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## 2013 Year In Review: June Through November

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million as of the end of 2011. Media reports say Runnells is \$20 million in the red.

### Region

PSE&G announced it was undertaking a \$3.9-billion, 10-year project to enhance its facilities throughout New Jersey to deal with extreme weather conditions in future years. PSE&G said it does not foresee a rate increase for its customers.

### AUGUST

#### Westfield

Six Westfield police officers were promoted, including Lauren Maloney, Westfield's first female ranking officer.

Bids were accepted for the dredging and repair of Mindowaskin Pond, part of the ongoing Mindowaskin 2018 project, which aims to restore and improve the entire park in time for a centennial celebration in five years.

The BOE approved a new policy regarding the use of electronic devices. Elementary students must keep devices turned off and kept in their lockers or backpacks. Middle-school students may keep their devices only to be used for educational purposes. The same policy applies to high-school students, except in the cafeteria, the student center or the courtyard. Recreational purposes are allowed except for phone calls. The devices may not be used in hallways, bathrooms or locker rooms.

#### Scotch Plains

The township council navigated its way through a meeting that was, by turns, contentious, acrimonious, chaotic and loud and ultimately approved two grant applications aimed at making improvements to the Scotch Hills Country Club building and taking steps to have the facility eventually designated as a historic site.

Don Parisi, chairman of the Fanwood/Scotch Plains Consolidation Study Commission, reported that both towns are not interested in taking part in or financially supporting the study.

Scotch Plains Democratic Mayor Kevin Glover's endorsement of Republican Governor Chris Christie took local officials by surprise.

#### Fanwood

The planning board approved the construction of a mixed-use building on the border of Fanwood and Scotch Plains, which will add six credits towards the borough's affordable housing obligations. The building will be on a half-acre lot at the corner of Terrill Road and Midway Avenue and be de-

veloped by Community Access Unlimited, which creates housing for persons with disabilities.

The recreation commission heard a proposal for the borough to partner with the Hillside Tennis Club to provide an affordable tennis program for all ages, from children to seniors. Also discussed were a new skate park, a new spray park and refurbishing the ice rink at LaGrande Park.

The council unanimously passed a capital ordinance funding \$1.8 million in appropriations for various improvements in Fanwood including paving projects and firefighter equipment.

#### Garwood

The borough council held a special meeting to pass a resolution awarding a special service contract, in the amount of \$12,500, to Hatch Mott MacDonald of Millburn for additional soil testing of the new athletic field complex.

Tax Assessor Annmarie Switzer recommended against re-evaluating property values, arguing the action carried a high risk of increased county taxes without providing much benefit to the municipality or its taxpayers.

The owners of the virtually abandoned industrial sites on North and South Avenues were so far not interested in selling their properties for the price buyers are willing to pay, according to Mayor Patricia Quattrocchi.

#### Cranford

The township committee welcomed Gary Merwede, Douglas Petschow and Matt Seitz as new appointees to its fire department and promoted Lt. Daniel Thorn to the rank of captain. Mr. Merwede will represent the third generation of his family to serve the department while Mr. Petschow and Mr. Seitz both will be second-generation Cranford firefighters.

#### Mountainside

The board of education announced its intention to propose a \$19.4-million bond referendum for major renovations to improve Deerfield and Beechwood Schools.

#### County

The Union County Board of Chosen Freeholders passed a resolution urging state lawmakers to overturn Governor Christie's veto of the Marriage Equality and Religious Exemption Act, which would allow gay couples to marry in New Jersey.

The county's multi-use office building on North Avenue, which houses the Union County Clerk's annex among other offices, was officially dedicated

in the name of disability advocate Colleen Fraser, an Elizabeth resident killed in the 9/11 attacks who earlier in her career headed the Union County Office for the Disabled.

Union County Freeholder Dan Sullivan announced his resignation after 19 years as a freeholder in order to become acting head of the Union County Improvement Authority. Mr. Sullivan also is executive director of the Union County Utilities Authority.

#### Area

NJ Transit will provide some of its newly purchased dual-powered locomotives for Raritan Valley Line trains starting in the spring of 2014, enabling a one-seat ride to Manhattan. The Phase I operation is "highly likely" to include some off-peak, before-peak and after-peak weekday hours, say NJT authorities.

### SEPTEMBER

#### Westfield

The board of education held a special meeting to ratify a one-year contract with the Westfield Education Association, retroactive from July 1, 2013 to July 1, 2014. Under the terms of the agreement, the teachers will receive a 2-percent raise.

After being destroyed in a six-alarm fire in 2012, the reconstructed building on the corner of South Avenue and Westfield Avenue was completed. The completed "Root Building" is two stories, with retail space on the lower level and five apartments upstairs.

Former town attorney and special counsel to the town council Robert Cockren said that after four years of litigation, the town had been vindicated on the builder's remedy suit brought against it by developer Sunnyside Senior Housing, LLC.

#### Scotch Plains

The BOE heard two hours of complaints from parents on cut bus routes within the district.

The Scotch Plains Management Corp. agreed to spend money for new holiday decorations and new trash cans and also discussed the idea of having all property owners, businesses and residents contribute, via a property tax levy, to revitalizing the business district.

A consultant told the township council that the local sewer utility should remain a separate entity rather than reincorporating its costs into the general municipal budget.

After hearing an informal presentation back in May from a development company seeking to build an assisted living facility on a portion of the Parker Gardens property, the township council discussed the next steps to rezoning the property.

Jim Killeen traded his desk at the bank for a boat trip in the Atlantic Ocean and then found himself hundreds of miles from land and tethered to the deck for safety as waves battered his rudderless vessel before being rescued.

The township council approved a \$138,163 bond ordinance to fund the work of a historical preservation consultant to determine the condition of the clubhouse at the Scotch Hills Country Club and also to make repairs to the building's deteriorating roof.

#### Fanwood

The borough council received an update from Friends of the Fanwood Memorial Library member Katherine

Balch regarding the library's progress on its 2013-2018 Strategic Plan. She reported that the library continues to proceed with the second phase of its Strategic Plan, which entails raising community awareness. The three main areas that the library's strategic plan seeks to address are space and safe access, materials and services and technology.

The council extended Fanwood's agreement with Union County to outsource its police dispatching.

#### Garwood

Borough council members agreed to prepare resolutions directing the planning board to conduct redevelopment studies on the virtually abandoned industrial sites on North and South Avenues. The study, proposed by Councilman Bill Nierstedt, will determine whether Casale Industries and the old Garwood Paperboard plant meet the criteria to be declared as areas in need of redevelopment under the state's Local and Redevelopment Housing Law. The declaration is needed before the borough can rezone the property.

Parents and guardians of Garwood teenagers who attend Clark's Arthur L. Johnson (ALJ) High School voiced their concerns over crowding on school buses. After changing from a three-bus system to just two, teenagers attending ALJ have complained to their parents that the buses are more crowded, though none are over the maximum capacity of 54 students.

#### Cranford

The planning board passed a resolution to recommend the Complete Streets program be considered by the township committee. The recommendation followed a presentation by Rebecca Hoeffler of Cranford and Ranjit Walsia, a planner from Clark, who said the program would make Cranford more convenient for motorists, pedestrians, bicyclists and public transportation riders.

### OCTOBER

#### Westfield

At a planning board meeting, testimony continued on the Stop & Shop expansion application, with an objector, traffic engineer Joseph Staiger on behalf of Massachusetts Street resident James Hughes, saying that the basement was not used in calculations for the required number of parking spaces.

Westfield Mayor Andrew Skibitsky and Councilman David Haas squared off in a debate late in the month, moderated by *Westfield Leader* reporter Lauren Barr, with Mr. Haas, the Democratic candidate, criticizing what he called the Republican mayor's lack of transparency while Mr. Skibitsky touted his own accomplishments during his eight years in office.

#### Mountainside

The borough council heard a proposal from the board of education for a \$19.4-million school-renovation project to be funded by a public bond and with state aid. The renovations would modernize Beechwood and Deerfield Schools and update the physical plant, fire, control, maintenance and waste management, technology and security systems.

The historic Levi Cory House in Mountainside was set to be moved from its original location at the corner of Mountain Avenue and New Providence Road to a site near the Mountainside Public Library, but last-minute

structural problems delayed the move, which was being spearheaded by the Mountainside Restoration Committee.

#### Garwood

Council members asked Borough Attorney Bob Renaud to investigate the plausibility of an ordinance requiring property owners to remove a building's foundation within a set time period after the structure has been declared uninhabitable and razed. The matter stemmed from properties on Second Avenue and Center Street being destroyed by fire in the past year. Both have been leveled to the foundations but have remained dormant since their destruction.

The athletic field complex will be ready for use by the last week of April, nearly a year after it originally was scheduled to be open, the borough council was told. Councilman Louis Petruzzelli, the board's liaison to the project, made the announcement, saying he had been presented with a calendar of stage-completion dates by builder Flanagan's Contracting Group.

Loss of order interrupted the Garwood candidates' debate. Three candidates — incumbent Republican Jim Mathieu, Republican Mike Martin and independent Democrat Bruce Pateron — had gathered to debate at The Pointe apartment complex's clubhouse. The candidates were competing for two open seats on the borough council.

#### Scotch Plains

Representatives from the company seeking to transition the Parker Gardens property on Terrill Road into a retirement community spoke, at the township council's behest, about their plans. Shelter Development LLC sought to have the council enact an ordinance altering Parker Gardens' R-1 zoning designation to allow the construction of up to 240 apartment units for persons primarily in their 80s and 90s, according to Shelter's vice-president, David Holland. The entire property is set to be converted into a three-story apartment complex, which he described as a "quiet-use" facility, with construction planned in two phases.

Later in the month, the two candidates for township council disagreed on the proper way to undertake a police merger, the efficacy of the sewer utility, whether it was the right decision of the council to replace professional-service providers and whether the township library is being adequately funded. Democratic Councilman Louis Beckerman and Republican Llewellyn Jones answered questions during a 40-minute forum held at the offices of *The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times*.

Mayor Kevin Glover admitted that the issue of moving the sewer utility back into the municipal budget was, for now, not a top priority. In September, consultant David Kaplan had told the council that the local sewer utility should remain a separate entity rather than reincorporating its costs into the general municipal budget. Mr. Kaplan said in early September that putting the utility back into the municipal budget would resurrect the problem with exceeding the expenditure cap and lead to an increase in municipal property taxes or cuts in expenditures elsewhere in the budget.

#### Fanwood

Residents and some elected officials raised concerns and expressed skepticism about a proposal to merge the Scotch Plains and Fanwood police de-

partments. The two towns have been discussing such a move for the past few years as part of a joint effort to save money and control local property taxes while improving the efficiency of their police departments. The governing councils from both towns, joined by administrative and legal personnel, met jointly at Scotch Plains-Fanwood High School, with about 125 residents in attendance. Fanwood Mayor Colleen Mahr called the proposal — which was detailed in an hour-long slide presentation — "a realistic plan" to combine the two police departments while "improving public safety" and "putting more boots on the ground" in both communities.

Town Engineer Dominic Carrino passed away after a brief battle with cancer. Mr. Carrino, who served Fanwood for six years, was vice-president and manager of public works at T&M Associates.

#### Cranford

The director of the Office of Business and Economic Development for the township, Kathleen Miller Prunty, led a discussion with the planning board that focused on the future of the downtown. She said the downtown should ideally attract empty-nesters and 20- to 30-year-olds in order to thrive. To attract this population, she said the downtown should become a place to socialize, and should have public spaces that are welcoming and have cultural activities.

The township committee approved an ordinance setting increases in fines each time a retail food establishment fails a health inspection. The new law was necessitated, according to Commissioner Kevin Campbell, by several recent instances in which local restaurants failed their annual inspections multiple times.

Westfield Regional Health taxes, balancing the budget, the township committee form of government and the importance of hiring a township administrator were the questions at hand at the township committee candidates forum, sponsored by the Union Area League of Women Voters and Cranford Jaycees. Democrats Kelly Howard and incumbent Kevin Campbell and Republicans Mary O'Connor and Robert D'Ambola faced off for the two open seats on the township committee.

#### County

Sergio Granados was sworn in as the newest Union County freeholder, replacing Dan Sullivan, who resigned to take over the Union County Improvement Authority in addition to his duties of running the county's utilities authority. Mr. Granados, a resident of Elizabeth, works as a supervisor in the City of Elizabeth's health division.

Representatives of the Health Professionals and Allied Employees (HPAE) Local 5112, representing 60 registered nurses at Runnells Specialized Hospital, asked the Union County Board of Chosen Freeholders to provide assurances that employee contracts would be protected under any future operators of the Berkeley Heights facility.

#### Regional

During a meeting of the board of commissioners of the Rahway Valley Sewerage Authority, members announced that the authority would end the year with a budget surplus of between \$150,000 and \$200,000. This

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13-10-31: CLOWNING AROUND...The Westfield Halloween Parade, hosted by the Optimist Club of Westfield, drew a host of interesting characters to the downtown.



13-11-07: GOP SWEEP...The Westfield Republican Party celebrated at Echo Lake Country Club in Westfield on Election Night after winning both the mayoral and town council races. Pictured, left to right, are: Councilman Jim Foerst, Councilwoman JoAnn Neylan, Councilman Mark LoGrippe, Councilman-elect David Oliveira, Councilman Sam Della Fera, Councilwoman Vicki Kimmins, Councilman Frank Arena, Mayor Andrew Skibitsky and Councilman Keith Loughlin.

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