officials and said that an earlier, similar vandalism spree in the Berwyck Chase neighborhood has been stopped through police efforts.

Councilwoman Paulette Coronato told Mrs. Burstein that those responsible for the earlier vandalism were forced to pay restitution to the victims.

In other business, the council voted to renew its participation in the Union County Sheriff's S.L.A.P. (Sheriff's Labor Assistance Program) initiative, which makes non-violent offenders available to municipalities to perform jobs such as litter pick-up and light stream clean up.

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## BOE OKs Tentative \$67.5 Mil. Budget

By MARIA WOEHRE  
Specially Written for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times

SCOTCH PLAINS — With word still pending on state aid, the Scotch Plains-Fanwood Board of Education adopted a tentative 2006-2007 school budget by a 7-1 vote last Thursday.

BOE Business Administrator Anthony Del Sordi outlined the \$67,533,630 budget, which represents an increase of \$448,942 over last year. The proposed tax levy of \$64,627.481 is up \$5,964.687 over last year.

The budget factor includes some "breathing room," most likely to compensate in case this year there is less state funding, Mr. Del Sordi said. "The maximum amount of money the budget can increase by is 4.04 percent. We could spend an additional \$1.5 million but in order to do that we would have to raise taxes," Mr. Del Sordi said.

The total property tax levy is projected at \$64,627.481 with Scotch Plains residents providing 78 percent of that sum and Fanwood residents paying 22 percent.

"The tax impact for the average home in Scotch Plains is \$306 per year and for a Fanwood resident it is \$279 (over last year)," Mr. Del Sordi said. "This was a difficult budget because we received no direction from the state prior to Friday," Mr. Del Sordi explained. He said the district based state aid on the \$4,116,794 figure given to

the district for the last four years.

"This year there is no guarantee that we will receive this amount of money," he explained.

If Scotch Plains receives less than the anticipated figure, he said the district would either increase the proposed school tax levy further or lower the budget increase.

"The big cost drivers are salary increases, benefits and tuition increases for out-of-district students," said Mr. Del Sordi. "The state would be giving us money to meet those needs."

This year's budget takes \$1,184,400 into account for maintenance and projects such as paving the driveway of Brunner School, improving McGinn School's rear walkways, and repairing the high school's roof and locker room. In the past, 40 percent of maintenance projects have been covered by state aid, according to Mr. Del Sordi.

"We are very frustrated that we have not had an increase in state aid in four years," BOE President Linda Nelson said. "The lack of state aid is driving the budget between the two main issues of routine maintenance and class size."

The 2006-2007 budget includes a 12 percent hike in medical benefits and a 10 percent increase in dental premiums. Money set aside for raises to teachers' salaries will be increased

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## FW Council

### To Introduce Budget

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

FANWOOD — Mayor Colleen Mahr and the borough council will introduce the proposed municipal budget next week, the mayor announced during the council's regular meeting on Tuesday night.

She said the new budget proposal, drafted over a series of special budget meetings held during the past few months, will be unveiled at a Borough Hall meeting on March 22 at 7:30 p.m.

"An introduced budget is not a final, adopted budget," said Mayor Mahr,

noting that additional review and adjustments will be necessary before the new spending plan is finalized and adopted sometime this spring.

She also said that the borough plans to apply for an "extraordinary municipal aid" program in an effort to address some of the fiscal challenges discussed by the mayor and council at the recent budget meetings. These include increased pension and insurance costs, higher utility bills and expenses incurred as a result of state-mandated programs, among others.

"We applied for this (municipal aid program) two years ago, and we were quite successful," she said. She also pointed out that the mayor and council only have the ability to determine about one-fifth of the local tax levy.

"We will do what we have to do, and that is to work hard for you," said Mayor Mahr of the difficult process of finalizing the municipal budget.

In other business, Councilman Jack Molenaar reported that work is nearing completion on a South Avenue Corridor study, which will help to chart the area's redevelopment.

He said the next in a series of "visioning sessions" will be held on March 30 at the Forest Road Park complex. "We want to make sure this is your plan for the South Avenue Corridor. We've had some good input (from residents), but we could always use more."

The council also held a first reading on an ordinance that would change the borough code to extend domestic partner benefits, including pension benefits and rights, to municipal employees. Council President Donna Dolce explained that the measure, "mirrors those being adopted by the state and county." A public hearing on this ordinance is set for April 11, at Borough Hall.

The council adopted an emergency-management resolution that sets up a local version of the National Incident Management System (NIMS). Councilman Molenaar said that NIMS "started out as a homeland security issue" and requires all first responders to go through specialized training.

Councilman Joseph Higgins, during a report on recreation and community services, pointed out a concern

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## Fanwood Residents Discuss Boro's Redevelopment Plans

By DEBORAH MADISON  
Specially Written for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times

FANWOOD — The second community visioning session, discussing the Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) program, was held at Forest Road Park's recreation building last Thursday night.

Organized by the Department of Smart Growth, a division of the New Jersey Department of Community Affairs, in conjunction with the Fanwood Borough Council, the TDR workshop allowed residents and business owners to brainstorm ideas regarding the redevelopment of the South Avenue corridor.

A question-and-answer-session regarding the implementation of the proposed TDR program was presented by Mayor Colleen Mahr and consultants from the state's Office of Smart Growth.

Consultants for the TDR program were paid through a \$160,000 grant from the Office of Smart Growth. This was the fifth public presentation hosted by that office and the borough.

As explained by professional planning consultant Stan Slahetka, TDR is the transfer of development potential from one piece of property to another. A TDR program permits developers, in a receiving zone, to purchase TDR credits from property owners in a sending zone. Property owners in the sending zone agree to place development restrictions on their properties in order to preserve

the property's historical integrity.

The property developers in the receiving zone are afforded certain development incentives for purchasing the credits. The precise incentives for each property owner are still being decided on by the borough and the Office of Smart Growth.

Mayor Mahr told *The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times* that the borough expects to have those details worked out by the summer.

The proposed redevelopment area runs along South Avenue to the south of the Fanwood Train Station and downtown north of Martine Avenue, between South and LaGrande Avenue. It does not include the borough's downtown redevelopment area and it does not include residential properties on South Avenue.

After a short presentation, the audience broke up into small groups to discuss their visions for the revitalization of this area. The participants made lists of the types of businesses and architectural styles they would like to see developed, as well as those not wanted.

Mayor Mahr emphasized that the TDR program did not include any plans to invoke eminent domain and that the TDR program was completely voluntary.

Fanwood was one of five municipalities in New Jersey selected to participate in the TDR program. It is the only municipality to consider

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Debbie Madison for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times

FANWOOD'S FUTURE...Fanwood residents review a map of the Fanwood TDR (Transfer of Development Rights) map at the March 9 TDR visioning session. At right is Borough Councilwoman Joan Wheeler.

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