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Letters to the Editor

Scotch Plains Can Finally Begin Serious Negotiations With Fanwood

I read with great interest the recent press release by Scotch Plains Council members Bo Vastine and Mary DePaola where they have finally come around and indicated their support for creating a joint Scotch Plains/Fanwood Police Department.

I am happy that they have finally seen the light, and I welcome them to the position Democratic Council members Kevin Glover and Mickey Marcus have been fighting for since being elected. In order to cut costs we must go ahead with shared services with our neighboring towns.

Regardless of the apparent inner turmoil from the other side of the aisle, now that we finally have a majority of the town council supporting the merging of the Scotch Plains and Fanwood police departments, we can finally begin serious negotiations with Fanwood Borough - and bring much needed tax relief to our residents.

Louis Beckerman
 SP Dem. Municipal Chairman

Merging Police Without Significant Tax Savings Is Not The Way to Go

The much-discussed prospective merger of the Fanwood and Scotch Plains police departments is a recipe for disaster. The financial reasoning behind the merger is murky, the savings unknown and the impact to police response times, especially in Fanwood, uninvestigated. No serious analysis of the savings behind the merger has been performed. Both mayors and town councils admit that the amount of the savings is unknown, and any level of savings is likely to be miniscule to the average homeowner.

Cost savings from mergers occur when there is a significant reduction in costs. There are no such reductions to be found in the police department mergers. Both departments have excellent teams of experienced officers, all of whom would join the merged department. Our excellent police chiefs and senior officers would also all join the combined force. Their salaries, benefits and pensions are a very large portion of our costs, and they would not be reduced. We would end up with a new department with all the personnel costs of both current departments!

Public safety, however, is the most important factor in considering a police department merger, and any study of how response times (and other factors) would be changed has either not been performed or not made public. The 2010 shared services report is famously lacking any serious analysis. Fanwood residents should be especially wary, since our response times are currently very fast. If you have ever had the chance to dial the police in Fanwood, you know that the patrol cars are in your driveway before you hang up the phone! With only a square mile to patrol, and one to two patrol cars on the road, they are always going to be there immediately. With a combined force, who knows where the one to two patrol cars on duty might be? One on the northside of Route 22 and one below Ashbrook Golf Course?

With the current rash of break-ins in these troubled economic times it is crucial that our elected officials find ways to reduce tax burdens, and I thank them for their efforts. But, merging our police departments without significant (or maybe any) taxpayer savings and a completely unknown impact to public safety and response times is not the way to do it.

David McIntyre
 Fanwood

ABCDIJKLMNOPQRSTUWXYZ
 Diction Deception

Below are four arcane words, each with four definitions - only one is correct. The others are made up. Are you sharp enough to discern this deception of diction?

If you can guess one correctly - good guess. If you get two - well-read individual. If you get three - word expert. If you get all four - You must have a lot of free time!

All words and correct definitions come from the board game Diction Deception.

Answers to last week's arcane words.

1. Keddah - An elephant trap
2. Mabble - To wrap
3. Heuristic - A branch of logic dealing with discovery or invention
4. Pertussis - Whooping cough

PERRIER

1. The head of a household in France
2. A hat maker; haberdasher
3. An investigator or detective
4. A medieval catapult for hurling stones

PONTACQ

1. A slingshot
2. A river of southeast Michigan that empties into Lake Erie
3. A type of red wine
4. An engineer who specializes in building temporary bridges

HEMATEMESIS

1. The passage or velocity of red blood cells
2. Verility; manliness
3. The transformation of blood in the lungs from venous blood to arterial blood
4. To vomit blood

SPIV

1. A person who lives by his wits, without doing any work
2. Speaking rapidly
3. An organ stop producing a thin, reedy sound
4. Wreathed; coiled; curly

New Ice Skating Center? Maybe... If A Public-Private Partnership

A recently completed study by the County of Union has recommended construction of an ice skating center at Oak Ridge Park in Clark. The estimated \$9-million facility would be open year-round and would be the magnet for the further development of the former golf course into other passive and active uses.

The county is also looking to include tennis courts, a skateboarder park, water spray park, handicapped-accessible playground, pedestrian bridge, disc golf and archery range areas. Did we leave anything out?

The county has gone out for a grant for half of \$16-million of some of the proposed development at Oak Ridge. From the report, we can't figure the total figures and just how much money all this would eventually cost.

While the current Warinanco Park ice skating center in Roselle is in poor condition, our concern is not with the need for such a center, but whether this is affordable - Should it be a county-operated, tax-funded facility? Perhaps, this would be a great public-private venture, with the county leasing the

land to a business that would finance, construct and operate the facility - keeping the profits (and losses).

If there's no business willing to undertake the venture with profit and loss risk, then the facility should not be built. Taxpayers should not be skewered on the hook for this.

Of course the neighborhood in Clark needs to be involved before a surprise 'Megplex' sprouts up in their backyards and highways are built to support the traffic.

The county debt is over \$560 million, and that does not include the \$45 million to be spent for the proposed new family court complex to be built in Elizabeth.

Until the onerous county debt is put right (brought down to manageable levels), the puerile wish list of spending must be suspended - in our view. Maybe a few projects currently considered necessary should be suspended too?

At some point in time, shouldn't we face up to reality before reality punches us in the nose with a knockout thump?

The Addition of Urban Outfitters Is a Breath of Fresh Air

With the recent approval of an application made by national retail chain Urban Outfitters to renovate and occupy the historic Westfield Trust Company building on the corner of East Broad and Elm Streets in downtown Westfield, hipsters will not have to go far to find fun, humorous and sometimes kitschy apparel.

The chain creates a distinctive shopping environment by incorporating vintage-inspired designs, along with cutting edge creations that will blend perfectly in the unique space.

Although Urban Outfitters ironic, tongue-in-cheek sense of humor has sometimes caused a stir among certain groups in the past, the chain's target audience, the 18 to 30 crowd, seem to embrace its retro, bohemian style. Hopefully, residents will also embrace the addition of this trendy new store that will once again breathe life

into the iconic building that has sat empty since 2008.

The evolution of Westfield's downtown has come along way since the days, decades ago, of Woolworth's and Sealcons. With the addition of Urban Outfitters, it seems safe to say that a new, and possibly younger crowd will be drawn to the downtown. An influx of youthful energy might be just what the doctor ordered.

Kudos to the Westfield Board of Adjustment for exercising flexibility when working with the retailer in order to seal the deal.

Westfield boasts an eclectic and varied downtown seldom matched by other places. Welcome Urban Outfitters.

We look forward to them opening their doors, joining the community and filling a void left empty for far too long.

Letters to the Editor

Cyberbullying: Act Now to Save Our Youth

Today's conviction [last week] of Dharun Ravi for invasion of privacy and bias intimidation comes too late to save Tyler Clementi but should serve as a wakeup call for society that 21st century technology has brought teen bullying to new levels. According to the Cyberbullying Research Center, approximately 20 percent of school students report experiencing cyberbullying in their lifetimes, with the most common types of cyberbullying being hurtful comments and rumors spread online.

To help address this problem CONTACT We Care, the crisis listening line of Central and Northern New Jersey, on March 22 is launching a "Save Our Youth" campaign designed to raise awareness about teen suicide among parents, educators and community-based youth organizations and to increase resources to help teenagers in crisis. Never again can we allow a youth with so much life ahead of them like Tyler Clementi to feel he or she has nowhere to turn and no solutions. We must act to save our youth.

Joanne Oppelt
 Executive Director
 CONTACT We Care

Criticizing Obama; No Purpose To Demonize And Descend Into Gutter

It is sad to see political discourse in national media stoop to the low levels of falsehoods, innuendo and character assassination that have become prevalent in recent years. It is sadder to see that occur in the local media in our community. Unfortunately, a letter to the editor in the March 15 issue of *The Westfield Leader*, criticizing the Obama administration, is an example of that.

It is one thing for the author to criticize the administration for the high cost of gas and "confiscating taxation," which is completely wrong since global forces control the price of gas, and the administration has actually reduced or limited taxes for the majority of taxpayers through payroll and other taxes. At least that

is a substantive opinion on policy issues.

However, referring to the administration, U.S. Senate, unions and "selective ethnic groups" as "evil forces" is hyperbole that is character assassination and unnecessary. Even worse, asserting that the Obama administration policies "are meant to make you part of his expanding plantation of dependent slaves" injects thinly disguised racial innuendo that has no reason to exist in such discourse.

It is fair to discuss political issues in an objective manner; it serves no legitimate purpose to demonize and descend into the gutter to do so.

Charles Stotter
 Westfield

GOP or DEM, All Town Councils Should Go to Freeholder Meetings

I've seen news reports that representatives of the Summit Town Council have recently been going to the Union County Freeholders' meetings to complain about the level of county taxes imposed on Summit residents. I'd like to urge the members of the councils of all 21 municipalities in Union County, including the members of the Scotch Plains Council, to start going to the freeholder meetings.

Our council members ought to attend the county freeholder meetings and register, on behalf of the residents of Scotch Plains, our unhappiness with the level of county property taxes. In Scotch Plains, we are taxed more by the county than by the town. That's not the way it should be.

My guess is that the town council members have not concluded that the level of county taxation imposed on their residents is appropriate. At least I certainly hope not! I suspect that if you asked the residents of Scotch Plains, the answer would be pretty clear that we are not happy with the level of county taxation. It is far too high. The county freeholders seem to be completely oblivious to the discontent of its taxpayers. The county budget is approaching a half of a billion (billion, with a "B") dollars. As bad as the rate of increase in our municipal taxes have been over the last 20 years, the county has been much worse. Our town council recently seems to be trying to keep tax increases to a minimum. The freeholders are not.

The county spends far too much money. Golf courses, dog parks, ice skating rinks, new court buildings, palatial police stations, boats, county cars, free gas, innumerable people making huge salaries, nepotism, are just a few of the issues with county spending. To top it off, the at-large voting system by which the freeholders are elected results in one party rule (such that many of the freeholders lose the vote in their home towns but stay in office due to a political machine) allowing the freeholders to ignore issues raised by anyone other than political bosses.

At the local level, the town council frets about a few thousand dollars here and there, but meanwhile we

Letters to the Editor

A Money Tree In The Back Yard I Was Never Able To Find

I'm sorry, my math teacher must have failed me, as I don't understand the town's announcement. The Town of Westfield said they are applying to the federal government for salaries for two new police positions and four new firemen positions.

Now, we have just been told that the Westfield budget is \$1.5 million in the red, and they want to raise taxes to cover this "shortfall?" Enter the "new" sewer tax. Now they are telling us that (in addition) they want to hire six more people?

Are they telling us that the pensions and the salaries of these new six positions are going to be paid by the federal government for the next 25 years? If not, where is the money coming from for these new extra hires?

Property values, and hence tax revenues will be sliding down. People are losing their jobs every day. There are two million more foreclosures yet to hit the court system. So, there will be less money in the Westfield tax coffers.

Now my daughters always talked about a money tree in the back yard, but I was never able to find it. Does the Town of Westfield have a secret money tree? Is my math wrong?

Carl Swenson
 Westfield



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LD-21 includes Westfield, Mountainside, Garwood, Summit and Cranford.
 LD-22 includes Scotch Plains, Fanwood, Plainfield, Clark and Linden.

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"In the spring, a young man's fancy lightly turns to thoughts of love."

Alfred Lord Tennyson

A cartoon illustration of a young man in a suit, looking thoughtful with his hand to his chin. The signature 'CHARLIE August 10, 1957 WL' is at the bottom left.

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