

THE WESTFIELD LEADER

Ad Populos, Non Aritus, Perbenimus

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SEVENTY FIVE CENTS

Westfield Council Finalizes 2012 Budget and New Sewer Tax

By LAUREN S. BARR
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD – Westfield Town Council unanimously adopted its amended \$36.95-million 2012 municipal budget at its meeting on Tuesday.

The budget was reviewed and approved by the state, as is required every three years for all municipalities. According to Town Administrator Jim Gildea, the state found three minor errors in the budget, but that it did not change the final number. He added that the state also reviewed and approved the town's sewer utility ordinance and fees.

Residents will now be charged a sewer fee which will bill single and

multi-family housing units \$170 for the year; condominium and townhouses \$135 per unit; commercial and industrial users \$315 and each apartment unit \$100. Bills will be sent out on or around May 15 and payments are due July 1. The fee is expected to generate over \$1.3 million to offset the town's \$3,548,584 bill from the Rahway Valley Sewerage Authority, a nearly \$250,000 increase over last year.

The average assessed home of \$182,300 will see an increase of \$79 in their tax bill for the municipal portion of their property tax bill.

The council also approved on first reading an ordinance to appropriate \$165,000 for the repaving of North

Euclid Avenue from East Broad Street to Mountain Avenue. The town received state aid for the project, totaling \$145,000, meaning that local taxpayers will only bear \$20,000 of the project costs. A public hearing will be held on the ordinance at the meeting on Tuesday, May 22.

Final approval was given for the repaving and construction of new curbing on Seneca Place from Embree Crescent to Coleman Place and First Street from Rahway Avenue to Hyslip Avenue. While the town will bear the cost of the roadwork, residents will be assessed the cost of the new curbing, payable over five years. According to the ordinance, the total cost of the project is \$120,500.

A public hearing was also held on the town's cable franchise agreement with Comcast. No resident spoke during the hearing, but Charles Smith, director of government and regulatory affairs for Comcast, was on hand to answer questions. Mr. Gildea said that negotiations on the contract will continue and the contract was expected to be renewed in November.

During the open discussion by citizens, Adina Enculescu and Greg Kasko once again spoke out against the pedestrian activated HAWK signal on Central Avenue.

Mr. Kasko said there have been nine accidents in the vicinity of the light, and that seven of them have involved cars turning left onto Clover Street. He also said there is "no need for cul-de-sacs" at Cambridge Road and Belmar Terrace if there is no light at the intersection.

Ms. Enculescu said that accidents are happening at the intersection of Central Avenue and Clover Street because the intersection is uncontrolled, and that the light needs to be moved to that location.

Resident Tony DeDuca approached the microphone and quoted a philosopher saying that the "definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over, expecting different results."

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SPRING FLING... Westfield's downtown streets were filled with area residents for the annual Spring Fling street fair held last Sunday. Booths offering everything from food and crafts to facepainting held something for people of all ages.

WF Rec. Comm. Hears Scout's Proposal to Refurbish Park

By DELL SIMEONE
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD – One ambitious Boy Scout has a civic-minded idea that could earn him a badge and benefit the whole community.

Rahul Nair, a 16-year-old Eagle Scout candidate, from Troop No. 72 in Westfield, told the Recreation Commission Monday night that he would like to refurbish the one square mile of Birdsong Park, a neglected bird sanctuary on Dunham Street, which had previously been designated as a Greens Acres site. He used his laptop computer to show the commission pictures of the garbage-strewn area.

Rahul said that he and fellow members of Troop No. 72 would perform the manual labor needed to rid the area of debris such as garbage and fallen

branches. He said the troop would need the help of the Westfield Department of Public Works (DPW) to operate power tools, and other equipment, which the Scouts are not authorized to use. He further said that trucks would be needed to haul the branches and garbage away. The Audubon Society has offered to help the Scouts identify the species of birds that live there.

He said the Scouts would clear the

walking path and line it with wood chips. Rahul also said they would place logs on the edge of the pond. The town council has already approved the project, and Recreation Director Bruce Kauffmann said the DPW would donate wood chips and use trucks to haul the debris.

In other business, Andrew Stillfusen of Fourth Avenue, which is

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CF Township Committee OKs Wildlife Feeding Restrictions

By FRED T. ROSSI
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

CRANFORD – The township committee on Tuesday night gave final approval to an ordinance regulating the feeding of wildlife on public and private property while admitting that the enforcement of the new law, particularly the feeding of birds, will be somewhat vague.

The committee has been working on the ordinance, along with some clarifying amendments, for the past few months, in an effort to balance the concerns of residents who favor more of an unfettered feeding of wildlife with those of individuals who have raised health and safety concerns stemming from wildlife feeding.

Several residents spoke at Tuesday's

public hearing, with most of the concerns centering on whether residents would face fines and other penalties for feeding birds. The ordinance calls for bird feeders to be at least four feet off the ground, but ground feeding – the spreading of feed on the ground – also will be permitted. However, Township Attorney Phil Morin cautioned that if ground feeding rises to an excessive level that attracts rodents and other "unwelcome" wildlife, it could lead to possible penalties. But when pressed for an example of what might constitute excessive feeding, Mr. Morin admitted several times that there is "not a black-and-white standard" and that the ordinance does not have a "hard and fast black line." He said one standard

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Benjamin B. Corbin for The Westfield Leader

ENERGY REFUND... Fanwood Mayor Colleen Mahr stopped by the office of The Westfield Leader last Friday to discuss state legislation aimed at returning more revenue collected from the New Jersey energy tax to towns with Editor Paul Peyton.

Mayors Look to Restore Energy Tax Revenues

By PAUL J. PEYTON
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

AREA — New Jersey mayors are endorsing recently introduced legislation to have money generated from taxes on gas and electric utilities operating in municipalities returned to towns. The legislation would restore \$439 million over a five-year period, with \$87.8 million returned the first year the legislation is signed into law. The money used to be collected by towns before the state took it over in the 1980s.

The New Jersey State League of Municipalities has said over \$3.4 billion has been diverted from the Energy Tax Receipts Property Tax Relief program and the Consolidated Municipal Property Tax Relief Act program (CMPTRA) over the past 10 years. Funding was cut \$26 million in 2008, \$32 million in 2009, and \$271 million in 2010.

Despite comments from lawmakers in the 1990s that the revenue stream to towns from the energy tax would not be touched, the "state budget makers have diverted funding

from energy taxes to fund state programs," according to a letter to state mayors from William Dressel, executive director of the New Jersey League of Municipalities.

Fanwood Mayor Colleen Mahr, who heads up the legislative services arm of the New Jersey Conference of Mayors, told The Westfield Leader during an interview last Friday that if the money had stayed in the municipal coffers, Fanwood would have received an additional \$2.1 million in revenue over the last 10 years, including a million dollars the past two years. "In 2011 our tax levy would have been 10 percent less" if the borough had its full allotment of revenue from the energy tax, she said.

"We want to begin to restore to the local budgets the dollars that have been diverted for many years for state purposes," Mayor Mahr said.

"This is a huge important fiscal issue for towns in New Jersey," Mayor Mahr said, noting that the issue has been a "unifier" of mayors regardless of political party affiliation. "We want

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Workers Seek to Keep Jobs As County Eyes Privatization

By PAUL J. PEYTON
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

COUNTY — As the last of 280 layoffs of Union County employees becomes effective June 1, the Board of Chosen Freeholders last Thursday approved several ordinances to refinance \$78 million in bonds to save money on debt service. In addition, the board approved a contract to look at the privatization of Watchung Stables, which is running a \$600,000 deficit. County officials have said the layoffs were necessary to close a \$35-million deficit in its \$484-million budget.

Freeholder Dan Sullivan, chairman of the freeholders' fiscal affairs committee this year, said the ordinances would be the subject of a hearing before the state's Local Finance Board on Wednesday, May 9, in Trenton. He said the amount of savings to the county through the refinancing would not be known until the Local Finance Board renders its decision.

"If we get these particular funds, there has been no determination made as to how those funds will be utilized and whether they would be allowed in the 2012 budget," Mr. Sullivan told a packed freeholders' meeting room full of workers and union representatives.

County Manager Al Faella told The Westfield Leader previously that the refinancing was expected to save the county between \$2 and \$4 million.

In commenting on the refinancing of the bonds, Bruce Paterson of Garwood said, "You are funneling money to your cronies," a reference to John Hudak, an attorney handling the refinancing for the county and the father of second-year Freeholder

Chris Hudak.

Freeholder Chairman Al Mirabella said the senior Mr. Hudak had worked for the county long before Chris Hudak became a freeholder. Freeholder Hudak abstained on the votes on the ordinances.

Prior to the board approving resolutions on the agenda, Mr. Faella explained that the \$16,000 contract to Mareth Advisors, LLC of Arlington, Va., will "seek an independent evaluation at the Stables to understand the facility's competitive market position and its financial performance potential."

"This is all in relation to possible ongoing management by Union County or alternatives to enter into a lease or third-party management agreement," Mr. Faella said. "By evaluating all these components, the consultant will prepare a set of recommendations and an estimate of financial performance and help us to complete substantive steps to evaluate which options make the most sense for Union County moving forward."

During the public portion of Thursday's meeting, workers and union representatives made statements on the layoffs.

Prior to those comments, Mr. Sullivan read a statement. "Each individual on this board understands that this budget will affect our employees that are being laid off and those who will remain to provide county services. We understand that it is going to be very difficult to ease the pain for the employees and their families who are affected and we are doing all we can to soften the impact," Mr. Sullivan said, noting that

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Greg Ryan for The Westfield Leader

QUATRO DE MAYO... Tamaques Elementary School held its Quatro de Mayo fundraiser last Friday night at the Westfield Armory with money raised earmarked for an outdoor classroom for children to learn about gardening, weather and more while working in the outdoors. There was music, food, drink and a silent auction.



Paul Lachenauer for The Westfield Leader

BIRTHDAY ROAST... The Republican Committee of Scotch Plains held a roast in honor of former Mayor Marty Marks' 50th birthday on Friday night at The Westwood. Mr. Marks took the friendly jabs in good humor.

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