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Council Holds Line On Municipal Budget

The Scotch Plains Township Council introduced its annual budget for 1973 on Tuesday night. The budget was 17 days late according to deadlines set by state law, but taxpayers will undoubtedly be delighted to know that at least the municipal portion of their tax dollar will remain the same as it was last year. The total budget for 1973 is \$3,595,525. The amount to be raised by taxation jumps by only \$481, from \$1,320,959 in 1972 to \$1,321,440 for 1973.

The total tax rate cannot be given as yet, since a decision on the amount to be raised for school purposes is still pending, following voter defeat of the school budget last month and the subsequent review by the governing bodies of Scotch Plains and Fanwood, a process now underway. Last year's total tax rate in Scotch Plains was \$3.45, with the municipal portion representing 26 cents. That should remain the same.

The total set aside for municipal purposes in the new budget is \$2,953,785. Adding a six and a half percent reserve for uncollected taxes, which totals \$641,740, the amount of general appropriations is set at \$3,595,525. Although this figure for general appropriations is higher than 1972 by \$154,566, anticipated revenues also increased to offset the difference. The anticipated revenues in the 1972 budget were \$2,120,000, versus \$2,274,085 for 1973. The increase is attributed to revenue sharing funds.

A total of \$1,352,765 will be appropriated for salaries and wages. It represents an increase of 5.5 percent for most township employees. In addition, several employees were given extra consideration because the requirements of their positions warranted it, Council members pointed out. There have also been additional funds provided for the salary of the Municipal Manager and new personnel. Other operating expenses went from \$934,920 to \$1,136,730.

The Council elected to apply the allotment of Revenue Sharing as received from the federal government for 1972 as follows: \$167,385 for public safety and

\$70,000 as a capital appropriation for two fire engines needed by the fire department.

Certain fixed expenses over which the township has no control have increased appreciably, officials said, and they cited the township's share of Social Security taxes and gas, and electric rates, fire hydrant service and insurance.

The capital improvements will be reduced this year, to \$280,000 from last year's total of \$400,000.

The public hearing on the budget has been set for March 27. However, for those who wish to discuss the budget informally or are unable to attend on the 27th, the township treasurer will be on hand at Saturday's session of the Listening Post, held on Saturday morning in the municipal chambers. He will answer questions on the budget.

Date Set For Paper Collection

Chris Nette and Dave Koulisch, student co-chairmen of the Scotch Plains-Fanwood Raider Marching Band paper drive, have announced the date for the next collection. It will be Saturday, March 10th. The deposit site will be in front of the high school on Westfield Road, Scotch Plains. Members of the community are requested to start saving their old newspapers now, and to deliver them to the high school on March 10th between 9 a.m. and 3 p.m. Anyone who cannot deliver papers to the deposit site may telephone 233-0538 or 232-2444 to have their papers picked up.

Court Backs Board Of Education In Teacher Complaint

Recently, the Scotch Plains-Fanwood Board of Education adopted a method of reporting which would provide information on staff absences to the Board. It was felt that this procedure was well within the accepted practices of the Board and not a violation of any law or negotiated contract.

The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Education Association took exception to this reporting of absences and felt it was a violation of contract and the subject of a formal grievance.

The Superintendent and the Board felt the matter was not grievable nor a violation of the contract, and therefore denied the Association a formal grievance hearing. However, the Board did encourage the Association to discuss this matter through administrative channels and with a committee of Board members.

The Association reaction to this dispute was to seek the process of arbitration and the Board, believing the matter non-grievable, sought an injunction to

restrain arbitration.

On Friday, February 23, the parties appeared before the Superior Court Chancery Division in Newark to receive a ruling on the granting of an injunction. The court granted the injunction and also ruled that the Board of Education had the legal right to adopt this method of absentee reporting. It further ruled that the Board did not violate the law nor the collective bargaining agreement between the parties and thus the matter was not subject to the grievance procedure.

Board President Joseph Parry III released the following statement regarding the action:

"On behalf of the Board, I

Redistricting Plans Get Close Study By School Administrators

Listening Post

The regular monthly Listening Post session conducted by Scotch Plains Committeemen Alan Augustine, Walter Grote and B. Lawrence Newcomb has been set for Saturday, from 10 to 12 noon. Ted Sienicki, Township Treasurer will be available to answer questions regarding the budget. The public is invited to the informal meeting, which is held on the first Saturday morning of each month in the Committee Chambers, Municipal Building, Park Avenue, Scotch Plains.

Fund For Fire Victims

Scotch Plains residents, concerned over the plight of some of their fellow citizens who were left homeless when fire struck their apartments several weeks ago, now have a way to assist. Franklin State Bank has set up two bank accounts - one for the Shelhorne family, the other for the Pattersons. The two families lived in upstairs apartments at the corner of Park Avenue and Bartle Avenue until recently. The second floor of the building no longer exists. It has been razed following extensive damage from the fire.

According to Paul Schiattarella, Welfare Director in Scotch Plains, both families are in need of assistance from fellow citizens. Mrs. William Patterson, who was not in her apartment at the time of the fire, is now living with her relatives on Hoe Avenue. Mr. Patterson was injured guiding their three children from the burning apartment, and he remains hospitalized at Muhlenberg Hospital, with severe burns.

Mrs. Shelhorne had lived in the apartment with her three grown sons.

Neither family was covered by fire insurance, and consequently have lost their entire household belongings, including their clothing, valuables, furniture, dishes, etc. Many clothes have been received to date, Schiattarella said, but there are other items which both families will need desperately to start to set up housekeeping once again.

The two accounts have been arranged by Mr. Richard Flitz of Franklin State Bank.

regret that we had to take this action to bar what we felt was an unwarranted action on the part of the Association. We have always and will continue to deal in good faith with the staff and in the past, administrative and informal channels of communication such as those held open in this instance have proven effective.

Board Cites Need For Decision Before Next School Term

When school opens next September, there is every expectation that elementary school students in Scotch Plains-Fanwood will enjoy new facilities at some locations and space improvements at others. Additions are under construction now at Brunner, Coles, McGinn, and Evergreen School, and a new elementary school is being built on Willow Avenue. Although the new school may not be totally inhabitable in the opening days of the school year, it is anticipated that the additions should be ready and waiting. With the improved facilities goes a new look at current districting patterns. Who goes where, is the question now facing the Scotch Plains-Fanwood Board of Education, and an administration plan for some minor but necessary redistricting is under consideration.

The Board has indicated that it plans to make a decision and an announcement soon regarding the school assignments for next year.

How are such decisions made? School administrators outlined this week some of the criteria they faced in drawing up a plan for elementary student distribution.

For example, in planning attendance patterns, the easiest approach would be to simply divide children by grade level - 50 sixth graders to such a school, 50 more sixth graders to another, evening out every sixth grade in the district for a perfect distribution at that and at every other grade level. However, this approach negates any consideration of keeping families, streets, and neighborhoods together. Therefore, maintaining family and neighborhood unity was one major consideration in preparation of the redistricting plan.

The Board and the administration will also have to take another look at racial balance at all levels, to insure that the local district is still meeting state guidelines. Two years ago, the Scotch Plains-Fanwood district was among almost 100 districts in New Jersey cited for racial imbalance by the New Jersey Department of Education, Office of Equal Educational Opportunity. A redistricting was planned and put into effect at that time to meet state mandates which dictated that every elementary school in the district reflect quite closely the racial percentages of the district as a whole. The state now requires periodic checks of these cited districts, and the local administration must insure that any building plan will still retain the equal balance of black-white students here.

A third consideration in planning attendance is the goal of insuring that each of the seven elementary schools will enjoy generally similar educational opportunities and space for them - which includes space at each school for a multi-purpose room, remedial reading room, speech room, nurse's station, etc. At the present time, every elementary school in the district has pressed its multi-purpose room into service for classrooms, libraries, or other applications.

The new additions will ease space requirements at some schools, permitting the movement of classes now in the multi-purpose rooms into the new classes. However, since Shackamaxon and La Grande Schools are not receiving additions under the voter referendum approved last year, providing for a multi-purpose room, remedial reading room, and speech room at those schools will obviously necessitate the movement of some students.

Class size provided still another in the long list of criteria. Board policy has set a class size of 25 as optimum for the district, and it is the goal to continue that average with the new building facilities.

Sixth graders from Brunner and Evergreen Schools will no longer attend Muir School - a strictly sixth grade school - as they have in the past, since Muir will be phased out as an educational facility with the opening of the new building and additions. Therefore, administration and Board had to plan for the return of sixth grades to Brunner and Evergreen. The fifth graders now attending these two schools will continue through sixth grade, and accommodation must be made for them.

The planning should also include some acknowledgement of and provision for future growth areas, and the plan suggests that the school student population next year be kept just a little smaller than the student population at elementary schools of similar size and physical plant. This was recommended because Coles is the area most likely to show future growth due to new housing starts, and provision for future students now will avoid any major redistricting in the future, it is hoped.

The Special Education students have also figured in the considerations and criteria for next year's redistricting. In recent years, educational programs and classes for Special Education students have grown, yet space has been at a minimum. Therefore, these classes have been gypsies of a sort - moving from school to school as classroom space has become available. In the opinion of educators, it is important that these