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We Still Have Great Cause to Celebrate Independence Day

Our nation's 244th birthday will take place this Saturday, minus, of course, many of the grand displays traditionally associated with the Fourth of July. Yet amid the unprecedented challenges that continue to confront us, we can still celebrate the precious gift of freedom won for us by our forebears, as well as our own resiliency as a people from our country's earliest days.

This resiliency is a legacy passed down by the early American colonists whose thirst for liberty galvanized them to take on the British Empire. It is a legacy reflected by our defenders of freedom, both on foreign battlefields and the home front, across every generation since. It is a legacy carried forth by the abolitionists, the suffragists, and the civil rights marchers, right up to the present day. It is a legacy that we, in turn, must pass down to our children, the guardians of America's future.

The ideals forged by our earliest patriots nearly two and a half centuries ago, and immortalized in the Declaration of Independence, not only shaped the course of our own union but ultimately that of the entire world. Through the service and sacrifice of our military men and women, we have defeated tyranny in its many forms around the globe and liberated the oppressed, preserving the lives not only of those rescued but of their countless descendants who may otherwise never have been born. All of us who enjoy freedom today owe an incalculable debt to those who took up — and sometimes gave up their lives for — its cause.

Our country has always represented a beacon of hope for peoples everywhere yearning to live free, yet we remain on

a journey as a nation ourselves. We continue to wrestle with how best to achieve equality for all members of our society, to better understand one another, and to foster the unity that is our greatest strength. It is a journey we have been on since the dawn of our republic, marked by trials and tribulations along with triumphs, but each chapter of our history has seen us emerge ever stronger as Americans. We

believe the same will prove true in the years ahead.

Yes, even with the skies less glittery this Independence Day weekend, we still have a right to feel festive — and grateful as well. Our country has survived and thrived in the wake of every adversity, constantly evolving toward that goal of creating, as so eloquently stated in The Preamble to our Constitution, a "more perfect Union."

We Owe It to Our Children to Preserve Historic Homes

There are local ordinances that are cause for legitimate concern. There are others for which misinformation feeds unwarranted fear. As a former Westfield Town Councilman, I have had experience with both. The recently proposed amendment to the Westfield Historic Preservation Ordinance is of the latter kind.

The New Jersey State Municipal Land Use Law does not permit the owner of a property that has been designated an historic site to consent to, or to veto, such a designation. Critics of the proposed amendment to the Westfield Ordinance complain that it will eliminate the consent of an affected homeowner before designating a property as "historic." In fact, controlling New Jersey state law already prohibits such consent. The amendment will simply conform our Ordinance with that law.

It has been suggested that the Brindle Administration seeks to empower an unelected body to tell residents whether their homes are historic landmarks. In fact, the Historic Preservation Commission has always been comprised of unelected members, as required by the controlling state MLUL. Neither Mayor Brindle nor any future Mayor may designate a home or a district for historic preservation. Instead, the town's Master Plan is the document from which designation nominations are presented to the Planning Board and the Town Council for approval. Moreover, the amendment permits 20 percent of the residents of any district to object to a change that would designate it as "historic." Overriding such an objection would require a supermajority vote of the Town Council.

Both the current and amended ordinance provide that, in establishing

a survey of historic landmarks, the commission "shall be guided by the National Register of Historic Places Criteria Eligibility." The "Criteria for Designation" in the local ordinance faithfully tracks that federal regulation.

The amended ordinance will be perfectly constitutional. It will also slow the rate at which we currently lose our historic landmarks. Since the year 2000, between 900 and 1,000 homes have been razed and replaced with new construction. This includes 53 homes that were identified as potential historic properties or were located within potential historic districts.

Studies have consistently shown that historic homes, and homes within historic districts, maintain their values better than those without such designations and, in fact, increase in value at a greater rate. Yet, this is not the main reason why we should scrupulously fulfill our collective responsibility as stewards of Westfield's heritage. There are homes and structures in Westfield that date to the 1740s. There is a farmhouse on Central Avenue that was built when George Washington was 25 years old. There are sites where significant events in our colonial history occurred. We owe it to our children and to posterity to preserve landmarks that are associated with significant contributions to our history, that are linked to the lives of important historical figures, or that help us to understand our history. The proposed amendment to the Historic Preservation Ordinance will accomplish these worthy goals in ways that the current version of the Code has often failed us.

Carl A. Salisbury
 Westfield

Letters to the Editor

Fanwood Municipal Tax Increase is Appalling

It is appalling that in the middle of major health and economic pandemic, the Borough of Fanwood and Mayor Colleen Mahr would push through the largest property tax increase of our time. Under the guise of a township-wide revaluation, the majority of Fanwood homeowners will now have to pay an additional 25 percent or more in property taxes. Not \$72 as your paper reported. That was a bold-faced lie. Fanwoodians cannot afford this massive and painful property tax hike. Our jobs and savings have been severely negatively impacted by the COVID government shutdown. Is Mayor Mahr trying to destroy us financially?

New Jersey is the highest property tax state in the nation. Even without the revaluation, our home values and taxes were high based on other counties and states. If the town was required to conduct a revaluation program (and failed to do so over the last 30 years), they could have done that and left current property tax burden in tact. The greediness of squeezing every last dime from Fanwood homeowners, especially at time when most of us are not able to earn our full potential incomes or have been laid off, is beyond tone-deaf leadership. It is also likely we will enter a second wave of COVID this fall which will cut even deeper into our earnings and savings.

Mayor Mahr has said "the timing is unfortunate." Make that seriously unfortunate, harmful and demoralizing. You just need to walk by the Fanwood Train Station on any work day and see few cars when there once an overflow.

How can Mayor Mahr justify this economic blow to the good citizens of Fanwood? Why not hold off their money-grabbing tax increases until our economy and jobs stabilize? Why does the political leadership in Fanwood want to drive us out of our beloved homes? We cannot afford these increases, especially in a recession with high unemployment.

The homeowners of Fanwood cannot be the township's personal ATM machine. We have our own mortgages and expenses to pay. Also,

putting us over the \$10,000 property tax threshold will make it impossible to create a diverse community with affordable housing options.

Finally, why are Mayor Mahr's quarterly taxes going down \$1,000 a quarter when the great majority of Fanwood homes are going up? See chart here <https://wipp.edmundsassoc.com/Wipp/?wippid=2005#taxPage1491>

Since 2006, Fanwood property taxes have nearly doubled. Our home property taxes were \$7,100 when we moved to Helen Street in September 2006. Now they are \$10,300. With the revaluation program, we will be over \$13,000. In 15 years, our property taxes have doubled? That is not the rate of inflation or consumer price index. That an unchecked, reckless government and school board. We used to say "Home is where the heart is." Well, now "Home is where the hurt is."

If you disagree with your new assessed value, I urge you to submit an appeal to Union County. The Appeal Deadline is July 1, 2020 up until midnight or must be received by their office by no later than 4 pm. Appeals postmarked on or before July 1 but not received until after July 1 will be rejected.

To begin the appeal process, visit <https://ucnj.org/taxation-board/> and select "File A Tax Appeal Online." Send a message to Mayor Mahr that we are sick and tired of paying high property taxes and to find other ways to raise money via spending sacrifices and shared services.

Don't let the Borough of Fanwood take anymore of your hard earned money. It belongs to you, your children and your future, not their pockets.

Fight for your beloved home. Say no to higher property taxes. Appeal your revaluation by July 1st. Call Mayor Colleen Mahr at (908) 322-8236, ext. 124 or mahor@fanwoodnj.org and tell her to stop raising taxes and start finding savings in her bloated budget.

Carolyn Brink
 Fanwood

ABCD EFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ

Diction Deception

Below are four arcane words, each with four definitions — only one is correct. The others are made up. Are you sharp enough to discern this deception of diction?

If you can guess one correctly — good guess. If you get two — well-read individual. If you get three — word expert. If you get all four — You must have a lot of free time!

All words and correct definitions come from the board game Diction Deception.

Answers to last week's arcane words.

1. Sponson — A formal promise or pledge
2. Sanguigenous — Producing blood
3. Periople — The outside, smooth, horny part of the hoof of a horse
4. Leister — A three-pronged, barbed spear for taking fish

LOCUSTA

1. A private place where conversation is permitted
2. A small spike or elongated cluster of flowers in grasses
3. The order of large winged insects related to grasshoppers and crickets
4. A poisonous liquid alkaloid resembling nicotine

THYLACITIS

1. Degenerative disorder caused by calcium deficiency
2. Inflammation of the oil glands of the skin
3. Inflammation of the Adam's Apple; goiter
4. An alkaline imbalance

PERRON

1. A court entirely round a temple, surrounded by a wall
2. An outside staircase
3. One who receives anything, as rent or profits of an estate
4. The European falcon

LIBANT

1. Capable of being poured; in a liquid state
2. Lighthearted; cheerful
3. Balanced; stable
4. Tasting or touching delicately

Brightwood Park Valued By Westfield Resident

Westfield is considering making changes to Brightwood Park. There is a constituency that wants to add paths for trail bikes, having failed to get them approved at other area parks. Some feel that the Park is currently "underutilized". The number of people using a park is not the only measure of its success. A better metric might be, "How does the park contribute to the surrounding community?"

I value Brightwood Park for its extensive natural habitat. It is unique in offering the ability to take a quiet walk, maybe crossing paths with birds and other wildlife, sharing the experience with joggers and families with dogs and strollers. It offers a chance to escape the noise of the city — cars and lawn mowers and leaf blowers — and imagine how Westfield looked and sounded 50 years ago.

Several decades ago, I joined some people doing trail maintenance in the Watchung Reservation. Much of the damage to the trails, and to the eroding slopes beside the trails, was from riders who couldn't resist leaving the trails for the thrill of charging down a steep slope. I have no doubt that most of the trail bikers were responsible actors, staying on the trails as requested. But the minority who misbehaved were causing outsized damage. There was no obvious way to limit trail cycling to those willing to behave. It was easier to ban trail bikes altogether. They did. I don't believe it is possible for bikes and walkers to share the same paths without destroying the tranquility that is unique to Brightwood. Dogs and strollers and slow-moving walkers are not compatible with fast-moving bikes. Just this week, a few minutes after I had

watched a deer go by, I encountered my first trail bike in the Park. I heard the bike crunching down the gravel path 50 feet behind me. I thought it might have been a maintenance vehicle of some sort. It was the loudest sound I have heard while walking through the park. Not motorcycle loud, but still obtrusive. If bike paths are installed where there are no walking paths, this must displace and disturb habitat that is currently home to the wildlife in the Park.

There isn't much undisturbed habitat left in Westfield, and as it is removed, the wildlife that used to live there will be forced out. For many of us living near the park, the plant and animal diversity it supports is of value, even if we never set foot in the park. Proximity to this quiet space may have been a factor in choosing to live in Westfield. Not all parks have to be all things to all people. We have parks with playgrounds, parks with playing fields, parks with restrooms, parks with barbecue grills, parks with easy access to snacks. That Brightwood lacks these "amenities" is not a problem, it is a feature. If you have an opinion on this, particularly if you already use the park, contact your Westfield council members at westfieldnj.gov.

John P. Linderman
 Westfield

School Should be Named After Paul Robeson

One of Westfield's iconic residents was Paul Robeson. He was a leading advocate for human rights for minorities when it was not a popular cause. Westfield has honored him with a plaque at a small park and by a street corner named the Paul Robeson Corner. Mr. Robeson had his flaws, but at this point in time, shouldn't the Board of Education consider naming a school after this towering individual who actually attended school in Westfield?

Keith Firestone
 Westfield

Letters to the Editor
 The Deadline is Monday 9 AM for publication on the coming Thursday. The size limit is 200-500 words.

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