

## \* 2012 Year in Review January Through May \*

### JANUARY:

#### Garwood

The borough council voted 4 to 2 to freeze longevity benefits for non-bargaining-unit employees. Councilman Victor DeFilippo and Councilwoman Sara Todisco dissented. Last year, the council put forth the same vote, and subsequently Mayor Patricia Quattrocchi vetoed the council vote to approve freezing longevity benefits.

Under the measure, the borough would no longer provide longevity benefits to any present or future non-bargaining-unit employee. Longevity benefits activate when a borough employee has been employed for five years.

The Garwood Board of Education approved a five-year lease agreement with the Westfield Area "Y" to lease Washington School. Superintendent of Schools Teresa Quigley said the "Y" would offer daycare, preschool, a fitness center, yoga, before- and after-school care, senior programs and youth programming. The lease is effective through February 28, 2017.

The United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) approved funding for the Westfield Senior Housing Corporation (WSHC) to build a 72-unit apartment complex for people age 62 and over on the former St. Anne's School property in Garwood.

#### Cranford

Cranford officials said they would seek to have the state Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) hold a public hearing on an application filed by a Birchwood Avenue developer so that township residents could voice their opposition to the proposed development of several hundred housing units.

The Union County Renewable Energy Program brought solar power to more than two dozen

public buildings throughout the county, including rooftop installations at the Cranford Library and Cranford Community Center.

The year's first partisan flare-up occurred when, at the township committee's first formal meeting of 2012, Democratic Commissioner Ed O'Malley called for the resignation of newly named Township Attorney Phil Morin for what Mr. O'Malley said was a conflict of interest related to the appointment.

### FEBRUARY:

#### Cranford

Mayor David Robinson announced that Police Chief Eric Mason, who had been serving as acting township administrator since the summer of 2011, would assume that position permanently. Mr. Mason is a 34-year veteran of the police department and its chief since 2003.

#### Garwood

The Garwood Board of Education voted 5 to 2 in favor, with board members Linda Koenig and Christine Guerriero dissenting, of moving the school board election from April to the November General Election.

Borough Administrator/Clerk Christina Ariemma filed a lawsuit against Councilman James Mathieu, the mayor and the borough council, claiming she had been harassed and intimidated by Mr. Mathieu and was denied raises the last two years as retaliation for being a whistleblower.

The Garwood BOE voted to approve a five-year lease agreement with the Westfield Area "Y" for use of the Washington School. The school district and the "Y," a non-profit organization, have agreed to a 50/50 split of the net revenues.

#### Garwood

A recall petition was circulated

throughout the borough to unseat Councilman Jim Mathieu following Borough Clerk Christina Ariemma's lawsuit against Councilman Mathieu.

The borough's planning board voted, 7 to 2, with Bill Nierstedt and Georgia MacIndoe dissenting, to approve the application of Andrea Lopez to operate a permanent cosmetics business.

The council unanimously introduced a \$7.16-million budget that managed to stay within the state-mandated 2-percent ceiling, but resulted in a \$105 municipal increase per household.

Borough resident Angelo Alimonte asked the borough council why Councilman Louis Petruzzelli was receiving \$22,000 in healthcare benefits. Mr. Alimonte stated his opposition to paying benefits to council members and the mayor.

#### Cranford

Two weeks after the surfacing of an eight-year-old Internet audiotape, in which he uttered an off-color joke in a telephone conversation with his son, township Police Chief Eric Mason said those comments were "not indicative of the career I have had or the person that I am." He said he regretted if anyone had been offended by his remarks and lamented that a tape of "a private conversation" had been "exploited" by someone in order to "divide the community and to embarrass me."

After receiving comments from residents concerned about the scope of a proposed ordinance that would sharply limit the feeding of wildlife on public and private property, the township committee put off a vote on the ordinance so that its language could be more closely examined and fine-tuned.

### APRIL:

#### Garwood

The BOE unanimously approved

a proposed budget for the 2012-2013 school year totaling \$8,349,831, including a general fund of \$7,682,554 and special revenues of \$134,160, with \$7,258,780 to be raised in taxes.

The borough council adopted a \$7,160,257 municipal budget, with \$5,415,039 to be raised in taxes, in a 5 to 1 vote. Councilman Jim Mathieu was the sole dissenter. The tax levy is \$46,368 under the 2-percent mandated tax-levy cap. Homeowners saw a municipal tax hike of \$105 per \$100,000 of assessed value.

The borough council unanimously voted to approve a resolution to establish a compensation review procedure for the purposes of determining salaries and wages for full-time employees of the borough who are not the members of any employee bargaining unit, are not afforded compensation protection by law and whose compensation is solely with the discretion of the mayor and council.

Residents of The Pointe, a newly built condominium complex located along North Avenue in the borough, voiced their opposition to The Pointe residents paying what they said was double the taxes than the average taxpayer in the borough.

#### Cranford

The township's zoning board of adjustment approved two applications from homeowners who decided to raise the height of their homes to avoid future flood damage to their first-floor living space, after floodwaters from Hurricane Irene last year destroyed their main living areas.

The township committee, under protest, introduced a court-ordered ordinance that would formally permit the Birchwood Avenue property to include multi-family affordable housing. The ordinance was part of the township's compliance with a state Superior Court Judge's December order allowing Paramus-based S. Hekemian Group, which owns the property, to move forward with its plans to

build 360 housing units.

### County

### MAY

#### Cranford

The township committee gave final approval to an ordinance regulating the feeding of wildlife on public and private property while admitting that enforcement of the new law, particularly the feeding of birds, will be somewhat vague.

The Cranford Planning Board adopted an ordinance amending its Master Plan to include a Housing Element and a Fair Share Plan. The move was the first step in complying with a court order issued by state Superior Court Judge Lisa F. Chrystal on December 20, 2011. The court order was issued in response to a builder's remedy suit brought against the township by Cranford Development Associates, L.L.C., a subsidiary of the S. Hekemian Group of Paramus.

#### Garwood

A committee of three borough residents began the process of recalling Garwood Councilman Jim Mathieu. The councilman, elected to a three-year term in November 2010, caused a storm locally for his actions: from allegations of harassment by Borough Clerk Christina Ariemma that is the subject of a lawsuit against the mayor and borough council, to his questioning of crossing guards regarding unemployment benefits they collect during summer months.

Litigation between The Pointe and the borough concerning snow and garbage removal was concluded, after a hearing that lasted about eight months. Borough Attorney Joseph Triarsi expected to hear the judge's written decision in about two weeks.

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*The second half of the end-of-the-year review, June through November, will be published in the January 3 edition.*

**Probitas Verus Honos**