

SP Mayor Maloo Comments Reality of Merging Police or Even Consolidation of Scotch Plains and Fanwood

I read with interest your editorial in last week's edition regarding Scotch Plains and Fanwood's efforts at shared services and consolidation. Specifically, the editorial stated, "While Fanwood Mayor Colleen Mahr and the borough council are focused on merging the two police departments, Scotch Plains Mayor Nancy Maloo supports having a study conducted to determine the exact savings that could be achieved for taxpayers if both communities became one."

To clarify this point, I am in favor of exploring both options simultaneously. Both options are riddled with obstacles; some more easily overcome than others. Towns have been sharing services for years; Scotch Plains and Fanwood have been sharing for decades. It is a sensible way to reduce costs and is becoming the 'buzz word' of local government. The governing bodies of Scotch Plains and Fanwood currently are in the midst of exploring how we could merge our police departments in an effort to save money and provide more efficient services. Several obstacles stand in the way, but the two that seem the most difficult to resolve are governance and funding.

In terms of governance, one option is to form a "Joint Meeting" and the second alternative is a contractual shared service. The joint meeting would involve creating another level of government, where each town would appoint a representative to oversee the police department with a 'tie-breaking' representative agreed upon by both towns. In this scenario, this entity would have full control of the police department's financing, contract and operations. Each town would have equal representation, however, Scotch Plains would fund approximately 75 percent of the budget and Fanwood approximately 25 percent.

The Division of Local Government Services in the N.J. Department of Community Affairs recently informed us that they recommend a shared contract service rather than a joint meeting. According to the Department, several municipalities have successfully utilized this method, including Woolwich and Swedesboro in Gloucester County, Washington Township and Washington Borough in Morris County, and Wharton and Mine Hill, also in Morris County. In this scenario, Scotch Plains would employ Fanwood's police officers and Fanwood would pay Scotch Plains for the police services it receives.

I, speaking for myself and not the Scotch Plains Council as a whole, favor this option, as it seems more equitable for both towns. The joint meeting model has never been implemented for police services in New Jersey and does not provide Scotch Plains residents with adequate representation, yet it requires that their tax dollars fund three quarters of the budget. We shouldn't be interested in being the first in the state as much as we should be focusing on selecting a model that has a proven track record and predictable cost savings.

Both towns' governing bodies have expressed their desire to continue to try to work through this and the other difficulties that have arisen during this process. It is more complex than most would assume and it is time consuming, but we are committed to complete the investigation and move forward if it is prudent.

Consolidation, however, is the wave of the future, and must be considered at the same time. Just last week, a citizens' group submitted petitions to the Local Finance Board of the Department of

Community Affairs. These petitions proposed to form a study commission that would consider the pros and cons of the consolidation of Scotch Plains and Fanwood into one town. If the petitions are approved, the study commission would be formed and report back to our residents with the information they need to make an informed decision. At some point in the future, not likely sooner than two years, a referendum would appear on the ballot and voters in both towns would have the opportunity to decide whether or not to formally consolidate into one town. The citizens of both towns should have the right to decide, not politicians or special interests.

As I have stated on numerous occasions, I fully support the concept of the study commission. Consolidation has been on the minds of many residents of both towns for years. I cannot tell what a new town would be like, but I imagine very few of our day-to-day lives would be impacted much. I don't know what the new governing body would look like, or whether the names would change, or how much money it would save. These, and others, are the things our residents need to know before they can make a decision once and for all. And these are the things that the study commission is tasked to determine. I cannot understand why anyone would be op-

posed to becoming more informed through the work of a commission. Being in favor of this does not equal being in favor of consolidating the towns. No one should make that ultimate determination until they have all the facts.

The big question on everyone's minds is how much money they will save in property taxes. Again, I don't have those figures for either a merged police department or for a consolidated town. I pay taxes, too, and I want them reduced just as much as everyone else does. I think it is critical to point out, though, that even if we were able to cut the municipal portion of our residents' taxes in half - and I don't really believe that would ever be possible - but hypothetically speaking, that would save the average taxpayer (who pays \$10,000 per year in property taxes) about \$900 per year. Don't get me wrong, every dollar counts these days and if we can save anything, it's better than nothing. But I want our residents to understand the reality: merging police departments or even consolidation of towns is not going to result in the huge savings in property taxes that we need. I am, however, in favor of continuing to pursue both options because our residents expect and deserve it.

Nancy Maloo
Mayor of Scotch Plains

Conflict of Interest In The Union County Budget Process?

Editor's Note: The following was sent to all 21 Union County towns, the Union County Freeholders and Tom Neff of N.J. Division of Local Services.

This year 2012 we are now seeing the Union County government ignoring good governance and enacting a county budget based on a direct conflict of interest which, in our opinion, borders on criminal. They have explanation for doing this.

Freeholder Chairman Mirabella, without thought and conscience, appointed Freeholder Sullivan to be the chair of the Union County budget committee.

The conflict of interest arises in that last year freeholder Sullivan was appointed by the freeholders as the director of the Union County Utilities Authority (UCUA), which is a whole and separate entity from the county govt. This third party entity handles our trash and waste stream disposal. However, through last year's Covanta/Incinerator contract that was enacted by the UCUA and with the Freeholders vote of consent, there is now a revenue stream of millions of dollars directly from the UCUA to the coffers of the Union County govt. Note that Freeholder Sullivan in the recent past, sitting on the freeholder board, has recused himself from other matters of public discussion and vote on the UCUA, which defines the fact that he does recognize conflicts of interests between the UCUA and the freeholder board. UCUA outside Counsel DeCotiis Fitzpatrick stated in his letter of 9/27/11 page 2 at bottom (addressed to myself, member towns and Trenton authorities) notes that UCUA surplus monies can be "a payment to the county for use in reducing the amount of the county's budget obligations." As director of the UCUA, Freeholder Sullivan now has the authority and capacity to increase or decrease this revenue stream from the UCUA into the government budget as he sees fit to bolster or adjust the county budget line item thus taking the independence out of crafting the budget process. Obviously with Freeholder/

Director Sullivan on both sides of this equation he is inextricably linked and therefore is the conflict of interest.

This conflict was brought up to the freeholder board at the public comment portion of the freeholder meeting the night of February 23, 2012. In a wrap up comment Freeholder/Chairman/UCUA director Sullivan stated that county counsel reviewed this conflict of interest and deemed it not to be a conflict of interest. Then subsequent to Sullivan's comment, county counsel spoke on the review of a conflict of interest but noted it was for a process of the state mandated courts system (not the budget process.) Freeholder Sullivan may have been caught in a lie. This is all on record and videotape.

To the governing bodies of the 21 towns of Union County, as stewards of good governance, it is your responsibility to assure your taxpaying constituents that their hard earned tax money that you collect is legitimately derived.

Since the county budget process is about to begin in March, it is imperative as a strong suggestion, that you craft a resolution immediately (after certain actions defined below) to the Union County government stating:

- 1) You have had your town attorney review the facts of the conflict of interest and that it is indeed a conflict of interest.
- 2) You will be withholding any tax monies collected for the county purpose until this conflict of interest is resolved, or if nothing is done to resolve this conflict you will hold any county portion of the taxes in perpetual escrow since the process was tainted and illegal.
- 3) You will also distribute your resolution to the other towns for record.
- 4) You should demand that this conflict of interest with Freeholder/Chairman/Director Sullivan be immediately resolved to the favor of the taxpayers.

As taxpayers and residents we would expect no less in integrity of our government. This should be your charge.

Bruce Paterson
Garwood

ATTEND A FREE SEMINAR EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT DIVORCE

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www.tewnj.org

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Clark, New Jersey 07066
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www.crowneplaza.com/clarknj

Letters to the Editor

Why Were Investigators Assigned To Check UCWA Non-Profit Status

Editor's Note: The following letter was sent to District 21 representatives in the State Legislature and copied to this newspaper.

I write to request your assistance in understanding why the Office of Criminal Investigation sent two agents to my home requesting information about the Union County Watchdog Association's (UCWA) non-profit status. I suspect that dispatching the special agents to address an anonymous complaint regarding an entirely administrative question was a clear effort to intimidate me from continuing my activities as a leader of the UCWA.

Had the agents or their supervisors bothered to research the false allegation that the UCWA was not registered with the State of New Jersey and allowed to lawfully solicit charitable donations, they would have discovered that the UCWA was indeed properly registered. Had they sent a letter, an e-mail, or made a phone call prior to making their trip to my home unannounced the matter could have been readily resolved.

Imagine my astonishment when two special agents from the Office of Criminal Investigation arrived at my doorstep on the morning of January 11, 2012 to investigate the UCWA.

Can it be that the choice to send state agents to address such a minor matter is commonplace in a state struggling to balance its budget?

As your constituent I hope and expect that you will help me put an end to the intimidation of individuals who are trying to participate in their government and taking a stand against government waste, corruption and incompetence in New Jersey. And if I am incorrect in my assumption that this is not the normal way to deal with such a minor administrative matter, certainly there must be a more efficient way for the Office of Criminal Investigation to deploy resources.

Please feel free to contact me for any further information that you may require. I look forward to your anticipated prompt response to my concerns and questions.

Tina Renna
President UCWA
Cranford

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SOMETHING NICE... Dear Westfield Leader, Thank you so much for allowing us to visit your offices on January 19th. We had fun and learned so much about our great local newspaper. Brownie Troop 40268.

IT'S TIME!



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