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State of New Jersey 2007 Public Education Funds for Union County Towns

Town	State Funds 07	\$/Resident	Change %	Population	Households	Families
BH	\$1,847,951	\$138	\$53,824 3%	13,407	4,479	3,717
Clark	\$1,596,863	\$109	\$46,511 3%	14,597	5,637	4,126
Cranford	\$2,823,947	\$125	\$82,251 3%	22,578	8,397	6,222
Elizabeth	\$267,048,685	\$2,215	(\$1,486,604) -1%	120,568	40,482	28,175
Garwood	\$549,082	\$132	\$15,993 3%	4,153	1,731	1,125
Hillside	\$16,123,784	\$741	\$1,472,982 10%	21,747	7,161	5,578
Kenilworth	\$2,023,612	\$264	\$58,940 3%	7,675	2,854	2,117
Linden	\$18,977,744	\$482	\$2,080,687 12%	39,394	15,052	10,084
MS	\$659,224	\$100	\$19,201 3%	6,602	2,434	1,925
NP	\$1,427,302	\$120	\$41,572 3%	11,907	4,404	3,307
Plainfield	\$99,967,767	\$2,090	\$0 0%	47,829	15,137	10,898
Rahway	\$16,910,024	\$638	\$1,629,431 11%	26,500	10,028	6,728
Roselle	\$18,942,594	\$890	\$1,542,714 9%	21,274	7,520	5,226
Roselle Pk	\$8,448,977	\$636	\$498,757 6%	13,281	5,137	3,416
SP-F	\$4,240,298	\$142	\$123,504 3%	29906	10923	8349
Springfield	\$1,543,753	\$107	\$44,964 3%	14,429	6,001	4,014
Summit	\$2,541,642	\$120	\$74,028 3%	21,131	7,897	5,606
Vo-Tech	\$3,417,154		\$141,762 4%			
Union	\$25,210,716	\$463	\$2,110,090 9%	54,405	19,534	14,162
Westfield	\$4,700,587	\$159	\$136,910 3%	29,644	10,622	8,178
Winfield	\$1,589,905	\$1,050	\$85,322 6%	1,514	694	394

Notes: BH=Berkeley Heights; MS=Mountainside; NP=New Providence; SP-F= Scotch Plains-Fanwood. The Westfield 2006 budget is about \$80,000,000 of which 5.7% is funded by the state and most of the remainder is funded by local property taxes. There are about 6000 students in Westfield where public education costs about \$13,400/student; \$9,800/family; \$2,700/person. The Scotch Plains-Fanwood 2006 budget is about \$71,000,000 of which 5.8% is funded by the state and most of the remainder is funded by local property taxes. There are about 5300 students in SP-F where public education costs about \$13,400/student; \$8,500/family; \$2,400/person. Demographics is per 2000 census.

Property Taxes, There's a Lot to be Said in Westfield

By Sal Caruana
Westfield Town Councilman
Editor's Note: The following is the first of a three-part series on Westfield property taxes.

In 2006, the average residence in Westfield paid approximately \$10,935 in total property taxes. Some other towns like Westfield, which also do not have industry to help share the tax burden, compared as follows: Livingston, \$10,073; Montclair, \$13,547; Short Hills, \$16,511, and Chatham, \$9,850. Even with a modest amount of industry, the average property tax bill in Summit was \$12,566.

The Town of Westfield has the responsibility to collect the property tax on behalf of the board of education, Union County and our own municipality. In 2006 the average tax of \$10,935 would have been divided this way: board of education, \$6,819 (62.36 percent); Union County, \$2,270 (20.76 percent), and Town of Westfield, \$1,846 (16.88 percent). As the joint "tax collector," the Town of Westfield bears financial risk in that it must guarantee and still make timely payment to the county and board of education on the portion of the tax owed to each by Westfield property owners whose payments are late, delinquent or in arrears.

To be clear, the only portion of your property tax bill that was controlled by the Westfield Town Council in 2006 was the municipal component — \$1,846 — for the average household. The 2006 municipal tax was calculated based upon the estimated amount that was needed (\$19,019,139) to balance the town's operating budget (\$33,962,945) after first taking into account all other anticipated sources of revenue (\$14,943,806).

The municipal portion of the tax bill — \$19,019,139 — was allocated to each property based upon its assessed value as a percentage of the net assessed value of all the taxable properties in town, which was \$1.85 billion. Typically the assessed value of your property in 2006 represented about 26 percent of its market value. Using this calculation, the approximate 2006 market value of the 9,785 business and residential properties in the town was \$7.13 billion.

What are the services the town is delivering to you and your family (or business) at an average annual (and tax-deductible) cost of \$1,846 per property? Is each household getting reasonable value from our municipality for an average cost of \$154 per month?

Here are the services provided by the Town of Westfield for your tax dollars: a police department of 59 professionals, five traffic officers and 14 volunteer special officers and a full-time fire department of 40 professionals and 15 volunteers. These are highly-trained individuals who protect our community, our citizens and our homes 24/7; a public works department of 41 professionals who maintain our 227 acres of parks and fields and 110 miles of roads, as well as plow our streets, collect our leaves and oversee sewage and wastewater management; a recreation department of eight professionals and over 100 seasonal staff members who provided over 75 recreational programs to our community in 2006 and manage our recreational facilities; a full-service public library with 190,000 volumes, 30 employees and over 650 community programs last year.

Other services our municipality provides include 44 school crossing guards, senior transportation, street lighting, TV 36, bi-weekly recycling, public health services, maintenance of traffic lights and signage, a conservation center and pressure testing and maintenance of our fire

hydrant system. The town also supports the efforts of an outstanding volunteer rescue squad of over 140 volunteers by providing retirement benefits through a program called Length of Service Award Program (LOSAP). In addition, the town is responsible for the operation of its municipal court which last year held over 90 sessions, and also for many administrative functions, including tax collection, tax assessment, engineering, surveying, building inspection and zoning.

In 2006, our building departments accepted and supervised over 2,600 new permits for home additions, renovations and new construction.

Like many other communities, to govern cost-effectively, Westfield relies on the efforts of volunteers who are committed to public service. Our mayor and council are elected to four-year terms with a salary of one dollar per year. More than 120 additional Westfield citizens also serve as volunteers on various municipal review boards, committees and commissions to help make public policy.

It is also important for you to know that some significant quasi-municipal services are not paid for by your tax dollars. For example, our outstanding Memorial Pool is a separate utility that receives no tax support, but rather is paid for solely by users through membership fees. All of the costs and activities of the Downtown Westfield Corporation, an organization that brings enormous vitality to our downtown and value to our community, are funded by a special assessment (\$390,970) paid by the 202 properties that lie in our central business district.

A recent strategy to lessen the tax burden on the general population and more equitably distribute costs is to rely more on user fees in select situations. For example, each participant in youth athletics pays a small \$10 user fee, and these funds are dedicated for field improvements. By sharing a small portion of some costs with its heaviest users, government can try to bring a measure of relief to all taxpayers.

particularly to our seniors, many of whom need it most.

Think about what monthly expenses average \$154 in your own household (a monthly NJ Transit pass to New York City costs \$180) and compare those expenses to all the municipal services that are being supplied at an average monthly price of \$154 to help provide you and your family with an outstanding quality of life in Westfield. Would you give up this package of municipal services (including full-time police, fire and EMT protection) to save \$154 a month?

At an average cost of \$154 per month, our residents are getting exceptional value from the town, it's 250 employees and more than 260 municipal volunteers. But there is always room for improvement. Mayor Andrew Skibitsky and the Westfield Town Council continue to seek cost savings in all services and departments, and to focus on increasing efficiency, quality and customer service values in all aspects of municipal government.

While Westfield municipal government is cost-efficient for your tax dollar, it is ironic that most municipalities are the flash point for taxpayer dissatisfaction and property tax reform in Trenton, even though the municipalities are usually the smallest piece of the tax bill.

For example, Union County receives 23 percent more of your tax dollars (\$2,270) than Westfield does. What services does Union County directly provide to you and your family in Westfield, beyond maintaining county roads and parks? Of course there are disproportionate needs in Union County, and our county tax dollars rightfully should help to support compelling needs in other communities. But are we getting a fair share of the remainder? What exactly is the cost effectiveness of Union County government and it's value equation for the Westfield taxpayer?

In forthcoming articles, we will discuss the overall condition of the town's municipal finances, the 2007 Operating and Capital Budgets and a six-year plan for projects to improve roads, fields, parks, the Memorial Pool, the downtown business district, the South Avenue business corridor, our waste treatment system and other elements of our aging infrastructure.

Letters to the Editor

Global Warming: Typical Liberal Tactic

In regards to Assemblywoman Linda Stender's (D, Legislative District 22) recent propaganda — "New Jersey must act now to reduce global warming" — as an educated gentleman, I must tell you, and naive individuals, especially the Sierra Club, that global warming is a theory that is being pushed by the liberals to scare you.

It is a typical tactic. If you have read recently in your newspaper, the weather around the globe — not only this country, but also abroad — has been below 30 degrees and even minus zero. Question: how come meteorologists can predict weather for the next 25 to 50 years but can't accurately give us a 14-day forecast? I also believe grant monies can be spent in other valuable areas for study.

In closing, who was to blame for the ice age? They can't blame industry or motor vehicles or even aerosol sprays.

Kevin Retcho
Linden

Cranford Pub Crawl Charity Set for Friday

CRANFORD — The annual "Cranford Pub Crawl" will be held tomorrow, March 2. The route winds its way through several establishments in Cranford, including the VFW Hall.

This is a charity event for the Jaycees programs. In the past, about 100 people participated. Please join in.

For more information, contact Bob Rial by phone at (908) 272-2964 or by e-mail at rialtekin@comcast.net.



22nd District News Deal With State Workers Is Step in Right Direction

Senator Nicholas Scutari, Linden

Governor Jon Corzine and state worker unions closed in on a contract agreement that would provide 13 percent in wage increases over four years, but require workers to make major concessions on health insurance and pensions.

This deal represents a significant step in the right direction for New Jersey. It implements, to varying degrees, three of the core reforms proposed by the Joint Committee on Public Employee Benefits Reform — It would require public employees to contribute to the cost of their health care premiums, raise the retirement age for future state workers from 55 to 60, and cap the total amount of salary credited for pension purposes at \$97,200 annually. Furthermore, the agreement would require public workers to contribute more of their salary towards their pension benefits.

While I have previously differed with Governor Corzine regarding the best approach to dealing with our state's burgeoning benefits crisis, I never doubted his sincerity in tackling the problem. He has managed to extract significant concessions on pensions and health care benefits at the bargaining table, saving New Jersey taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars and creating a positive precedent for cooperation with the unions. For this, the Governor should be commended.

Of course, there is still much work to be done. One of the most significant recommendations made by the Joint Committee was to allow municipalities, school districts, and other employers participating in the State Health Benefits Program to negotiate health care premiums and

plan features with their employees.

This proposal, which has not yet been enacted, would provide local governments with the same flexibility and leverage that Governor Corzine deftly employed to work out a better deal for taxpayers at the state level. We should stop forcing local governments to bargain with one hand tied behind their back.

We must also address New Jersey's looming benefits liabilities, which even the most conservative estimates place north of \$50 billion. Governor Corzine's deal will help stem the tide of red ink, but we have a long way to go before the situation is stabilized.

Governor Corzine Signs Obesity School Bill

SCOTCH PLAINS — Assemblywoman Linda Stender (D-LD22) announced last week that Governor Jon Corzine signed her legislation restricting the sale and distribution of junk foods in schools into law. Designed to encourage healthier eating habits, A-883 requires improvements in the nutritional content of foods available on school property.

Ms. Stender said, "Habits that have been permitted at school, such as snacking and drinking sugar-added beverages, are all thought to contribute to weight gain among children and teens. Childhood obesity is a public-health crisis, but it is a preventable one."

Schools are prohibited from selling candy and all other sugar foods and sugar beverages. Schools must also reduce trans-fats and total fats.

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Iceberg 23.99 1.75 L	Seagram's 7 Crown 15.99 1.75 L
Olifant 19.99 1.75 L	Fleischmann's Preferred 12.99 1.75 L
Wolfschmidt 13.99 1.75 L	SCOTCH
Crystal 9.99 1.75 L	Johnnie Walker 56.99 BLACK 12 YR. OLD 1.75 L
CANADIAN	Macallan 36.99 12-YR. OLD SINGLE MALT 750 ML
Crown Royal 20.99 750 ML	Johnnie Walker 29.99 RED 1.75 L
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Black Velvet 13.99 1.75 L	Clan MacGregor 15.99 1.75 L
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