

IMPORTANT INFORMATION REGARDING

WESTFIELD REVALUATION

It's the first time in more than three decades that Westfield residents will deal with the uncertainty of tax assessments. And there's a pressing question on the minds of many Westfield homeowners... *Will I be overpaying my taxes when the Westfield Revaluation Process is done?*

▶ You can find valuable information and videos about the revaluation and appeal processes at WestfieldRevaluation.com.



LEADER IN FLORIDA... Caroline and RJ from Cranford hold up *The Westfield Leader* in front of the Flagler Beach pier in Flagler Beach, Fla., on Sunday. With the temperatures reaching into the 80s, playing in the sand and surf has been a nice break from the ice and snow in New Jersey.

Cranford BOE Proposes \$68-Mil. School Budget

By ROBYN ORR-GIOFFRE
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

CRANFORD — Preliminary discussions about the 2019-2020 school budget took place on Monday night at the Cranford Board of Education (BOE) meeting.

The projected total for the budget is expected to be \$68,522,849, which is a 1.26-percent increase from last year. The approximate school tax increase on the average Cranford taxpayer will be \$167.16.

The board approved submission of the budget to the executive county superintendent of schools, part of the state's Department of Education.

The six largest components of the budget are salaries and benefits, out-of-district tuition costs, transportation costs, energy costs, student related/extraordinary services and liability services.

These areas make up over 94 percent of the budget and add up to \$62,763,069. The district is receiving an increase of \$216,159 in state aid. According to Superintendent of Schools Scott Rubin, Ed.D., the money will be used to "continue the district's focus on promoting and enhancing health and wellness."

The district is recommending that two school counselors be hired, one at Orange Avenue School and the other at Hillside Avenue School.

"Currently, there are no school counselors at either of these schools," but instead there is a social worker, working with a ratio of over 700 students to one, according to Mr. Rubin. "An additional counselor at each of these schools certainly will provide much needed support," Mr. Rubin further commented.

Additionally, the extra money will be put towards partnering with the New Jersey Coalition for Inclusive Education.

A hearing on the budget will be held by the Cranford BOE on Monday, April 29.

In other board business, the Comprehensive Annual Financial Report for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2018, as submitted by Hodulik & Morrison, P.A., was accepted by the BOE, with no recommendations made. Robert Morrison commented to the board that the audit was the "cleanest, best, nicest report we can issue."

The board accepted resignations on behalf of Antonia Ward, a speech-language specialist; Kathleen Savage, a physical education teacher; Shaun Benoit,

a kindergarten teacher, and Elizabeth Kellett, a school nurse.

Board member Lisa Carbone commented in regards to the retiring faculty that "they are pillars of our community," and further commented that, "they have left a mark" on the community.

The next regularly scheduled board meeting is Monday, March 25.

Council

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

He urged that the wires be placed underground, a solution he and others called a "no brainer."

A Scotch Plains Avenue resident called PSE&G's planned route through residential neighborhoods "crazy," noting that it would run past the municipal pool complex, Kehler Stadium and past schools. He also cited health concerns from the high-voltage wires, saying that "we'll become a grand medical experiment for PSE&G" if the project went forward. A Shackamaxon Drive resident told the council it was a "no brainer" for the governing body to "unequivocally" oppose the project.

Mr. Jardim addressed the crowd part way through the public comments to say the town was "willing to take all steps necessary to get a plan acceptable to the community and to the council." The mayor and council members expressed their support for the residents, with Ms. Brindle noting "how committed we are to oppose what they are proposing." She echoed Mr. Jardim, saying that "we've got the legal trigger ready to go" if PSE&G's new plans are not acceptable, "and they know that."

Councilwoman Dawn Mackey assured resident that "we are on your side" and "working in concert in a united front." Councilman David Contract said he was the only member of the governing body who lives along the planned route. "I share your concerns," he told residents.

In other business, the council passed three ordinances, including one that boosts penalties for violations of the town's housing and zoning ordinances to up to \$2,000, another that permits the playing of music and videos on commercial rooftops and third that allows restaurants and retail establishments to sell alcoholic beverages on Sundays starting at 9 a.m. instead of noon and also scales back the ending time for off-premise retail sales of alcoholic beverages in the early hours of New Year's Day from 3 a.m. to 1 a.m.

Town Administrator Jim Gildea told the council that Union County had formally certified all assessments that were done as part of the recent property revaluation and said post cards have been sent to all property owners with information on their new assessments. He reminded residents that the deadline to appeal such assessments is May 1.

Mayor Brindle also presented several proclamations, one to the volunteer rescue squad as it begins its annual fundraising drive, another to the Red Cross that declared March as Red Cross Month and a third to representatives from St. Paul's Episcopal Church congratulating the parish on its 125th anniversary.



DAR MARKS 75TH ANNIVERSARY... Barbara Krause of the Cranford Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution is presented with a resolution March 5 by Mayor Patrick Giblin marking the 75th anniversary of the Cranford DAR.

County Manager Releases \$491.6-Mil. Exec. Budget

By PAUL J. PEYTON
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

COUNTY — Union County Manager Ed Oatman has presented a \$491.6-million budget, of which \$368.2 million would be raised in county property taxes, to the county freeholder board.

The county manager said taxes countywide would increase 2 percent, "the lowest in 20 years, and lower than last year."

The proposed spending plan's tax levy is \$7.2 million over last year. The plan calls for a debt service payment of \$72.2 million, representing an increase of \$5.9 million from 2018.

Salaries and wages are budgeted at \$173.8 million, with pensions totaling \$32.4 million, an increase of \$3.2 million over last year. Social Security payments are estimated at \$10.5 million, \$431,500 below last year. Group insurance has dropped \$467,234 to \$49,928,266, with employee prescriptions budgeted at \$16.5 million, the same as last year.

At Thursday's freeholder agenda meeting, Mr. Oatman said the county expects to save \$24.6 million with the closing of the juvenile detention center in Linden. He said overtime for the corrections department at the county jail has been reduced by \$1.3 million.

"The county's continuing economic boom, coupled with sound fiscal management, has produced another strong executive budget that is below cap, maintains the highest bond rating possible, and fully funds Union County's high-quality government services," Mr. Oatman said. "Our debt levels have remained low, far less than the maximum of 2 percent by the state."

The board's fiscal affairs committee held meetings on Monday and Tuesday with department directors to review their individual proposed budgets and will meet at the Westfield Municipal Building this Monday, March 18, at 5:30 p.m., for the last of the meetings, which are open to the public.

Among projects funded in the budget are construction of turf fields at Pondersosa Park in Scotch Plains, construction of a new multi-purpose field at Wheeler Park in Linden, and

two fields at Madison Avenue Park in Rahway.

In other business, the board of elections has requested a contract of \$100,465 to be awarded to Wilkes-Barre, Pa.-based A. Rifkin Co. for election security bags. Nicole DiRado, board of elections administrator, said the bags are needed to carry the ballot cartridge bins back to the county offices on election night. She said each cartridge contains the voter verified paper audit trail, a system included on the county's newly-purchased election machines, along with bags containing provisional ballots.

Ms. DiRado said the supply bag "can nest" on the rolling bin bags which have wheels, making it easier to be transported by election workers. A total of 485 supply bags and 440 rolling bin bags are being purchased, she said.

The machines are being rolled out this year in the Primary and General Elections after they were unveiled for Westfield voters last November.

She said the elections board is working with the nine towns where the new election machines will be rolled out in the June primary to set up demonstrations for voters. Those towns are Berkeley Heights, Elizabeth, Fanwood, Garwood, Kenilworth, Mountainside, Union and Winfield. She said her office is scheduling night and Saturday hours for demonstrations for those towns.

Ms. DiRado said the board of elections will hold a demonstration of the machine in Garwood from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Saturdays, April 13 and May 4. They will be at Trailside Nature and Science Center in the Watchung Reservation for Earth Day on Sunday, April 28.

The new machines will be implemented in the 2019 General Election in Clark, Cranford, Hillside, Linden, New Providence, Plainfield, Rahway, Roselle, Roselle Park, Scotch Plains, Springfield and Summit.

In recognition of this Saturday's annual Union County St. Patrick's Day Parade in Union, the board congratulated this year's grand marshal, Union Catholic Regional High School Principal Percylee Hart, Adjunct Kerri Ricci, and Parade General Chairwoman Jessica Ann Cunningham.

Hartz

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

parking spots, the other had no dedicated parking spaces, in the plan presented to the board, Mr. Rasched said.

In Mr. Rasched's testimony, he felt the clubhouses should have parking spaces and, "it's not unusual for a clubhouse that size to have 30 to 40 parking spaces." Later, Hartz Mountain attorney James Rhatican asked if the township has a requirement for parking at a clubhouse, to which Mr. Rasched responded, "I am not aware of any."

Many tenants will choose to drive instead of walking 1,000 feet, Mr. Rasched said, referring to the tenants going to the clubhouses.

"The site...may not function in a safe and efficient manner," Mr. Rasched summed up.

During board questions, Deputy Mayor Ann Dooley asked if his testimony would change if he was only looking at Phase 1. Hartz Mountain has proposed a two-phase approach where it would build about half the apartments in the first phase, and retain some of the commercial space during the first phase. He said his testimony would remain the same.

The next meeting will be Wednesday, March 20, when the board of education will speak, Planning Board Attorney Mark Rothman said. The board's planner will be present at the Wednesday, April 3 meeting.

Westfield Municipal Taxes to Be Flat

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Gildea said.

He told the council his goals for this year are to maintain the town's AAA bond rating while reviewing all revenue sources to increase non-property tax revenues. The budget will also allow for a review of vital meeting rooms in the municipal building that may need renovations or technology upgrades, including video screens that could be used by applicants at planning and zoning board meetings.

Mr. Gildea also mentioned continuing funding for a sewer-cleaning program in the downtown, installing electric-vehicle charging stations in municipal parking lots and investing in equipment for the police and public works departments.

The budget is set to be introduced at the council's Tuesday, March 26 meeting, Mr. Gildea said, and a public hearing will be held on Tuesday,

April 23.

Town officials are continuing to formulate this year's capital budget proposal that Mr. Gildea said will likely include finding for road projects, drainage enhancements, sidewalk replacement, pedestrian safety enhancements, public safety equipment and enhancements to town facilities and downtown infrastructure improvements.

Support Local Journalism



goleader.com/subscribe



More ways to live well.

You're going to love our approach to "wellness."

Living well is easy at Fellowship Village. Here, you'll enjoy maintenance-free living, farm-to-table dining, a variety of amenities to encourage a robust social calendar and good friends to share great times with. After all, living well is the best kind of wellness.

Your Life, Your Plan, Your *Life Plan* Community

Welcome Wednesdays
Open House
10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Explore our new website!
FellowshipSeniorLiving.org



FELLOWSHIP VILLAGE
Welcome to Inspired Living

8000 Fellowship Road
Basking Ridge, NJ 07920



Call today to set up your private tour.
877-395-1715



Concerns Over PSE&G Upgrade of Power Grid

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

the project in an email to Councilman Stokes. He said a lot of residents in the Fourth Ward are hearing for the first time that "our neighborhood is being turned into a power distribution corridor."

"Questions should be asked and our town government should be the lead advocate to protect our neighborhood from 69kV transmission lines," Mr. Foerst said.

"I stand with you (Mr. Stokes) and our town government against this surprise announcement of PSE&G to have our residential streets serve as the transmission grid for the region," Mr. Foerst stated.

He questioned the need to cut down a significant number of trees.

"If there is no expansion of the current right-of-way, why is there a need to cut down 45 plus trees just in Westfield? The current lines which are 50+/- feet tall are being increased to 150 plus percent of current size and the load of the line more than tripled," Mr. Foerst said.

"The base of these poles are 18 inches in diameter which is likewise much larger than current existing service (which are 10 inches in diameter). What is the property right document or law that gives PSE&G its current rights? Is there a deed of easement? Does state law govern the

private utility's rights to cut down a private tree without owner consent?" Mr. Foerst inquired.

Mr. Foerst told *The Leader* the height of the new utility poles is to increase from 50 to 75 feet. PSE&G documents, however, state that the maximum height would be 65 feet.

He told *The Leader* that a PSE&G employee told him they would be removing a tree from his front yard on March 11.

The former councilman said he will listen to what specifics the utility has to say about the project. Mr. Foerst is seeking documents including the order from the state's Board of Public Utilities instructing PSE&G to increase its power grid to the new 69kV.

Mr. Foerst said if necessary he and his neighbors are prepared to file a lawsuit to fight PSE&G from removing trees on privately-owned property and from moving ahead with the significant increase in the power grid voltage.

"They are not telling the truth (on the project.) They just are not telling the truth," Mr. Foerst told *The Leader*.

"I think it's great that residents are coming together, but I think the town's governing body should be leading the charge" by asking the questions of PSE&G, Mr. Stokes said.