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SIXTY CENTS

FW Council Reviews Capital Budget; DOT Officials to Tour South Ave.

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

FANWOOD — On Tuesday night, Mayor Colleen Mahr and the borough council discussed a variety of capital projects at their monthly agenda meeting.

Borough Engineer Joseph Pryor said a public meeting would be held Tuesday, June 19, at 7:30 p.m. in the Forest Road Park building to update residents about planned drainage improvements in the Glenwood/Tillotson and LaGrande/Beech neighborhoods.

Mr. Pryor said the improvements would address longstanding flooding issues along those roads. "These aren't small projects," he added.

Borough Chief Financial Officer Fred Tomkins reported that efforts continue to finalize the new capital budget. He briefed the governing body about the "two pieces" of the capital spending plan: one piece containing

capital improvement projects managed by the borough engineer's office (such as the Helen Street project), and the other piece to be approved collectively by the county.

Borough officials also discussed plans to install two temporary "trash castles" — at an estimated cost of about \$6,000 each — in the parking area behind the businesses along Martine Avenue.

In leading the discussion on the issue, Mayor Mahr referenced "a never-ending saga" of trying to contain and improve the appearance of trash dumpsters in the parking lot.

Mr. Pryor said the current proposal calls for the trash containment areas to be constructed of "board-on-board" fencing "with a very heavy gate" to contain two dumpsters, but he suggested that three parking spaces, rather than two, should be allowed for each structure.

Mr. Pryor said Requests for Proposals (RFPs) have been sent out to seven fence contractors asking for additional "feedback." The proposals are due back to the borough by Friday, June 15.

Borough officials discussed whether changing the design or materials could reduce costs.

"Chances are, we will change the elaborateness of this," Mayor Mahr said.

Eventually, the temporary "trash castles" will be replaced with permanent dumpster containment structures as the Martine Avenue business district's facelift is completed.

In other business, Mayor Mahr said she and other borough officials plan to join representatives from the State Department of Transportation (NJDOT) at 1:30 p.m. this afternoon for a "walking tour" of the South Avenue corridor. The mayor said NJDOT would assist the borough in evaluating traffic signals, crosswalks and intersections "in light of the new development" that is taking place along the corridor.

Officials also said the county has authorized the borough to mail out estimated tax bills for the third quarter because the municipal budget has not been finalized.

The borough is waiting to finalize the budget until it receives a decision on its application for "extraordinary municipal aid" from the state. Officials said word should come shortly after the state budget is approved as expected by the end of the month.

In the meantime, in order to keep the borough running, estimated tax bills will be prepared and mailed to taxpayers. After the municipal budget is adopted, actual bills will be calculated and sent out, with the difference added or subtracted from the fourth-quarter bills, officials said.

Mayor Mahr said she plans to tape a public service announcement to air on the local cable television station, TV-35, "to keep the confusion to a minimum." In addition, the mayor said a special notice would be included with the tax bills that are mailed out.

Mr. Tomkins discussed the merits of a proposed upgrading of the borough's bookkeeping software system.

He said the current system has been in place since the early 1980s, "hasn't

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MAGICAL MOMENTS AND MEMORIES... Scotch Plains-Fanwood High School student John Birnbaum carries prom date Kristen Barry to an awaiting chariot for an evening filled with happy memories.



GUYS AND DOLLS STEPPING OUT IN STYLE... Scotch Plains-Fanwood High School students pose for a photo before setting off for their senior prom at the Pines Manor in Edison on Friday night. Pictured from left are: Allie Zazzali, Jeff Alisio, Francesco DeLuca, Alexandra Santangelo, Allie Hambleton and Robert Laraway. See additional prom photos at timesnj.com/photos.

'Mad Hatter' Bank Robber Extends Streak to 17 With Montclair Heist

By ALLISON GIBBONS
Specially Written for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times

AREA — With another robbery last Friday in Montclair, the robber dubbed the "Mad Hatter" has extended his disappearing act.

Since September 2006, the Mad Hatter has hit 17 banks up and down Route 124, ranging from Morris to Union Counties. Thus far, police have been baffled by his ability to hide in plain sight, with only grainy images of the suspect captured on security cameras.

While he has hit more than eight banks in Union County, including ones in Springfield and Union, the Mad Hatter has yet to strike in Scotch Plains or Fanwood.

Described as a white, middle-aged

man in his 40s or 50s, he seems to prefer Commerce Banks — 13 of the 17 robberies have occurred at these branches. The Mad Hatter earned his moniker from his affinity for hats. During every robbery he has worn a different one, ranging from a Yankees baseball cap to a fisherman's hat.

Westfield Police Department (WPD) officials said they are taking

extra measures to make sure the Mad Hatter does not strike in Westfield. Along with extra patrols outside of the Commerce Bank on 560 North Avenue, East, Police Chief John Parizeau said plainclothes detectives may be inside the bank at various times.

"We are giving the Commerce extra attention just because of this

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Freeholders OK Contract For Assistant Prosecutors

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

ELIZABETH — Last week the Union County Board of Chosen Freeholders approved a new five-year contract, which calls for a 14-percent hike in salaries over the length of the contract, for the county's 59 assistant prosecutors. The agreement is retroactive to January 1, 2006.

"We had a very hard fought negotiation," said Juan Fernandez, the assistant prosecutors' attorney during negotiations. He said county officials were concerned taxpayers could not afford the contract package sought by the assistant prosecutors.

"In the end it worked out very well for both parties," he said, adding that prosecutors will now likely stay with the county prosecutor's office.

Under the agreement, assistant prosecutors will receive a 4-percent retroactive pay increase to January 1, 2006, no increase this year or in 2008 and a 5-percent increase effective January 1, 2009, and again on January 1, 2010.

The board also approved a provision in the contract that assistant prosecutors, in exchange for the zero percent increases, will receive lifetime benefits in the form of a county subsidy to go along with their federal Medicare benefits. They are the first non-law enforcement union to seek lifetime health benefits.

"This would be considered a funded liability," said Joseph Salemme, director of labor management relations for

the county, noting that money saved from zero-percent increases this year and next year would be put towards benefits for retirees.

He said one change from previous contracts is a shift from a salary guide to an annual increment system, effective this year.

In the second through fifth years of the contract, assistant prosecutors will receive increases of \$2,500 for members earning \$85,000 or less; \$2,000 for those with salaries ranging from \$85,001 to \$100,000, and \$1,000 for Union members paid between \$100,001 and \$115,000. Assistant prosecutors paid more than \$115,001 will not receive annual increment increases.

Mr. Salemme said the previous salary guide structure "was a nightmare to administer." The increment, Mr. Salemme said, will increase the previous contract by \$25,000.

Likewise, Mr. Fernandez said annual increments make a "fairer system." He said, "The (old) system was so complicated" that prosecutors could move up multiple times on the salary scale in a given year. The new system will allow all assistant prosecutors to move up once in salary each year until they reach maximum pay.

In addition to annual increment increases across the board, assistant prosecutors who are on-call for cases concerning domestic violence and child abuse/sex assault and who work

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GOP Write-Ins Win Ballot Positions for Nov. Elections

By JENNA NIERSTEDT
Specially Written for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times

AREA — Tuesday's state, county and municipal primary elections in Union County state legislative districts 20, 21 and 22 produced fairly expected results in the Democratic and Republican party lines, as most races ran without competitive slates. Voter turnout hit 13.54 percent, according to the Union County Clerk's website, in part because so many of the races featured unchallenged candidates.

District 22, which includes parts of Union and Middlesex Counties, however, included a Republican write-in campaign for the vacant State Senate and General Assembly seats. Under state law, if no candidate filed by the April 9 deadline, the primary candidate who receives at least 100 votes becomes the official candidate to run for the party in the general election in November.

State Senate write-in candidate Rose McConnell, a former North Plainfield councilwoman, became the official Republican candidate following the primary. In the November election, Ms. McConnell will face Democratic incumbent Nicholas Scutari of Linden, who received about 80 percent of the Democratic vote to

challenger William Campbell's 19.86 percent, according to the Union County Clerk's website.

The General Assembly write-in candidate, Republican activist Robert Gatto of North Plainfield, took the vacancy on Republican fall ticket with 234 votes and will run alongside Bryan Des Rochers against incumbent Democrat Linda Stender of Fanwood and Jerry Green of Plainfield.

"They (write-in candidates) got that number (100 tallies) and a lot more," said William McClintock, chairman of the Scotch Plains Republican Township Committee.

In district 20, incumbent Democratic Senator Ray Lesniak of Elizabeth and Republican Linda Gagliano, a member of the Union Township Board of Education, ran unopposed to win nods from their respective parties for the State Senate race. Assemblymen Neil Cohen of Roselle and Joe Cryan of Union are the Democratic General Assembly candidates for November and will not face any Republican challengers, as no GOP candidates filed for the seats.

Because the State Senate and General Assembly candidates in district 21 ran unopposed, all primary candi-

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THANK YOU... Fanwood Environmental Commission Chairman Gary Szelc, right, presents Dean Talcott with a plaque in recognition of his service to the commission. Mr. Talcott recently resigned from the commission after 14 years of service, including nine years as commission chairman. Mr. Talcott continues to serve as the caretaker of the Fanwood Nature Center, a role he has held for the past 13 years.



BUS AGAINST BUSH... New Jersey Democratic organizations bring a bus to Edison on May 30 to protest the visit of President George W. Bush. See story on the President's visit on page 2.

Planning Bd. OKs Mixed-Use Building at Union Ave., Rt. 22

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

SCOTCH PLAINS — The township's planning board last week gave unanimous approval to an application to build a mixed-use building on westbound Route 22.

Angela Rascionato will raze three old houses on three separate lots at 1935, 1941 and 1945 Route 22 West, consolidate the lots into one lot and build a two-story mixed-use building that will contain office and retail space on the ground floor and three apartments on the second floor.

Planning board member Robert LaCosta told *The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times* that the apartments would be located directly on the highway.

There is no indication yet what types of businesses might occupy the ground floor spaces, although Mr. LaCosta noted that, given the "compact" size of the new building, which

will be located at the corner of Route 22 and Union Avenue, large-scale tenants are unlikely.

The board granted six variances as part of its approval of the application. The newly-consolidated lot will be 17,970 square feet in size while local requirements mandate a minimum 20,000-square-foot lot in the B-3 zone. The board also approved front- and rear-yard setback variances. A variance for parking spaces was also approved, with 14 spaces being allowed when a minimum of 18 spaces are required.

The board also waived a requirement that the new building include space for loading and unloading trucks since the applicant said such space would not be needed.

The board has no meetings scheduled for this month, and board members said it is possible that meetings will not resume until after Labor Day.

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FIFTY YEARS... Bob Kruthers recalls events over his decades of service with the Fanwood Rescue Squad during a luncheon honoring him and Bill Crosby for their 50 years with the squad. See story on page 12.