

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](http://WestfieldRevaluation.com).



**CLOSED...**Theresa's Restaurant has closed after 25 years in downtown Westfield. See story on page 2.

## Cranford BOE Proposes \$68-Mil. School Budget

By ROBYN ORR-GIOFFRE  
Specially Written for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times

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 receiv-

ing 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 said.

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

The BOE will hold a public hearing on the budget on Monday, April 29. The next regularly scheduled board meeting is Monday, March 25.

## Soccer Association Proposes 24-Hour Marathon

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hopeful a policy will be in place by the commission's next meeting at the end of March.

On another issue, Mr. Salvante said a township ordinance has to be amended in order for the police to write tickets for non-permitted players using the township's fields. After speaking with the township officials, Mr. Salvante said the ordinance number, the location, the times permitted and the penalty should be clearly stated on any signs posted at playing fields.

"There will be no new signage until the ordinance is in place, hopefully by the next meeting. The next step will then be to present the new ordinance to the township attorney for review and then it will be decided if it goes to the township council," Mr. Salvante said.

He told the commission that the recreation department will "work on a recommendation" for a water fountain at the south-side field.

On another matter, the commission has a new subcommittee for public engagement. Mr. Walsh said the purpose of the subcommittee is "to do a better job of communicating with the public to create awareness about what the commission is doing."

Commission member and public engagement subcommittee member Deanna Dell Bene said the subcommittee "wants to inform residents about events in town, the recreation facilities and the location of the recreation commission meetings."

"We hope to do this with Facebook live videos on the Scotch Plains recreation page, the township's Facebook page and pictures on the recreation department's Instagram account," Ms. Dell Bene said.

Ms. Dell Bene also said she

would like to interview recreation program instructors to create more interest in group classes and to have annual events listed on the recreation commission's website.

Mr. Walsh, Mr. Salvante and commission member Colleen Gialanella spoke about a meditation garden at Frazee House Park in honor of town councilwoman and commission liaison Rose Checchio, who passed away from a lengthy battle with breast cancer in October 2018. Mr. Salvante and Ms. Gialanella both said they did not have much success with recent discussions with the Garden Club in town about moving forward with the meditation garden. Ms. Checchio was the founding member of this club.

Mr. Walsh urged the commission to "not wait for outside groups" and to move forward with this memorial. Ms. Gialanella said she is hoping to raise funds soon and do planting this spring. Commission member Tom Donatelli told the commission that the Westfield Garden Club has a large number of members and also may be able to help.

Mr. Salvante spoke of the success of the summer camp registration. He said the new playground at Brookside Park should be completed by the start of summer camp and that a new restroom has been installed at the Greenside Park playground and that he hopes it will be finished by the end of March.

Mr. Salvante said the township's Easter Egg Hunt is scheduled for Saturday, April 13, at 10 a.m., at Brookside Park. He said there will be 6,000 Easter eggs this year.

On Saturday, April 27, there will be a Party for the Planet on the Green, from 9 a.m. to noon, in conjunction with the Scotch Plains Green Team.



**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.

## County Mgr. Releases \$491.6-Mil. Exec. Budget

By PAUL J. PEYTON  
Specially Written for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times

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 multipurpose 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.

## Yoga

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

adjacent municipal parking lot. A similar lack of parking exists at the Bramnick-owned building across the street that houses the Loughlin law firm, she said.

The new lot, located across Park Avenue and next to the Valley Bank property, will include 12 parking stalls, two of which will be designated for handicapped use, according to engineer Thomas Quinn. He told the board that an underground detention basin will be installed to collect rain water and said fencing will be put in place on all sides of the lot, which will be accessible from Westfield Avenue. Engineer James Watson told the board the new lot will help "lessen the burden" on township-owned lots.

## Fanwood to Hold Revaluation Meeting

FANWOOD — A special town hall meeting of the Fanwood mayor and council has been scheduled for Tuesday, April 2, at the Forest Road Park Building, 200 Forest Road, at 7 p.m., to discuss the 2019 revaluation of all real property situated in Fanwood.

Public officials and the Realty Appraisal Co., Fanwood's revaluation consultants, will be present to answer all questions and concerns residents may have regarding the revaluation process.

Official action may be taken.

## Concerns Rise Over PSE&G Power Grid Upgrade

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*Fanwood Times* that, "PSE&G...advised that this work is required by the (New Jersey) Board of Public Utilities in order to enhance the current electrical system for all residents which will limit and/or shorten future power outages due to severe weather events or other system failures."

Mr. Stokes told *The Times* that PSE&G has said the upgrade would enhance the electrical grid by connecting two area substations, including Cranford, thus lessening the risk of power outages caused during severe weather events such as hurricanes.

Mr. Foerst expressed his concerns on 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 Times* 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 Times* 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 Times*.

"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.



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