

Marion Resigning as SP Manager For Position in Old Bridge

By PAUL J. PEYTON

Specially Written for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times

SCOTCH PLAINS – Township Municipal Manager Chris Marion announced his resignation on March 12, effective March 30, to take the position of business administrator in Old Bridge Township.

Mr. Marion, a resident of Freehold in Monmouth County, has served as Scotch Plains manager since June of 2009, replacing Michael Capabianco who resigned suddenly after only six months on the job. Mr. Capabianco had replaced Tom Atkins who was manager for 28 years. Prior to joining the township, Mr. Marion served as municipal manager in West Windsor and Marlboro. He has served on the Freehold Board of Education for the

past six years.

Old Bridge has 63,000 residents and 40 square miles compared to Scotch Plains, which has 23,000 residents and nine square miles. Mr. Marion said, noting that Old Bridge is facing difficult financial decisions and had to lay off 10 police officers earlier this month.

"I was very happy in Scotch Plains Township," Mr. Marion told *The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times*. "It's a career opportunity that I would like to pursue."

He said he would be finishing the municipal budget this week for introduction on Tuesday and would hold budget workshops with the council the remainder of the month. Mr. Marion also will attend the township's

Tuesday, April 17 budget public hearing and adoption vote.

When reached for comment Monday night, Mayor Nancy Malool said Township Clerk Bonnie Lacina and Zoning Officer Robert LaCosta would serve as co-managers until a new manager is hired.

"It was not a shock to me but I am very sad to see him go because I think he was very good for Scotch Plains," Mayor Malool said of Mr. Marion's decision. "He needs to do what's good for him. I understand that. So I am not happy about it, but I support him in what he needs to do."

The mayor said she is concerned that the township's track record of having had three managers in four years and the fact this is a mayoral election year in Scotch Plains could make the manager's position unattractive to potential job applicants. A council seat also will be on the ballot this year. The council makeup is currently two Republicans and two Democrats, with Republican Mayor Malool as the tiebreaker.

"My only hope is that we're able to find somebody good and not take five steps backward because we really were able to move forward with Chris," Mayor Malool commented, noting that morale among municipal staff was impacted when municipal manager searches had to be conducted in both 2008 and 2009.

The mayor said the applicant pool for the manager's job was weak in 2009. "Finding Chris was like finding a gem in a pile of ordinary rocks," Mayor Malool said, adding that she believes Scotch Plains is "in much better shape now than we were then" with the changes made by Mr. Marion.

In addition to Scotch Plains, there are openings for administrators in Washington Borough in Warren County and Florham Park in Essex County, according to classifieds on the website of the New Jersey League of Municipalities.

Mr. Marion said he would assist in the recruitment process for a new manager and would be "available to the acting co-managers as long as they need me to be."

"I want to make sure I leave things in good order," Mr. Marion said.

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SP Budget Calls For Moderate Property Tax Increase

By FRED T. ROSSI

Specially Written for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times

SCOTCH PLAINS — The proposed 2012 municipal budget that was introduced at the township council's regular meeting on Tuesday night calls for a \$34 increase to \$1,777 for the average assessed property of \$122,800.

The council agreed last week to use \$100,000 in surplus funds from the sanitary sewer facility to lessen the property tax hike. The tax rate for municipal government purposes will rise from \$1.431 per \$100 of assessed value to \$1.459 this year.

The municipal budget calls for \$23,594,546 in expenditures (including the \$1.3 million municipal library budget which is a separate line item) compared to \$23,626,588 last year, a spending decrease of 0.14 percent from 2011. The tax levy is up \$230,000 this year to \$15,774,203.

Speaking to *The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times*, Mr. Marion said he was "really pleased" with the spending plan, and complimented township employees for their efforts in helping to craft the budget, a process that began last summer. "Every department head stepped up," he said.

The municipal portion of property tax bills this year is expected to be about 16 percent.

At Tuesday's meeting, Township Manager Chris Marion, in detailing his budget proposal, noted that since 2007, the tax rate for Union County



Susan M. Dougherty for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times
BON VOYAGE!...At the top of Act I, the cast of Scotch Plains-Fanwood High School Repertory Theatre leans to stage right to simulate the roll of the ship the S.S. America in the number "Bon Voyage" from *Anything Goes*. See story on page 22.

SP Council Reduces Tax Increase By Using Surplus From Utility

By PETER GRIESMER

Specially Written for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times

SCOTCH PLAINS – Shortly after the Scotch Plains mayor and council reconvened last Thursday's budget workshop meeting, Councilman Kevin Glover made a motion to move \$100,000 from the town's sewer utility surplus to its municipal operating budget. His motion passed by a 3-2 vote, with Mayor Nancy Malool and Councilman Mickey Marcus supporting, and Deputy Mayor Mary DePaola and Councilman Bo Vastine opposing.

The township currently holds a \$899,000 surplus for sewer utility, a fund now in its fourth year of operations independent of the municipal budget. Whereas Township Manager Chris Marion's original budget proposal of \$23.6 million would have resulted in a \$46.28, or 2.66 percent, increase from last year's municipal property tax for the average \$121,800 assessed home, the \$100,000 transfer will reduce that increase to \$34.10,

or 1.96 percent. The total to be raised in taxes is \$15.8 million.

According to Mr. Marion, the fund balance afforded by the surplus has been used to offset steep rate increases ever since it came about.

Although it was not known exactly how much the transfer would allow the town to lower its tax rate increase, Mr. Glover was confident at the time of the meeting that it would be more than enough to meet the 2-percent

cap for annual increases in the municipal tax rate mandated by the state.

Despite the slight difference between the \$1,789 that the average household would have paid in the municipal tax and the \$1,777 that they will now pay, both Mr. Glover and Mayor Malool said that the move was also meant to give something back to the taxpayer.

"Whatever you can do to help the

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SPMC Announces Campaign For Business Recruitment

By FRED T. ROSSI

Specially Written for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times

SCOTCH PLAINS — The Scotch Plains Management Corp. (SPMC), the management entity for the township's special improvement district, will embark on a major business recruitment effort this spring, including having a representative attend the premier retailing trade show in Las Vegas in May.

At its meeting on March 14, the SPMC board approved the campaign that was detailed by David Biagini, president of FirstTEAMmanagement, SPMC's manager. The five-point strategy includes subscribing to a national online retail database that

provides not only basic information on retailers and businesses, but also details on whether they might be interested in relocating or expanding to a particular town based on various criteria including desired demographics, location requirements, the type of lease being sought and the types of competitors located nearby. Subscribing to the database, Mr. Biagini said, "cuts out a lot of the guesswork" in business recruitment.

The second, third and fourth prongs of the recruitment strategy will entail garnering information on the availability of vacant properties, investigating what, if any, incentives might

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Peter Griesmer for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times
HARD AT WORK...Scotch Plains Township Manager Chris Marion, pictured, left in background, discusses the proposed 2012 municipal budget last Thursday. Police Chief Brian Mahoney, right, was on hand to discuss details of the police department's budget.

Fanwood Introduces Budget With Minimum Tax Hike

By MICHAEL J. POLLACK

Specially Written for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times

FANWOOD – The Fanwood Borough Council introduced its \$8.8-million budget Tuesday night. The budget provides the same level of services and does not result in any layoffs. Fanwood residents can expect their overall property-tax bills to increase \$55 in 2012.

Despite total appropriations dropping from 2011's \$9.08-million level, the municipal tax levy will go up "very slightly," Chief Financial Officer Fred Tomkins said on Tuesday. The levy will rise by one-third of 1 percent, from \$5.59 million to \$5.61 million. This will result in a \$7.67 municipal increase for an average home assessed at \$87,536. The school tax will increase \$10.85, and if county government spends up to the 2-percent levy cap, Fanwood residents can expect a \$38 surcharge from Elizabethtown. All told, property taxes should increase about \$55 for Fanwood residents.

Council President Russell Huegel, serving as acting mayor, said, "A \$7 [municipal] increase doesn't happen by accident."

Later in the meeting, responding to a resident, he said Mayor Colleen Mahr and previous councils "fore-saw" redevelopment as a means of aiding future budgets. In 2012, he said, "shared services are becoming that phenomenon," and the borough will continue to move in that direction.

The largest single line-item increase, Mr. Tomkins detailed, was PARSA (Plainfield Area Regional Sewerage Authority) expenditures, which rose \$59,126.

Mr. Tomkins, who noted that Fanwood is one of the only municipalities in the area that has not created its own sewer utility, said the community "cannot sustain this type of increase" forever. He suggested creating a dedicated utility in the coming years.

In 2009, the Scotch Plains council voted 3-1 to create a sewer utility that charges residents based on their water usage; this is in addition to a flat fee that every resident pays. Mayor Nancy Malool, at that time, said the township "had no other choice" because it had to meet that year's 4-

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Betsy Burdord for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times
SPRING FLOWERS...The garden of a residence on Lawrence Avenue shows an array of spring colors as daffodils and hyacinth line the flower bed.



Photo courtesy of Jim Lowney/County of Union
80 YEARS AND COUNTING...Union County Freeholder Chairman Al Mirabella, right, joins Congressman Leonard Lance, second from left, and Springfield Mayor Ziad Andrew Shehady, left, in congratulating Springfield Free Public Library Director Susan Permahos, center, and Board of Trustees President Shelley Stangler on the 80th anniversary of the library during a reception held at the library on March 18. For more information about the Springfield Free Public Library, visit springfieldpubliclibrary.com.

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