

Mandated Expenses Rise \$1.1 Million for SP Budget

By FRED T. ROSSI

Specialty Written for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times

SCOTCH PLAINS — Township Manager Thomas Atkins said on Tuesday that fixed non-discretionary budget increases for 2007 already add up to \$1.1 million, a level he termed "a little worse than we've faced in recent years."

Mr. Atkins told the township council at its conference meeting that he will submit his executive budget proposals to members by Friday, February 2. He listed nine separate areas subject to "significant" expenditure increases mandated by contracts, state mandates and other means.

Contributions to the police and fire pension system will increase by \$215,509 this year, while payments to the public employees retirement system will be \$75,905 higher than in 2006. Fees paid to the Rahway Valley Sewerage Authority will rise \$144,000 this year and will increase "sharply" in the following two or three years before leveling off. State-mandated funding for the township's library will increase nearly \$150,000.

Health insurance premiums for township employees will go up by \$131,067. Police salaries and wages will increase by \$221,000 under the terms of the existing contract. Gasoline costs are projected to increase

by \$70,000 over last year, while utilities expenses will rise by \$21,000.

Prior to formal introduction of the 2007 municipal spending plan, the council is expected to hold a series of budget meetings in February and March to allow members to review Mr. Atkins' spending proposals. The \$1.106 million increase in mandated costs detailed by the township manager on Tuesday represents an 11-tax-point increase in appropriations over last year's \$22.01-million municipal budget, without consideration of township revenues.

Mr. Atkins told the council that "your revenue picture is going to be better than your spending picture," even though he is assuming that state aid will be flat again this year, he said.

Mr. Atkins said he was not optimistic that lawmakers in Trenton would enact any meaningful property tax reform solutions. He said proposals for tax credits and a cap on municipal property tax increases, and certain caveats related to those two ideas, would if enacted prove to be "damaging" to township residents. He termed action in Trenton as "merely talk," saying state officials may feel the "need to do something politically this year," when all 120 members of the Legislature are up for re-election. "They feel they really need to give the appearance of doing something."

In other business, renovations to the municipal building should be completed by June, according to the project's architect, who told the council that the \$3.8-million undertaking is so far being done at or under budget. Architect Tom Potter, along with consultant Walter DiNizo, provided an update on the progress so far since work commenced last fall.

Mr. DiNizo said a new steel roof truss will soon be ready for installation and that this will require the building to be closed for two or three days. He mentioned the weekend of February 16 to 19, which is a holiday weekend, as a possible time for the installation of the truss.

The council is expected to approve a \$30,000 change order so that the front porch and steps of the 33-year-old building can be replaced. The \$30,000 expenditure for the front porch and steps will come out of a \$146,000 contingency included in the project's \$3.8-million budget.

Councilman Kevin Glover asked why this wasn't part of the original budget and whether future unforeseen cost increases were in the offing. "I am concerned whether there will be other discretionary decisions that we will have to make," he said.

When Mr. Potter mentioned the sidewalk plaza between the front of the building and Park Avenue as another possible area for improvement, Mr. Glover said, "If there are more things, we should get a value [for them] now rather than later."

Mr. Potter and Mr. DiNizo agreed to submit to the council frequent written reports updating members on the progress of the project, which entails replacing the building's roof and the heating and air-conditioning system, adding a second floor above the police station and making improvements to the building's facade.

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Fred K. Lecomte for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times
NOT ENOUGH...Blue Devils senior guard Mike Venezia takes a foul shot at Thursday's game against the Scotch Plains-Fanwood Raiders. He scored 19 points, but the Raiders prevailed, 63-57, in double overtime.



Fred K. Lecomte for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times
ALL SMILES...The Scotch Plains-Fanwood High School cheerleaders are all smiles at the Raiders boys' basketball win over the Westfield Blue Devils, 63-57, in double overtime last Thursday.

WF Police Detective Alleges Sex. Harassment by Ex-Chief

By PAUL J. PEYTON

Specialty Written for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times

WESTFIELD — A Westfield police detective has filed a sexual harassment lawsuit against the town, the Westfield Police Department (WPD) and former police chief Bernard Tracy. The detective, Sandra Chambers of Plainfield, has been employed by the WPD since 1995.

The six-count lawsuit, served on Westfield on December 14, alleges that "during a two-year period, Chief Tracy regularly called Detective Chambers at home, during non-working hours and late into the evening" and that Mr. Tracy invited Detective Chambers "to call him on his personal cell phone."

Mr. Tracy retired from the department in September 2005 and accepted a job with the Linden Public Schools as a school security officer.

Detective Chambers admitted that she and Mr. Tracy had been friends, and that then-Chief Tracy invited her to attend a convention in 2003 with him in Washington, D.C., paid for by the police department.

"While at the convention, Detective Chambers worked very hard to make contacts that would benefit the Westfield Police Department," Detective Chambers alleges in the suit. "While at the convention, Chief Tracy commented to Detective Chambers and others that she was not spending enough time with him, and he felt that she had 'abandoned' him."

The detective alleges that the former chief "intimated that he was hopeful that while they were at the convention, he and Detective Chambers could become even better friends."

SP Deer Reduction

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

program would "get done more quickly," Mr. Atkins told the township council last month. That option allows as many deer to be eliminated as is authorized by a permit, so theoretically a reduction program could be accomplished in as little as a day or two.

The deer problem on the south side of Scotch Plains has increased in recent years as the growing deer population, seeking food and shelter in a more-crowded reservation, has moved into residential areas and, in the process, crossed busy local roads. Council members and southside residents have told of seeing "numerous" deer in their backyards, and there have been a number of incidents where cars have hit and killed deer that were crossing area streets.

Regardless of how the deer herd is reduced, Mr. Atkins earlier expressed his belief that, "if you do it for several more years, you'll see more tangible, quantifiable reductions in the deer overpopulation."

Fanwood Council

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unteer of the Month.

Mayor Mahr said Mr. Grover's many local volunteer activities include maintaining the community sign board on Martine Avenue, playing the part of Santa during the borough's main holiday celebration and working with the Lions Club.

"You really exemplify everything that it takes to be a good Fanwoodian," the mayor told Mr. Grover.

"I guess I just do what I'm expected to do," he responded. "I just do my best."

Susan Brandt McCrea, Esq.

Attorney At Law

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POLICE BLOTTER

Scotch Plains

Thursday, January 4, a student at Scotch Plains-Fanwood High School reported the theft of her iPod from her locker.

Friday, January 5, a resident of Fanwood reported that, while she was at her gym, her cellular telephone was removed from her locker. The value of the telephone was \$235.

Saturday, January 6, a student at the Union County Vocational-Technical Schools reported the theft of his book bag from his locker. The bag contained several hundred dollars in cash, police said.

Saturday, January 6, one or more unidentified individuals sprayed graffiti on a building on Route 22. The damage was valued at approximately \$150.

Sunday, January 7, a resident of Country Club Lane reported being the victim of criminal mischief. According to police, the tires on his motor vehicle were slashed while the vehicle was parked in the driveway. The tires were valued at approximately \$200, police said.

Fanwood

Wednesday, January 3, Erika K. McFarlane, 34, of Cranford was arrested following a motor vehicle stop on South Avenue, which revealed an outstanding Clifton warrant. She posted bail and was released.

Friday, January 5, Preston I. Fulford, 34, of Stewartville was arrested following a motor vehicle stop on North Avenue on outstanding warrants out of Trenton and Stewartville. While being taken into custody, the suspect allegedly resisted arrest and assaulted two police officers, police said. He subsequently was charged with two counts of assault and resisting arrest. Bail was set at \$40,000.

Friday, January 5, Efrain Mendoza, 32, of Elizabeth was arrested following a field investigation on an outstanding New Brunswick warrant. According to police, the suspect also was linked to a hit-and-run accident. The suspect posted bail and was released.

Tuesday, January 9, Claudia Morales-Morin, 28, of Union was arrested on an outstanding Westfield warrant following a motor vehicle stop on Terrill Road. She posted bail and was released, police said.

Tuesday, January 9, Jose O. Cintron, 24, of Newark was arrested on an outstanding Newark warrant after a motor vehicle stop on Martine Avenue. He also was charged with providing police with false information, authorities said. Cintron posted the \$500 bail and was released, police said.

Paterson Calls GW Mayor, Borough Council 'Thugs'

By KATHY MARQUES

Specialty Written for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times

GARWOOD — A night that ended with a resident calling the mayor and borough council "thugs" and "criminals" concerning the timing of a letter sent about St. Anne's school began with an update on the North Avenue Mews project.

Borough attorney Robert Renaud opened the first council session of the year Tuesday night by stating that he will meet with developers of the Mews next week to go over documents.

"I have been meeting with them bi-monthly, and they have been cooperative in regards to keeping up with needed paperwork," Mr. Renaud said.

In other matters, Councilman Walter Tucker, chairman of the Public Health and Safety Committee, spoke about newly appointed patrolman, Officer David Perrotta.

Mr. Tucker noted that the officer is "adjusting well to the department and is on his way to completing his training."

Mr. Tucker spoke about the new Home Safety Inspection Program, which allows residents to have a home-safety evaluation conducted by a member of the police department. The officer would make recommendations on how to make the home safer.

Sergeant Michael Wilson, Police Officer Douglas Stoffer and dispatcher John Drone created the program, Mr. Tucker said. The Garwood PBA (No. 117) also donated high-efficiency light bulbs to seniors in order to alleviate the cost of leaving a conventional light bulb on at night, dispatcher Drone told *The Westfield Leader* Wednesday morning.

Resident Bruce Paterson, during public comment, said he had heard from several residents that they were "threatened" by council members if they didn't remove his election sign from their lawns. Mr. Paterson is the Independent candidate in Garwood who lost the mayoral race to Mayor McCarthy in November.

Mr. Paterson also said he heard from someone that a butcher shop owner was told by a government official to not circulate his "TREE" newsletter.

While speaking at the podium, Mayor McCarthy's wife, Debbie, addressed Mr. Paterson, saying that she used to go to the butcher shop, but did not any longer. She denied telling anyone not to distribute his newsletter.

"I don't tell anyone who to vote for," she said. "I don't tell anyone where to shop. I chose to stop shopping there for personal reasons; it had nothing to do with politics. It's my personal choice to shop where I want, and had nothing to do with the election."

Wednesday, January 10, Melody C. Mendez, 21, of Linden was taken into police headquarters on suspicion of driving while intoxicated after a motor vehicle stop. She subsequently was charged with careless driving, police said. She was released to a responsible adult.

Westfield

Sunday, December 31, after being arrested on a shoplifting charge at a North Avenue store, Rowland Adeyemo, 22, of Scotch Plains was held on open warrants from Newark, for \$300, and Belmar, for \$800, until he posted bail.

Sunday, December 31, Pete Septynski, 45, of Westfield was arrested and charged with driving while intoxicated after being stopped for a motor vehicle violation at West Broad Street and Rahway Avenue. He later was released to a responsible individual.

Tuesday, January 2, a general contractor renovating a residence on the 60 block of Nomahegan Drive reported the theft of several pieces of equipment from the premises, including a table saw, a hammer drill, a compound miter saw and a circular saw. The total value of the missing property is \$1,077. There were no signs of forced entry into the residence.

Tuesday, January 2, a resident of the 10 block of Tudor Oval reported the theft of two iPods from within her home. The missing property is valued at \$300. There were no signs of forced entry into the residence.

Wednesday, January 3, Daniel Campos, 21, of Roselle was arrested at South Avenue/Crossway Place on two outstanding motor vehicle warrants issued by Watchung. He was released after posting a total of \$380 bail.

Thursday, January 4, a resident of the 400 block of Highland Avenue reported that someone damaged his garage by attempting to set it on fire.

Thursday, January 4, a resident of the 700 block of Austin Street reported the theft of a Nokia camera and a Motorola cellular telephone from the pocket of a jacket left unattended during a school choral concert. The missing property is valued at approximately \$550.

Saturday, January 6, Gary A. Healey, 41, of Westfield was arrested on Mountain Avenue on an outstanding criminal warrant issued by Garwood. He was released after posting \$560 cash bail.

Sunday, January 7, Hagen A. Lewis, 37, of Plainfield posted \$100 bail at Westfield police headquarters on a traffic warrant issued by the Westfield Municipal Court.

Mr. Paterson also questioned the mayor on sending a letter out to constituents a few weeks before election time about residents' concerns of James Ward and the St. Anne's School proposal.

He said, "You (Mayor McCarthy) sent the letter out on government (council) letterhead, but it read like it was all about you, that you were the one who was going to try to address the concerns of the residents. I am concerned with the timing of the letter — weeks before the election — and don't agree with your tactics."

Mr. Paterson called the mayor and council "thugs" and "criminals," adding, "New Jersey is the laughingstock of the country, and there are problems that need to be fixed that aren't."

The mayor responded that the timing of the letter had nothing to do with the election.

"I would've sent the letter to the residents in September or October," he responded. "I was letting the residents know that I am aware of their concerns. It's not my fault (that) the timing of the Mews development and issues (were) around election time. I had nothing to do with that."

In other news, Mr. Tucker, chairperson of the library committee, spoke about Toddler Story Time, which will be held by the Garwood Free Public Library, beginning on Wednesday, January 10, at 10:30 a.m. It will run for eight weeks. He also spoke about how circulation increased.

"It was 11,267 for 2006, exceeding the goal of 10,000. This figure was reached with just eight months of actual operation of the library," he said.

Councilman Charles Lombardo, chairperson of the streets and roads committee, said the Department of Public Works would collect Christmas trees every Wednesday in the month of January.

Mr. Tucker mentioned that former resident Tom Perotta and his movie *Little Children* has been nominated for a Golden Globe Award for Best Motion Picture-Drama.

Mr. Perotta is the author of "Little Children," "Joe College," "Election," "The Wishbones" and "Bad Haircut."

The finance committee will meet next month to work on the 2007 budget, said re-appointed Councilwoman Kathleen Villaggio, chairperson of the finance committee.

In other business, Mr. Paterson, member of the celebrations committee, mentioned the winners of the Holiday House decorating contest. First place went to 249 Fourth Avenue, second place to 315 Hickory Avenue, third place to 205 Third Avenue and an honorable mention to 231 Spruce Avenue.

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