

SP-F BOE Cites Cost Savings in Move to November Election

By MICHAEL J. POLLACK
Specially Written for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times

SCOTCH PLAINS – Despite some misgivings about the potential emergence of politics ruining the “collegial” nature of the board, the Scotch Plains-Fanwood Board of Education voted 8-1 last Thursday to move its board elections to November.

The move could save the district at least \$30,000. Because most Union County towns have voted to move their elections to November, Scotch Plains would have assumed the sole cost of holding an April contest; one member speculated that costs could have ballooned to \$50,000.

Betty Anne Woerner remained opposed to the measure and voted “no.” She spoke at three different occasions at Thursday’s meeting, even disputing the projected cost savings.

If a school board’s tax-levy increase is limited to 2 percent, there will be no vote on the budget. Mrs. Woerner said removing a vote provides one less avenue for the public to communicate to the board.

Fanwood resident Michael Lewis agreed, saying that the move to November “would take away all alternatives to communicate with you.”

He also said that lumping the school elections into the November political fray would only welcome

“a line of people looking to accomplish something [politically], and what you have here will be lost.”

All other members of the public spoke in favor of moving the elections to November. In addition to the cost savings, they spoke about higher voter turnout and more certainty over the budget.

Judy Dillon of Scotch Plains, a former BOE president, said, “People always complain that more people need to get out to vote in the school elections. If you move it to November, you will get those numbers.”

She also disagreed with Mr. Lewis’s contention that a change will lead to the politicization of the board.

“You may have to do more campaigning. Is that the political part?” she asked. “You are an elected official. You are political. If you vote down savings to Scotch Plains-Fanwood, you will be faulted for not saving money. I support moving it to November. It saves money and is the right move.”

Paul Reese of Scotch Plains said the change was “long-overdue” and was something that was “owed to the voters.”

Gail Moser of Fanwood remembered budgets “going down year after year,” which she said that was bad for all involved, especially the students. She said moving the election would benefit the district.

Board member Amy Winkler continued to express “serious reservations” because “a lot of details had not been worked out,” including the specifics of voting on cap overruns and the new process of superintendent approval.

She said the change would be “a little weird” in the near future. However, she ended up voting in favor of the move because the costs to the district, she said, would increase “vastly” otherwise. She said she could not, “in good conscience,” keep the elections in April if the

CONTINUED ON PAGE 10

Gov. Christie Supports CF Mayor’s Stance on Birchwood

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

CRANFORD — Mayor David Robinson has expressed appreciation for Governor Chris Christie’s seemingly supportive comments about the township’s stance on the proposed Birchwood Avenue development.

At the township committee’s meeting on Tuesday evening, a resident played an audio tape of the governor’s remarks—made recently on a radio call-in program—in which Governor Christie, when questioned by a Cranford resident, said the state Department of Community Affairs had met with local officials and was “working on resolving the matter.”

The governor went on to say that he was “concerned about [the proposed development] from a flooding perspective,” adding that “it doesn’t sound to me like it’s a very wise idea.” The governor, who told the caller that he had lived in Cranford in the late 1980s, said that the proposed 360 housing units would worsen the effects from the next severe flood.

Earlier in the meeting, Township Attorney Phil Morin briefly recounted last month’s denial of a motion for reconsideration in the township’s lawsuit against Cranford Development Associates LLC, the Birchwood Avenue developer. Superior Court Judge Lisa Chrystal issued her denial on January 26, after the township had included additional evidence regarding the deleterious effects of flooding on the area if the development were permitted to go forward. The denial will allow the soil conservation permits to be issued by the town-



Fred Rossi for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times
VALENTINE THANK YOU...Local veterans were honored last Friday evening at the fourth annual “Valentine’s Day With a Veteran” dinner held at the Evangel Church on Terrill Road in Scotch Plains. About 50 attendees enjoyed a multi-course buffet dinner provided by local restaurants and organizations.

Task Force Recommendations Could Cut UC Budget by \$850,000

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

COUNTY - Freeholder Dan Sullivan announced last Thursday night that a governmental efficiency task force put together by Union County Manager Al Faella has recommended changes that could save the county \$850,000 in the 2012 county budget.

“The task force’s recommendations cover practices regarding computers, printers, copy toner, office supplies, stationary, burglar alarms, portal to portal assignments (use of county-issued cars), fuel consumption, cell phones, BlackBerries, and the purchase of more efficient replacement vehicles,” Mr. Sullivan said.

One area where the task force is

looking to save money is the upgrading of the county’s telecommunications infrastructure. The county will be moving the county’s voice network hardware to new technology called Voice Over Internet Protocol, or VOIP, which the report estimates could save the county over \$400,000 annually.

Mr. Sullivan said the report recommends cutting the number of cellular devices used by county employees by 40 percent for an estimated savings of \$60,000 annually and replacing county computers “when necessary” with “less expensive, but more efficient models,” for an additional annual savings of \$60,000.

“Virtually all these recommendations can be implemented with little impact on the overall operation,” Mr. Sullivan said. “This is an excellent starting point” for the 2012 budget, he added. Mr. Sullivan is chairman of the freeholders fiscal affairs committee this year.

It was also announced that a \$60,000 contract with Kean University to provide information technology (IT) services to the county, a resolution unanimously approved by the freeholders, was being done instead of filling two vacancies in the county’s IT department.

Cranford resident Jim Buettner said the task force’s recommendations amount to only “.2 percent” of the county’s budget, which was \$482 million in 2011. “It’s pretty sad,” he said. “That’s (.2 percent) like my gas money for the week.”

He said the county could save money by not developing the former Oak Ridge golf course in Clark into a park (for both passive and active recreation) at a cost of over \$16 million. The freeholders approved a resolution Thursday to apply for a matching grant of \$8,035,774 from the New Jersey Office of Green Acres. The county previously was awarded \$1.4 million for the project.

With the release of Mr. Faella’s executive budget still weeks away, members of the county’s largest union, Council 8, attended Thursday’s Board of Chosen Freeholders meeting over concerns of potential layoffs and privatization of some operations.

Michael Bukosky, a Hackensack-based attorney representing Council 8, asked the freeholders to “protect our families and jobs that we have.”

“I know the last thing that a public body wants to do is layoffs,” Mr. Bukosky told the freeholders. “What

CONTINUED ON PAGE 10



Benjamin B. Corbin for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times
WORK IN PROGRESS...Fanwood Crossing, the multi-use development on the corner of South and Martine Avenue, will be complete by early summer. Fanwood Mayor Colleen Mahr said retail tenants that fit the needs of the community are being sought.

Indoor Sports Complex OK’d By MS Planning Bd.

By CHRISTINA HINKE
Specially Written for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times

MOUNTAINSIDE – After six months of deliberation, the Mountainside Planning Board last Thursday voted 6 to 1 to approve the application for the Triboro Sports indoor sports complex on Sheffield Street. Planning Board Chairman John Tomaine was the sole dissenter. “There is inconsistency, there is an inapplicable argument, and when you remove all of that away, again what is left is the board acting to rezone this property becomes a misuse by virtue of granting the ordinance, which it has no authority to do,” Mr. Tomaine said. He also said the applicant did not meet the positive criteria to grant the use variance.

“The chairman understood the law,” said Glenn Kienz of Weiner and Lesniak LLC, who was an attorney hired by objector Ben Caiola of 868 Hillside Avenue in Westfield.

When the board gave their vote, some board members said that the borough’s master plan should be revised.

“We have changed from a manu-

facturing society to a service society,” board member Theodore Zawslak said.

Residents from Mountainside and Springfield packed the council chambers to address the board regarding the proposed 80,000-square-foot indoor sports complex.

Triboro Sports is proposing erecting an indoor sports complex at 270 Sheffield Street where a vacant industrial building currently sits. There are no existing variances. New variances include a use variance, retail sales, café, foundation area over 35 percent where 51.3 percent is proposed, lot coverage over 75 percent where 86 percent is proposed, HVAC system location, insufficient buffer area, insufficient parking spaces, parking spaces in the front yard, side yard parking, parking space size 9 feet by 20 feet is required and 9 feet by 18 feet is proposed, and an accessory structure. The property is also located in a flood zone.

Residents voiced concerns of noise, floodlights from the parking lots streaming into their backyards, traf-

CONTINUED ON PAGE 10



Betsy Burgdorf for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times
CLEAN FUTURE...Approximately 30 protesters gather at the Westfield train station February 8 to protest New Jersey pulling out of the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI). See story page 3.



Horace Corbin for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times
IMAGINING A BRIGHTER FUTURE...Representatives of Imagine, Inc., a year-round grief support center set to open this spring for children, teenagers and adults coping with loss due to death and illness, visit the offices of The Westfield Leader last Friday to discuss the new Westfield-based program. Pictured, from left to right, are: Keith Hertell, chairman of Imagine’s board of trustees; Mary Robinson, executive director of Imagine, and Community Editor Suzette Stalker.

PAGE INDEX

Regional	2-3	Education	9, 16
Editorial	4-5, 8	Sports	11-15
Police	6	Real Estate	11-14
Community ...	6-8	Classifieds	16
Obituary	8	A&E	17-18



CONTINUED ON PAGE 10



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