

Area Mayors Plan Initiatives for 2012 From Downtown Redevelopment to Recreation

By PAUL J. PEYTON

Specialty Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

REGION - As the region enters the new year, local mayors are looking ahead to projects and initiatives they want to accomplish.

Scotch Plains Mayor Nancy Malool said her first three years in office have limited endeavors for the township due to the rough economy. She hopes that changes this year when she faces reelection.

Mayor Malool said she wants to have a study on consolidating Scotch Plains and Fanwood, not just on merging departments as has been discussed in recent years. She anticipates the governing body will introduce a resolution on such a study in January and she hopes Fanwood would follow the township's lead to determine what, if any, services would be generated for taxpayers. Mayor Malool said she hopes members of the two governing bodies would not oppose such a study and that any discussion on a merger study should be free of "self interest" or "political interest."

"If this study shows it [consolidation] would save taxpayers hundreds of dollars we really would be foolish not to move forward," Mayor Malool said.

The mayor also wants to focus on revitalizing the downtown, noting that as part of an agreement with new ownership of Shackamaxon Country Club the township was to receive a check for \$50,000 by December 31, 2011. Another \$50,000 will come upon development of condos on a section of the Shackamaxon property.

"Fifty thousand dollars could make a difference in our downtown," the mayor said, noting she would like to enhance parking and overall quality of life in the business district, "so people see something for their tax dollars," Mayor Malool said.

Fanwood Mayor Colleen Mahr, who was sworn into a third term on Sunday, said she wants the towns to complete their discussion on merging the Fanwood and Scotch Plains police departments. She said Mayor Malool's comments to *The Times* on plans to vote on a resolution for a consolidation study, as well as plans to discuss the proposed resolution with the New Jersey Department of Community Affairs before discussing such plans with the borough, "really puts Fanwood at a disadvantage."

"Consolidating the two towns is a completely separate discussion" than shared services, Mayor Mahr said. She said the borough is waiting to hear back from Scotch Plains on which dates in January would be acceptable for a meeting between the two towns on the police departments' merger.

"I believe this really can work as it makes financial sense and I want to see that conversation finished before we get into a consolidation conversation," Mayor Mahr said. She said the

police department budgets are the largest line items in both towns.

In addition to shared services, Mayor Mahr wants to advance the borough redevelopment initiatives to the area on South Avenue between Fanwood Crossing, the new development at South and Martine Avenue, and Terrill Road.

"I want to review the current zoning and land ordinances," Mayor Mahr said, noting that she believes both are "outdated" and that some existing zoning is "not part of the future."

"We want to make Fanwood a business friendly town," Mayor Mahr said. On the budget front, Mayor Mahr said she does not expect financial numbers in 2012 to be any easier.

Garwood Mayor Patricia Quattrocchi said she wants to see the athletic field project proceed by spring, noting that either the borough has to move funds from different accounts to pay for the project or even rebid the project as bids ranged from \$2.4 to \$2.6 million, hundreds of thousands of dollars over the \$2 million the borough had budgeted.

"We want to get going as soon as

possible," the mayor said, noting the baseball field would not be available this spring due to closing of the facility because of asbestos abatement. Mayor Quattrocchi anticipates the borough breaking ground between late May and July.

Another issue that she anticipates coming up is longevity payments for employees. While the borough council passed a resolution banning the benefit, the mayor refused to sign it. She said the payments mean a lot to some lower paid employees and that Garwood needs to compete with other towns like neighboring Cranford, which offer higher salaries.

"It's (longevity benefits) not up the council to do," she said, noting that the council are legislators, not administrators. "These people are trying to support their families...and put food on their table."

The mayor also plans to announce her initiative to revamp Garwood's Office of Emergency Management.

"It needs to be brought into this century," she said.

She also wants to revamp the borough's website. "I would like it to be a little more interactive. I would

also like to have some fun things about the town," Mayor Quattrocchi said.

Newly elected Summit Mayor Ellen Dickson said she wants to make the city government "as fiscally prudent as possible." She said the police department, which is led by newly appointed Chief Robert Weck, and the fire department are both at sufficient staffing levels.

To increase security, the city plans to install 10 cameras along with Wi-Fi capability in the downtown.

The new mayor also said she would like to find a solution to the city's downtown parking shortages. She said the common council has appointed a parking committee to study the issue.

"I really hope in 2012 that we come up with some solutions to our parking shortages," Mayor-Elect Dickson said.

The new mayor also wants to see the "Think Local First" initiative, which encourages Summit residents to shop in city stores, to help downtown businesses.

"It's to get people to think about supporting their downtown merchants," Mayor-elect Dickson said.

She also plans to continue her website, ellendickson.com as well as Facebook and Twitter accounts to communicate with Summit residents.

The former 2010 Union County Freeholder candidate said she plans to start attending freeholder meetings, noting that she heard county spending will be increasing between 3 and 4 percent this year. She said due to the high value of Summit's real estate, the state's equalization formula used to calculate county taxes would cause taxes to increase higher in Summit.

"So we could have a really high increase in (county) taxes this year," Mayor-elect Dickson said.

She, however, wants to work with the county and neighboring Chatham Borough to add a walking path and boat launch along the Passaic River on the Summit/Chatham border.

RDC Golf Affiliate Finalizes Purchase of Shackamaxon

SCOTCH PLAINS — The acquisition of the 96-year-old, 145-acre Shackamaxon Golf and Country Club in Scotch Plains has been completed by an affiliate of RDC Golf Group, Inc. (RDC), operator of the Forsgate Country Club in Monroe Township and Fiddler's Elbow Country Club in Bedminster. Shackamaxon will now operate as a non-equity private club and features a new website shackcc.com

Shackamaxon was founded in 1916 and features a historic A.W. Tillinghast golf course. The championship, par-71 layout boasts one of the most famous holes in the New York-metro area: the ninth-hole island green, one of Tillinghast's first island green creations.

The club's new ownership group are RDC Principals Christopher Schiavone and Matthew Galvin. The hospitality side of the business is under Warren Leeds, president of Whippany-based Ome Caterers.

"Shackamaxon is a great private club with a proud history," Mr. Schiavone said. "My partners and I believe that our commitment to high standards, along with the support of a great membership, will ensure Shack's future as one of New Jersey's top country clubs."

The Schiavone family has been entrenched in New Jersey golf for 46 years, having co-owned Fiddler's Elbow Country Club in Bedminster since 1965. Mr. Schiavone founded RDC in 1993, and shortly thereafter, joined forces with Mr. Galvin, who currently serves on the Board of Directors of the National Golf Course Owners Association.

The company and its affiliates own and operate Forsgate Country Club in Monroe Township and the Tuscanwilla Country Club in Orlando, Fla. RDC also manages the Tallgrass Golf Course in Shoreham, N.Y., and the Putnam National Golf Club in Mahopac, N.Y.

According to the new management, current Shackamaxon golf members may continue their association with the club by registering for the newly

created "legacy membership." This membership category, also open to former members of the club (2009 to present), is available with no additional initiation fee or deposit required. Benefits include: caddy/walking privileges, complimentary locker and bag storage, reciprocal privileges with other RDC-affiliate clubs (subject to certain limitations); and numerous legacy member-only events, discounts and designated parking.

For those golfers interested in joining Shackamaxon as a new member, the club is now offering introductory memberships that require no initiation fees for the first two years. Golf outings are also being booked for 2012. Contact Kathleen Obropta at (908) 233-1300 for more information.

In addition to golf, Shackamaxon also offers corporate meeting space and banquet amenities inside of its 40,000-square foot clubhouse.

The club's hospitality operation will benefit from the expertise of Leeds who, along with Schiavone in 1985, founded Ome Caterers and later, the Dartcor Food Service company.

Shackamaxon has appointed Joe Nastro as the club's new executive chef. Chef Nastro comes to the club from Harvest Restaurant Group and previously served as executive chef at "allium" in Great Barrington, Mass.

For information on hospitality and banquets as well as golf, visit shackcc.com or call (908) 233-1300.

Laid-Off Cops Would Not Have to Retake Basic Training Course

TRENTON — A bill sponsored by Asm. Jon Bramnick (R-21, Westfield) that would allow police officers who have been laid-off for reasons of economy to waive the basic police-training course if re-employed within five years of termination has been approved by the General Assembly. Currently, the Police Training Commission requires a police officer to retake the course in order to be eligible for a permanent appointment.

Lautenberg Looks to Have USDOT Oversight on PA Tolls

WASHINGTON, D.C. — With recent toll hikes, lack of accountability and fiscal mismanagement at the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, U.S. Sen. Frank Lautenberg (D-N.J.) and U.S. Rep. Michael Grimm (R-N.Y.) have announced the Commuter Protection Act to restore the U.S. Department of Transportation's (USDOT) ability to determine whether toll hikes are fair to drivers and to give the department authority to prescribe more reasonable tolls.

"When it costs \$12 to drive your car across a bridge in America something is wrong. While the Port Authority and the two states are struggling to explain why these dramatic hikes were imposed, commuters are suffering," said Sen. Lautenberg, who chairs the Senate Commerce Subcommittee on Surface Transportation that has jurisdiction over interstate transportation policy issues.

"There's a clear need for federal oversight here to make sure toll revenue is being used appropriately and not going to fund excessive salaries or political patronage jobs. Given these out of control toll hikes and the cloud of misinformation surrounding them, these federal protections for commuters need to be restored," Senator Lautenberg said.

Rep Grimm said the legislation said taxpayers "shouldn't have to face such a harsh economic burden simply to shovel billions of dollars in toll revenue into the debt-stricken and mis-

managed PA."

The Commuter Protection Act would restore USDOT's ability to determine whether tolls on bridges and tunnels imposed by toll authorities are "just and reasonable." Up until 1987, USDOT had the authority to determine whether any tolls charged to drivers were "just and reasonable" upon a complaint.

Under the legislation, if the tolls were deemed unfair, the transportation secretary could prescribe a more reasonable maximum toll that could be charged.

The legislation would also require Government Accountability Office (GAO) to report on and make recommendations for increasing the transparency and accountability of tolling authority budget practices.

On August 19 the Port Authority approved an increase in toll hikes that will raise tolls for cars between New Jersey and New York from \$8 to \$15 by 2015. For cars with E-Z Pass, the toll will be raised from \$8 to \$12.50 over the same period of time. Five-axle trucks that currently pay \$40 will have to pay up to \$125 by 2015.

According to Senator Lautenberg's office, the legislation has already drawn support from AAA New York, and AAA Clubs of New Jersey, the American Trucking Association, the American Highway Users Alliance, the American Motorcyclist Association and the Owner-Operator Independent Drivers Association.



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