



OPEN HOUSE • APRIL 8TH • 7:00PM

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SHUSHAN PURIM...Michael Lieberman, dressed as Harry Potter, and his grandmother enjoy Congregation Beth Israel's Purim Carnival in Scotch Plains on Sunday morning.



ROLE REVERSAL...Curious deer peek into a home in the Indian Forest section of Westfield.



BUENOS DIAS...Ken and Debbie Zierler with their daughter, Tara, catch up on hometown news in *The Westfield Leader* in front of the Cathedral in Seville, Spain. Tara is with the CIEE Program in Bollullos, where she teaches English to elementary-school children.

Committee to Look Into SP Downtown Revitalization

By FRED T. ROSSI
Specially Written for *The Westfield Leader*

SCOTCH PLAINS — In the latest effort to jumpstart the downtown business district revitalization, the Scotch Plains Township Council on Tuesday voted to establish a Business District Development Committee that will seek to develop business-friendly practices and opportunities to attract new businesses and retain existing ones.

The new group, which will be composed of citizens appointed by the council, calls into question the future of the Scotch Plains Management Corp. (SPMC), which was created in 2008 to manage and oversee the business district and to recruit new businesses. But the SPMC has been met with resistance from property owners skeptical of the group's prospects and resistant to paying the annual \$400 assessment fee that funded SPMC's activities. Last year, the council voted to suspend the assessment, meaning that the SPMC's 2013 budget was made up of unspent funds from the prior year. There will be no assessment on business property owners this year, meaning that the SPMC, down to its final dollars, will likely be unable to mount much of an effort to foster downtown revitalization.

Councilman William Vastine, who has pushed for the establishment of the new committee, said the new group will "remove politicians from the process and remove the financial burden" on property owners. He said he hoped the new group will look at previous downtown studies and see if they have any relevance to the present time. He wants group members to work with the township planner, attorney and engineers to develop a plan for the downtown. Mr. Vastine said he hoped the new committee will "eliminate political interference and eliminate resistance from property owners." He expressed hope that "this will allow for a more cooperative solution."

Deputy Mayor Michael Marcus said that while he was "not entirely sure how the group will function," he said it was "good to get the ball rolling."

SP Library Hopes To Resume Sunday Hours

By FRED T. ROSSI
Specially Written for *The Westfield Leader*

SCOTCH PLAINS — The township council looks set to approve the needed additional funding that will allow the Scotch Plains Library to resume normal Sunday operating hours. A year ago, amidst cuts to its budget, the library closed on Sundays and pared back its hours on Mondays.

At the council's budget meeting on Tuesday, library director Meg Kolaya said a slight increase of \$4,000 in the library's \$1.35 million funding request for 2014 would enable her to reopen on Sundays from September through December. When Councilman William Vastine asked how much funding would be needed to allow the library to open on Sundays immediately, board of trustees president Jeffrey Noonan estimated that another \$5,000 to \$6,000 would suffice.

When asked, Mrs. Kolaya was not sure how much added funding would be required to allow the library to resume its normal Monday hours. Presently the library opens at 1 p.m. on Mondays instead of the 9 a.m. opening time in effect before last year's budget cuts.

Mayor Kevin Glover inquired as to whether a public fundraising drive might be the route to the needed additional financing for Sunday hours. Mr. Noonan said he would ask the board and the Friends of the Library organization but cautioned that funds raised by the Friends group already supports a variety of library programs. He ex-

pressed some concern that financing for those programs could be at risk if money was redirected to paying for the expanded operating hours.

Councilman Llewellyn Jones then proposed that an added \$10,000 be added to the library's budget request to allow Sunday hours as soon as possible. When Mr. Vastine proposed adding further funding to allow the resumption of normal Monday hours, Mayor Glover said he would prefer to get a more precise estimate of the costs of expanded Monday hours before considering the added funding.

When the mayor complained that certain council members were pushing for added library funding for political reasons and for the benefit of the media, deputy mayor Michael Marcus criticized the mayor's "ridiculous comments" and said he was "tired of comments about political posturing." He said he favors the restoration of Sunday hours "for the residents of Scotch Plains," adding that he "resents the fact that everything is being characterized as being political in nature."

Eventually, the council did give its assent to the added \$10,000 to the budget to enable the library to open on Sundays but put off action on funds for expanding the Monday hours.

At the start of the meeting, Mrs. Kolaya provided the council with data for 2013, including 21,168 holders of library cards, more than 17,000 of which are Scotch Plains residents. She said there were more than 140,000 visits to the library last year.

Garwood BOE Discusses Budget For 2014-2015

By BRIAN TRUDELLE
Specially Written for *The Westfield Leader*

GARWOOD — Garwood's preliminary school budget would see general expenditures decrease by about \$8,000, or about one-tenth of a percent, for the next fiscal year, but see a tax levy increase of about \$228,000, according to estimates unveiled at Tuesday's board of education (BOE) meeting.

Michael Donow, the BOE's interim business administrator, who disclosed the numbers devised by the board's finance committee, did not have available an initial tax impact for the average household but said he would have it when a hearing on the full budget is held on Tuesday, April 29. He said the full budget, which is for the fiscal year beginning July 1, will be published the week of April 15.

"The budget is due for submission to the county office on Thursday," Mr. Donow said, referring to the requirement that the executive county superintendent of schools review the document. "We're pushing where we need to be for that. The county will review over the course for a month or so. They have to be done by [Thursday] April 24."

"We will advertise the budget in a user-friendly form in the local paper," he stated.

Saying the budget was "99 percent ready," Mr. Donow revealed few specific numbers.

The "general fund" expenditures for the next fiscal year were estimated to be \$7,866,245, down from the previous year's \$7,874 million. "Special revenue" expenditures were listed at \$153,000 and debt service was estimated at \$510,641 for a total budget of \$8,529,886. Last year's total budget listed on the Garwood BOE website was \$8,506,667.

The tax levy will jump to \$7,645,688, which includes about an \$85,000 increase in debt service payments from \$303,196 to \$388,710.

Mr. Donow pointed out to the board that the biggest changes in the budget included a reduction of about \$90,000 in payments to Clark's high-school students. The BOE will enter into the eighth year of a 10-

year contract with Clark, which after paying a flat fee for sending the borough's ninth- to 12th-grade students to its neighboring town, will pay a per-pupil rate.

Although there will be a slight increase in enrollment, Mr. Donow said, Garwood will pay under \$11,000 per pupil. That figure is what Garwood spends on its students in grades 1 through 8, and is about \$1,000 less than Clark's per-pupil rate. But the contract with Clark allows Garwood to pay the lower rate certified by state officials in the final three years of the pact.

Among the biggest increases was a 20-percent rise in health-care insurance costs, money for a third bus to send students to Clark, a return of most of the cuts to custodial maintenance and the addition of one-and-a-half staff members, including one teaching position which was removed from last year's budget. Mr. Donow did not give figures.

The announcement comes nearly two weeks after the Garwood Borough Council's finance committee released its preliminary spending plan, which proposed an increase of \$154,433 as part of a \$7.612-million budget. The council's proposed plan would raise taxes by approximately \$44 for a home assessed at \$100,000.

Additionally, the board approved a services agreement with the borough for janitorial services at a 2-percent increase. The vote was a unanimous 9 to 0.

Superintendent Teresa Quigley announced that nurse Karen Lukacovic and science teacher Karen McCarrick will share the Educator of the Year Award. It was the third time during Ms. Quigley's tenure that there was a tie for the award. The two teachers will be honored at the Education Foundation of Garwood's 10th Annual Appreciation Dinner on Thursday, April 24, at The Westwood. Tickets are \$45.

The board also unanimously approved a school calendar for 2014-2015 that begins Thursday, September 4, for students and ends June 17, 2015; includes three snow days and a spring break from April 3 to 10.

Westfield Council

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Police Department by Mayor Andrew Skibitsky.

A graduate of Brookdale College, Officer Penn was appointed a Westfield police officer by the town on November 11 of last year and completed the requirements for Police Training Commission certification at the John H. Stamler Police Academy in Scotch Plains on December 10.

Police Chief David Wayman offered comments on the hiring of Officer Penn, stating, "One of the most important things one can do as police chief is the hiring of new police officers. You're really creating a bond, or a marriage for the next 25 years or so between the officer and the police department."

"So we take this very seriously and we put our applicants through a very intense interview process...the purpose of this is to make sure not only is the officer the best qualified but also is the best fit for the Westfield Police Department."

Chief Wayman continued, "After numerous candidate interviews, we interviewed Officer Penn. After several interviews with him on separate dates and with different interview panels, we decided Officer Penn would be the best for the Westfield

Police Department."

Chief Wayman stated that Officer Penn also has a Firefighter 1 certification as well as an emergency medical technician (EMT) certification. Officer Penn currently is in the police department's field training program and will complete that assignment in mid-April.

After he was sworn in officially by Mr. Skibitsky, Officer Penn thanked the mayor, Chief Wayman and the town council for hiring him and added, "This is a lifelong dream that I've worked all I can remember to get here. I think that my experience as a firefighter and an EMT brought me to the level I needed to become a police officer."

In other news, the council approved the demolition of a single-family dwelling located at 321 Saint Georges Place and the demolition of a single-family dwelling and detached garage located at 547 Pierson Street.

The next town council conference session open to the public is scheduled for Tuesday, April 1, at 7 p.m., at the municipal building, located at 425 East Broad Street. The conference session will be immediately followed by the council's regular public meeting at 7:45 p.m.

coverage continues to meet increasing demand," Mr. Moran said. He noted that Clark and Kenilworth recently joined the county's dispatch platform, bringing the total of number of municipalities and entities serviced to 11.

Mr. Moran said 2013 overtime expenditures included the hiring of five additional dispatchers, bringing the total to 14, to help handle the increased call volume. He said his 2014 budget request accounts for the five additional dispatchers for a six-month period at a salary of \$35,000 each, or \$175,000. He said adding dispatchers provides "more leeway when we add another town," and that he does not expect another town to join the platform before June of this year.

Mr. Moran said his department pays for statistical data provided by a company called FirstWatch, which monitors call processing times. He said the department uses the data to adjust the work load and to help meet a 30-second goal for a unit to be dispatched to an emergency scene.

Regarding the EMS division, Mr. Moran recommended the hiring of three additional emergency medical technicians (EMTs) at a total cost of \$102,000. He said additional staffing would allow EMTs to be available on weekends and at midnight on weekdays. Mr. Moran said he would also like to hire a supervising EMT to oversee and manage the schedule.

During the parks and recreation discussion, Department of Parks and Recreation Director Ronald Zuber said his budget appears higher by about \$4 million, but he noted that parks maintenance and other items were transferred to his department this year. Mr. Zuber said there are five vacancies in the park maintenance division and one vacancy at Watchung Stables. He said he would like to fill those openings because "there's a lot of work out there."

Mr. Zuber said total parks revenues exceeded projections by \$700,000, primarily due to golf operations. He said golf rounds were up more than 110,000 last year despite the hot summer weather. Mr. Zuber noted the completion last year of the clubhouse and banquet hall at the Galloping Golf Course in Kenilworth as well as the opening of the Red Knot Restaurant at the golf course. He said the restaurant, which opened in June, exceeded \$900,000 in revenue in its first seven months of operation.

Mr. Zuber said Trailside's outreach program reached over 700 children in 2013, visiting schools and community organizations that are unable to travel to the facility. Mr. Zuber said extensive discussions with the pro-

gram director at the Watchung Stables resulted in a "\$200,000 swing in increased revenues and reduced expenses." Mr. Zuber said his department will continue to upgrade the horse trails and build an overhead shelter to help patrons and camp participants cope with the summer heat conditions.

Warinanco Park in Roselle will undergo "a major face lift," Mr. Zuber said. He said his department will install a synthetic track and turf field with lighting capabilities this year to help "increase the hours of play," of the area's sports teams. Mr. Zuber said his department will replace the spray pools with new equipment, renovate the octagon bathroom facility and install an irrigation system at Chatfield Garden. Mr. Zuber said the county also plans to design and install synthetic turf fields at the following parks: at Rahway River Park in Rahway and Clark, Madison Avenue Park in Rahway; and Mattano Park in Elizabethtown.

The next two budget hearings will begin at 5:30 p.m. each evening as follows: at the Union County administration building, 10 Elizabethtown Plaza, sixth floor, in Elizabethtown on Thursday, March 20, and at the Park Madison Building in Plainfield, fourth floor conference room, 200 West Second Street, on Tuesday, March 25.

Cranford

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mote two patrolmen to sergeant in May and to hire two recruits in July.

"Within this budget we'll have a surplus of \$15,003.89," Chief Wozniak said.

The chief added, "We are an aggressive and proactive department."

Township Engineer and Director of Public Works Richard Marsden requested \$386,864 for this year. Last year's amount was \$237,284. He urged the committee to allow the engineering department to return to the full staff level it had in 2010. He said he wants the department to have, beside himself, an engineering aid, a part-time engineer, a secretary and a part-time sanitary sewer operator. He also said, "We may have to replace a 1986 truck." He said public works operates on a separate budget.

The committee then continued to ask questions about line items in the budget, which were explained by officials. Mr. Hall said, "We've tracked what could be deducted by the March 25 public meeting."

Potholes

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days to it in the past month, having applied around 4,000 pounds of blacktop by hand to try to keep things in check," he said.

Union County spokesman Sebastian D'Elia said public works crews also have been out patching potholes.

"We have crews out in every area doing repairs as needed [using] coal patch, since it is too cold to lay hot asphalt," Mr. Delia said. "And as soon as the weather breaks, we plan to address the worst areas first that we've been able to identify and send crews out to cut and patch using hot asphalt."

Area residents can report a pothole on county roads at <http://ucnj.org/report-a-pot-hole/> or on a state road at <http://www.state.nj.us/transportation/commuter/potholeform.shtm>.

Fanwood was contacted for this story but did not respond as of press deadline.

Editors Note: Fred Rossi, Kate Browne and Catherine Watson also contributed to this story.