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DOUBLE DUTY...After winning the North Jersey, Section 2, Public A titles, the Westfield High School girls and boys swim teams claimed the NJSIAA Public A titles by defeating Cherry Hill West, 89-81, and Bridgewater-Raritan, 86-84, respectively, at The College of New Jersey in Ewing on February 26. See story page 11.



LAPTOPS...The Mountainside Board of Education listens to a budget presentation at its Tuesday night meeting.

Mathieu Recall Effort Launched in Garwood

By CHRISTINA M. HINKE
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

GARWOOD—A recall petition may be circulated throughout the borough to unseat Councilman Jim Mathieu, resident Bruce Paterson told *The Westfield Leader* Tuesday night. Borough Clerk Christina Ariemma filed a lawsuit January 31 against Councilman Mathieu. Mr. Paterson told the council and mayor, in a statement signed by him and resident Rosemary Snow, "...we are again at a crossroads that many residents of Garwood feel that good governance has been compromised by the actions of Councilman Mathieu." They asked Mr. Mathieu to step down, of which he did not comply. Mr. Paterson said the petition would have to go out before the June Primary Election to seek out 700 signatures.

In a separate request to the council, Mr. Paterson stated why the council must form a resolution to the County of Union stating that Freeholder Dan Sullivan also being the chair of the freeholders' finance committee, as well as the director of the Union County Utilities Authority is a conflict of interest, and asked that it be "immediately resolved to the favor of the taxpayers."

The council unanimously approved changing engineering firms to clean up the Department of Public Works site on South Avenue that experienced an oil tank leak in 2005, and has since been undergoing cleanup efforts. Hatch Mott MacDonald was awarded the contract for the next phase of the project that would cost \$17,500, 50 percent more than the proposal submitted by T. Slack Environmental Services, Inc. of Kenilworth, Borough Engineer Donald Guarriello said. "We have had problems getting things done," Mr. Guarriello said of Slack's previous work on the job, and is why he recommended awarding the contract to Hatch Mott MacDonald of Millburn.

Following Councilwoman Sara Todisco's recent announcement of her request to install an employee evaluation policy for non-union employees, she said the council's finance committee has reached a decision and would like to move forward with putting a resolution on the agenda in the near future that would make employee evaluations part of the borough's policy. She also said the state will give the borough the same amount of state aid it received last year.

Athletic Field Complex representative Louis Petruzzelli said the rebid documents

are still under review. He noted that he and the council "don't expect to award this before the summer is over." Ms. Ariemma said it could be possible to award in August.

The hiring of William Pervarnik's replacement on the DPW was deleted from the consent agenda at Council President Keith Sluka's request. "I think positions should be advertised," Mr. Sluka said. The resolution is expected to be on the agenda for the next meeting.

Representative of Garwood for the Rahway Valley Sewerage Authority (RVSA), Steven Greet, gave an update on the RVSA, stating the RVSA reduced staff from 60 to 52 employees to date and the 2010 to 2011 savings is \$285,000. Labor negotiations were completed in August, he said. An electrical supply contract that was switched to Hess that occurred in June has seen a 50 percent savings over 2010, which resulted in a \$230,000 savings from 2010 to 2011. Garwood's assessment to the RVSA has seen a reduction of \$63,000 from 2010 to 2011.

People attending the meeting were required to walk through the new metal detector that was authorized by the council two weeks ago. Mayor Patricia Quattrochi told *The Westfield Leader* that the detector cost some \$2,700.

WF Council

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sioned by the freeholders, saying it could have been written by "a third grader" and that it only contained opinions and not facts.

Third Ward Councilman Dave Haas said that while he agreed with Mr. DeLuca that the Pennoni report had very little depth regarding whether the light is safe either at the corner or mid-block, where it currently sits in front of Adina Enculescu's home, "I don't know why we would want to do that to a resident if we didn't have to."

In between the conference and regular meeting, the council went into a brief closed session to discuss litigation involving Angelo versus Town of Westfield, involving a developer who was denied a subdivision by the planning board, and an employment matter.

Mountainside BOE

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budget. According to Mr. Saragnese, due to an increase in student enrollment, the budget does not exceed the 2-percent cap.

The board itself will vote to approve or reject the proposed budget on Tuesday, March 27, and, if approved, will then present it to the Union County Executive Superintendent of Schools, Joseph Passiment, for final authorization.

The owner of a home assessed at \$165,537, the average assessment in the borough, must pay \$4,751 in school taxes compared to last year's tax of \$4,503, an increase of \$248 and an increase of \$397 from two years ago. Mr. Saragnese stated that these figures are still "fluid" for a variety of reasons.

One of those reasons is related to state funding. The Fair School Funding Act is a bill that was sponsored by State Senators Michael Doherty (R-23, Hunterdon County) and Kevin O'Toole (R-40, Cedar Grove). If passed, the bill would necessitate a vote to change the New Jersey Constitution, allowing for the equal distribution of state funds to each school district per student.

Board member Dante Gioia provided an example from the most current available statistics of how state funds are currently distributed. "In 2008, the liability in Elizabeth was \$27,600,000. That's what the residents of Elizabeth paid in state income tax to the government. What they received back in funding was \$356 million," he said.

Mr. Gioia continued, "Now here in Mountainside...we paid about \$15,100,000 in our income tax to the state and received back a little less than \$350,000. The state funding that

they [Elizabeth students] receive on a per-student basis far exceeds what we can do here in Mountainside."

The bill was introduced in the State Senate last November and was referred to the Senate Education Committee. Currently, the borough will receive \$583,039 from the state for the 2012-2013 school year, which is actually an increase of almost 34 percent from last year.

Another potential factor in the budget process is transportation costs. Mr. Saragnese and other members of the board again appealed to the parents of students who are eligible for state mandated free bussing in the district but are using other means to travel to school.

Mr. Saragnese stated that the district's school buses are only filled to 50-percent capacity. If the parents of these students waive their rights to school bussing, he continued, two routes could be eliminated, saving the district more than \$100,000. The district will send out waivers to each household.

Another potential factor affecting the budget is the continuing contract negotiations between the board and the Mountainside Education Association (MEA). According to several board members, no staff reductions are scheduled for the next school year, but these negotiations could potentially have an effect on that as well, in either this year's budget or future budgets. The negotiations are an ongoing process with no set deadline.

The next BOE meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, March 6, at 7:30 p.m., at Beechwood School's Media Center at which time the third and final budget presentation for 2012-2013 will be offered.

Union County Freeholders

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ments. In other business, the board passed a resolution "to explore privatization options for county government."

"With regard to ongoing budget discussions and negotiations that we have we feel that it's necessary to explore all potential options relative to what may be the most efficient way to provide services in various components of county government," County Manager Al Faella said.

County employee David Weeks of Elizabeth said he has heard that layoffs were possible as well as privatization of Runnells Specialized Hospital in Berkeley Heights.

"We are working through the budget process right now and there are a lot of things that are on the table to solve the issue we have with our budget," Freeholder Mirabella said. He said officials are "aggressively looking for ways to present a budget that will work for this county."

On another matter, Salaam Ismail, chairman of the Elizabeth-based The National United Youth Council and a member of the Union County Advisory Board on the Prevention of Violence, thanked the freeholders for passing a resolution supporting the recognition by the Centers for Disease Control that youth violence is a public health problem in the United States. As such, the resolution states that there is a need for youth violence prevention programs/policies in Union County. Mr. Ismail said Union County is the first New Jersey county to pass such a resolution.

During the public portion of the meeting, Springfield resident Karen Bonacorda asked the board to "investigate an apparent lack of maintenance for Union County parkland and the Rahway River in Springfield." She said there is "so much" silt deposits upstream off Springfield Avenue that "it displaces flood water outside the dikes and exacerbates flooding because it has not been cleared."

Downstream, she said, there is gar-

bage deposited from Hurricane Irene and previous floods. "Garbage is littered throughout the parkland, and while unsightly, also gets washed into the river and clogs downstream bridges during rainstorms," Ms. Bonacorda said.

In addition, she said, tree trunks "litter the dikes" and trees pulled from the river during the hurricane have yet to be removed from the park.

County Engineer Tom Mineo responded that the county is working with Springfield as some of the maintenance issues involve township parkland. He said the county will work with Springfield "to maintain and clean up any trash" in the park. Although the dike is on Springfield parkland, he said the county would work with the town to address damage to the dike caused by fallen trees.

The county engineer said cleaning up the Rahway River, however, would require approval from the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (DEP). Mr. Mineo said he would contact the DEP to "see what their thoughts are...on dredge removal on this particular section of the river."

Tom Garvey, representing the taxpayers of Summit, said the city's school budget will be flat while the city budget is going up less than 1 percent or \$50 per household, while he heard Union County taxes will rise 10 percent. He said Union County taxes rank in the top five out of 3,000 counties nationwide, with Summit paying the highest tax in the county.

"The entire school budget of \$62 million for the Summit schools is less than the increase in [state] aid given to the Elizabeth schools," Mr. Garvey said.

Bruce Paterson of Garwood told Mr. Mirabella he should "rethink" who should chair the board's fiscal committee, saying Freeholder Sullivan has a "conflict" because he is interim executive director of the Union County Utilities Authority, which is included in the county's "revenue stream."

Police Chief Mason Named Cranford Administrator

By FRED T. ROSSI
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

CANFORD—Mayor David Robinson announced on Tuesday that Police Chief Eric Mason, who has also been serving as acting township administrator since last summer, would assume that position permanently.

Mr. Mason, a 34-year veteran of the police department and its chief since 2003, "has earned the right" to the administrator's position, the mayor said at the end of Tuesday's township committee meeting. Township officials have praised Mr. Mason's performance as acting administrator, especially his role in the recovery from Hurricane Irene last summer. He took on the duties as acting administrator when former administrator Marlena Schmid was placed on involuntary administrative leave last September. Mr. Mason will officially retire from the police force on May 31, thus necessitating a search for a new police chief.

In other business, the committee approved ordinances setting salary ranges for several dozen township employees and raising — "very minimally," in the words of Deputy Mayor Andis Kalnins — the fees for the township swimming pools. The committee also introduced an ordinance that will prohibit the feeding of wildlife in Cranford. Commissioner Lisa Aduabato-Nesi said the ordinance is aimed primarily at curbing the feeding of deer on both public and private property. She said this practice has led to other wildlife, including foxes, coming into residential neighborhoods. The public hearing on the ordinance will be held on Tuesday, March 27.

Another ordinance was introduced that lowers the minimal usage for sewer fee assessments from 75,000 gallons to 25,000 gallons. Deputy Mayor Kalnins said this was being done in an effort to make the sewer fee "more equitable." He noted that the Rahway Valley Sewerage Authority's (RVSA) fees

charged to Cranford are going up 20 percent this year. Mayor Robinson said "the goal is to incent conservation," and pointed out that those who use the least water will see an average decrease in their sewer fees of about 28 percent. The public hearing on the ordinance will also be held on March 27.

The committee approved, with two abstentions, a resolution backing a bill in the state Legislature that would scrap the current formula for disbursing state aid to local boards of education and replace it with a system of equal assistance for every student in New Jersey, namely \$7,481 per student, regardless of where the school district is located. Mayor Robinson said such a change would result in more than \$20 million in additional state aid to the local board of education. Commissioner Edward O'Malley abstained, saying the township committee was "looking to vent some frustration" without having adequately analyzed the proposal. Commissioner Aduabato-Nesi also abstained, saying that while she supported the "concept," the proposed legislation had "not been vetted enough."

The committee also approved a resolution naming the new park at the former site of Roosevelt School as Theodore Roosevelt Park.

The township committee is completing its work on the 2012 municipal budget, and Commissioner Kevin Campbell said the five members would go over the budget "line by line" at their conference meeting on Monday night. Mr. Kalnins said the budget was ready for introduction, but that committee members still wanted to review it to look for additional ways to lower expenditures and keep the tax rate from rising too much. And Mayor Robinson said that even after the budget is formally introduced in the next several weeks, there would still be time for changes to be made before the budget is voted on later in June.

Westfield Board of Education

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proposed school budget includes \$700,000 to update any computer system that is seven years old or older.

The report also noted that professional development would begin in late summer of 2012 and last throughout the next school year into summer of 2013 and would cost the district \$250,000 with a recurring cost of \$30,000. Mr. Aauker and Mr. Pineiro said ongoing funding for the district's technology efforts would also be met from the local Parent Teacher Organization, Parent-Teacher Council, community organizations and individual donations.

Wilson PTO Board member Susana MacLean spoke after the presentation stating that she was glad to see seven-year old computers being upgraded. She was also concerned with any computer older than three years old stating, "I want to get rid of the pinwheel of death." This, she stated, was the icon seen when the computer system is overloaded and the system then needs to be re-booted.

In other business, there was a lengthy discussion involving many audience members, as well as members of the BOE regarding a freshman required reading in three literature classes.

Many parents and students spoke in favor of the book, "The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-time Indian," by Sherman Alexie, noting its portrayal of a Native-American teenager and his struggles feeling like a traitor to his community as a part-time Indian because of attending a school with no other members of his tribe.

Parent Robin Rosen Chang spoke out in favor of the book saying that the book "encourages critical thinking." She stated that in all parts of learning there are things taught that might be considered uncomfortable to talk about by some people, but that they are parts of learning.

Three weeks ago, a dozen parents attended a BOE meeting stating that the book was vulgar and distasteful. The objections ranged from passages of vio-

lence and prejudices, to the use profanity and sexual content.

Parents all stated that they felt although the book did have lessons of overcoming adversity the "vulgar portions" outweighed its positive impact. Some parents stated that there were some students that were embarrassed by the book and that these students were hiding it from their parents.

Parents had asked the board to look into the matter of keeping the book as part of a mandatory reading list for those ninth graders that it effects and maybe make it part of an optional reading list. They also questioned why they had to purchase the book themselves.

Board member Ann Cary, chairperson of the BOE's curriculum committee, said her committee read the book and discussed its impact. She reported that "there were insufficient reasons to take the book off of a required reading list" as the book was found to have educational merit to learn about the Native American community. It was noted, however, that the board felt it was wrong to make parents have to buy a book that is on a required reading list.

In addition, the officials noted that an independent committee consisting of a parent, an administrator, an English teacher, a school librarian and a BOE member also read the book and found the book "appropriate" to use in the classroom.

Student Alex Jeffery, a junior at Westfield High School, stated "a full board approval of every book we read is just not feasible, especially in a district working with a \$95,000,000 budget."

The BOE also approved a resolution to for the \$95,360,622 tentative budget for 2012-2013 of which \$87,194,608 will be raised in taxes, \$84,667,331 of which will be for the operating budget. BOE meetings have been scheduled for Tuesdays, March 6, 13, and 20 with a public budget hearing scheduled for the Tuesday, March 27, meeting.



GRAND ADVENTURE...Patrick Mahoney, Jr., a seventh grader at Roosevelt Intermediate School in Westfield, enjoys *The Westfield Leader* on a recent trip to the Grand Canyon.

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