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New Law Hikes Costs to Run School Races

Amendment Allows Towns To Combine Polling Sites

By PAUL J. PEYTON
Specially Written for The Times Leader

A change in this year's election laws aimed at increasing voter participation has resulted in a significant increase in the costs of running the elections for local school boards.

Under a new law school board elections, traditionally held the third Tuesday of April, the Office of the Union County Clerk will be responsible for overseeing the elections with the assistance of the municipal clerks. The elections, though, will still be paid for by the local school districts.

Unlike previous years, sample school board ballots will also have to be sent to all registered voters as is the case with general and primary elections.

Scotch Plains-Fanwood School District, Assistant Superintendent for Business and School Board Secretary Richard J. Marshall said the district has budgeted \$16,500 for this year's election, an increase from the \$4,400 spent last year.

Westfield Board of Education Assistant Superintendent, Dr. Robert C. Rader, estimated the cost of this year's election at between \$30,000 to \$40,000, an increase from the previous cost of between \$9,000 and \$10,000.

A change in the original law, Assembly Bill No. 1705, would allow the county clerk to consolidate election polling places.

This amendment, introduced February 8, is expected to be acted upon today, according to the office of Assemblyman Richard A. Bagger who represents the 22nd Legislative District which include Westfield, Scotch Plains and Fanwood. Under the original law the same polling places used during general elections would have been utilized for the school board elections.

Westfield Town Clerk, Mrs. Joy C. Vreeland, said under the original provision the town would have used the eight or nine polling sites it uses in regular elections. Due to the generally low turnout for school board races, the school district in its elections had used just four polling places, one in each of the town's four wards.

Under the amendment to the original bill, the County Clerk could decide to consolidate polling places. The county's new clerk, Miss Joanne Rajoppi, could decide to take this action providing the consolidation of a group of districts resulted in less than 500 votes cast in the previous two elections.

In Scotch Plains-Fanwood, Mr. Marshall said without consolidation the district would be required to use the 28 polling places as utilized in general elections. Twenty-one of these sites are in Scotch Plains with seven in Fanwood. Since the district consolidated its polling sites, a total of 11 election polling places has been used.

Even if consolidation is allowed, Mr. Marshall said, the overall cost of the election will not decrease significantly.

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DOWNTOWN RENEWAL...John Beckman and Richard Bartholomew of the consulting firm of Wallace, Roberts & Todd, presented Scotch Plains Planning Board members and business leaders with an overview of the township's goals to revitalize the Central Business District during a special meeting held February 22.

William A. Burke for The Times

Township Council Recognizes Efforts Of Emergency Services Personnel

Senior Citizen Transportation Needs Survey Presented to Governing Body

By AUDREY KAPLINSKY
Specially Written for The Times

The Scotch Plains Township Council honored and recognized the "exemplary efforts, valor and dedication of service" of Police Chief Robert Luce, Fire Chief Jonathan Ellis and Daniel Sullivan, President of the Rescue Squad.

The plaques and commendations were presented to these individuals by the Knights of Columbus. Grand Knight Charles Gates was scheduled to make the presentation but he was unable to attend due to a prior commitment.

Mayor Alan M. Augustine noted that Chief Luce has been a Scotch Plains resident for 57 years, 38 years in the police force and 13 years as a police chief. Chief Luce was a Past President of the Union County Police Chief's Association. Mayor Augustine thanked Chief Luce for his "outstanding effort" and "many years of dedicated service."

While reading the commendation honoring Fire Chief Jonathan Ellis, Mayor Augustine noted Chief Ellis wished that the entire fire department be honored. Chief Ellis indicated it was "impossible to single out" one person for the award. Mayor Augustine thanked Chief Ellis for his exceptional service and leadership.

While commending Mr. Sullivan, Mayor Augustine informed the council Mr. Sullivan has been an active squad member since 1970. Mr. Sullivan has held numerous leadership and operational positions within the squad. It was noted that all members of the rescue squad are volunteers.

Councilwoman, Mrs. Irene T. Schmidt, stressed the importance of being a volunteer. In addition, she said, donations to the rescue squad are "gratefully accepted" any time of the year and they are tax deductible.

Mr. Sullivan noted that donations may be sent to the Scotch Plains Rescue Squad, P. O. Box 325, Scotch Plains, 07076.

Various members of the council commented that the police department, fire department and rescue squad are always available day and night to protect the citizens of Scotch Plains.

Senior Citizen Advisory Committee Co-Chairwomen, Mrs. Esther Iarussi and Mrs. Laura Negele, presented Mayor Augustine and the council with a report entitled "Survey of Transportation Needs Relating to Scotch Plains Senior Citizens."

Thomas Dentizio, an Advisory Committee member, chaired the survey committee which spent many months compiling information for the survey.

The survey also included types of transportation programs that were available to senior citizens in other locales such as private carriers, local and county governments.

Although the survey itself was expensive and consisted of several hundred pages, a survey synopsis was provided to each council member.

Subsequent to the results of the survey, it was noted that the Union County Paratransit Department will be servicing Union County in its entirety, including Scotch Plains. This became effective Monday, January 1.

This privatizing of the transportation system within Union County eliminated five non-profit agencies which had been operating senior citizen transportation in the county.

Although this revised program is "to give the system a central location to operate more efficiently," it has made the survey moot at this time indicated Mrs. Iarussi and Mrs. Negele.

INCREASED PARKING RECOMMENDED

Township Officials And Business Leaders Share Downtown Ideas

Consultant Says Central District Should Complement Highway Retail

By SUZETTE STALKER
Specially Written for The Times

A group of approximately 20 Scotch Plains officials, business representatives and residents convened February 22 at the Scotch Plains Municipal Building to share ideas concerning future development of the Central Business District as part of the community's overall plan to give its downtown area an economic boost.

Members of the Township Council, Planning Board and Zoning Board of Adjustment have been working in conjunction with the Downtown Business Alliance and other local merchants in a campaign to spruce up the business district, which faces competition from larger retailers along Route No. 22.

The meeting was spearheaded by Dr. Martin Marks, a member of the Scotch Plains Planning Board and its Master Plan Committee, which has focused heavily on the downtown area during development of the revised plan. Committee Chairwoman, Mrs. Maria Sartor, was also a key speaker during discussions last week.

John Beckman, senior associate with Wallace, Roberts and Todd, a Philadelphia firm specializing in environmental planning, urban design and landscape architecture, opened the meeting with an overview of the business district, preliminary goals for revitalizing the area and also a preliminary list of problems which currently affect the district.

The three preliminary goals, he said, are to revitalize the business district by attracting a greater number and variety of high-quality retail shops, improved aesthetics and supporting a mix of retail, residential office and public use; to make the district more "pedestrian friendly" and to unite the existing district through the establishment of an overall design "theme."

Among the preliminary list of problems outlined were pedestrian and traffic conflicts, particularly on Park Avenue; the shortage of parking in some locations; a lack of retail variety and continuity and a lack of pedestrian-friendly environment and amenities.

Mr. Beckman identified the intersection of Park Avenue and Second Street as the point where a "floating sense of character" begins indicating that one has actually entered the downtown area, which also includes merchants along Grand and Center Streets and Westfield Avenue, among others.

The Wallace Roberts expert reported that adequate parking, whether on-street or off-street behind the buildings, as well as convenient access from parking lots to stores, was a key factor in attracting shoppers to local specialty stores.

The introductory discussion was

followed by a brief slide presentation by Richard W. Bartholomew, a partner with Wallace Roberts, who urged audience members not to try and compete with Route No. 22 businesses but rather "complement" highway retail businesses by providing an attractive and viable local shopping district with a unique flavor of its own.

Using a slide which showed the blueprint for a typical regional shopping mall as a guide, Mr. Bartholomew explained such retail hubs are generally bracketed by two anchor stores separated by 1,000 feet, the maximum distance retail experts ascertain most shoppers are willing to walk between one end of a chain of stores to the other.

He emphasized the importance of "retail continuity" in attracting customers to the business district, noting "gaps" in a commercial zone can disrupt the steady flow of shopper traffic.

Mr. Bartholomew said having specialty stores along one side of Park Avenue in the Municipal Building vicinity was a typical example of lack of continuity.

Citing a recent article in *Atlantic Monthly* magazine which indicated many people have become bored with large malls, Mr. Bartholomew said local specialty shops are enjoying renewed popularity but that communities must make their local business districts appealing to patrons through attention to architectural character aesthetics such as landscaping, lighting and paving, and sufficient parking.

He also touched on the significance of local commercial districts becoming aligned with cultural or entertainment sites in the community as a means of drawing more people to the area.

Upon conclusion of the presentation by the Wallace Roberts and Todd representatives, those gathered broke into four separate groups, each of which focused for the next 90 minutes upon a different aspect of downtown revitalization. These areas included parking, access and circulation; retail and business mix; aesthetics and amenities, and residential considerations.

When they regrouped later, representatives from each group discussed their analyses and recommendations with the rest of the audience. For aesthetics and amenities, Mrs. Sartor covered such topics as proposals to expand public parking in the business district, possibly by relocating the Fire House, as well as giving the area a new look through landscaping and planting of additional trees.

She also discussed the prospect of creating a "community focal point," such as extending the Village Green,

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Board of Education Introduces Tentative Budget of \$40.6 Million

A Total of \$35.8 Million Would Be Raised Through Local Property Taxes

By ELLEN RADIN
Specially Written for The Times

The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Board of Education introduced a school budget of \$40,635,897 Monday which calls for an increase of 1.49 per cent over last year's spending plan.

In terms of the amount of money to be raised through taxes, the board approved a plan by board member Richard R. Meade which will bring an additional \$80,000 to the school district from municipal taxes.

Under Mr. Meade's proposal, the local tax levy would be increased from \$35,683,674 to \$35,785,170. Tax revenues collected by the municipalities for education would thus be increased by nearly \$102,000 with only a \$22,000 tax increase in Fanwood and none in Scotch Plains. The proposal would result in approximately \$80,000 additional to the school district, officials said.

That proposal would have meant a tax rate of \$3.0447 in Scotch Plains and \$3.6198 in Fanwood. Because, as a practical matter, fractions of a cent cannot be used, these figures were rounded up by the municipalities to \$3.05 in Scotch Plains and \$3.62 in Fanwood.

The rounded-up figures, Mr. Meade said, meant the municipalities were actually collecting more than the board's tax levy. They would, however, only give the board the exact amount of the levy.

The municipalities then retain the extra funds and use them for purposes other than education.

The goal of Mr. Meade's proposal is to prevent the municipalities from retaining funds "left on the table" after the board's tax levy is paid. The difference between the actual tax rate and the rounded-up

figures should instead be paid over to the school board.

Mr. Meade proposed raising the tax rate in Scotch Plains to a figure greater than \$3.0447 but not greater than \$3.05. The figure would still be rounded up to \$3.05. Mr. Meade said there would not be any tax increase in Scotch Plains in the area of education.

In Fanwood, Mr. Meade proposed, the tax rate would be raised to a figure that would then be rounded up to \$3.63. The one cent increase is necessary in Fanwood he said because at \$3.6198, there is no room for fractional increases that could still be rounded up to \$3.62.

The one cent increase per \$100 of assessed value would cause a \$10 tax increase a year to the average Fanwood property owner in the area of education. As a whole, Fanwood would be contributing an additional \$22,000.

Officials said taxes could still be raised by the municipalities for reasons not related to school budgets.

The increase of approximately \$102,000 in the tax levy for only a \$22,000 tax increase would net approximately \$80,000 extra for the school budget.

Mr. Meade's proposal was unanimously approved by the board. Board members and some of the 10 members of the public attending the meeting praised Mr. Meade's manner of finding "pennies from heaven."

Board member Albert J. Syvertsen was particularly pleased, he said, to have extra funds available so that the "free balance" which is maintained for emergencies need not be used for operating expenses.

Board members also praised district Superintendent of Schools, Dr. Carol B. Choye, for her work on the proposed budget.

Dr. Choye said the proposed budget was prepared taking into consideration the projected increased enrollment, likely further cuts in state aid, the need to "downsize" and the state of negotiations with the Scotch Plains-Fanwood Education Association.

The proposed reductions and their attendant savings are as follows:

Part-time high school art teacher, \$26,000; one full-time and one part-time home economics teacher, \$73,847; full-time middle school physical education teacher, \$37,217; minigrants, \$17,500;

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WINNING ENTRY...Mrs. Mary Hovanec, Chairwoman of the Scotch Plains-Fanwood Arts Association's annual Members Show, presents artist Steve Tomczyk, with a cup for his Best in the Show oil painting of the Fanwood Train Station. Please see story on Page 5.

Six Candidates Seek Seats on School Board

Four Township and Two Borough Residents File Petitions

Six persons are vying for seats on the Scotch Plains-Fanwood Board of Education in this year's election. Four candidates are challenging for two township seats on the board while two candidates are running for the Fanwood seat. The election will be held Tuesday, April 16.

In Scotch Plains, incumbent Morris H. "Butch" Gillet joins three challengers. The other candidates are Mrs. Mary Ball Cappaio, Edward J. Saradaki, Jr. and Mrs. Gail Schoenbach.

Mrs. Cappaio is the current President of the Park Middle School Parent-Teacher Association. All of the township candidates reside in the Evergreen School polling district, according to a district spokeswoman. Mr. Saradaki, a 20-year township resident, is employed by a Springfield-based publisher of non-fiction books for children and young adults.

In last year's school board race, Mr. Saradaki lost his bid for a board seat by just 99 votes as he finished third behind incumbents Albert J. Syvertsen and Dr. Donald E. Sheldon. Mr. Saradaki received 28.9 per cent of the vote behind Mr. Syvertsen's 39.6 per cent and Dr. Sheldon's 31.5 per cent.

Mr. Gillette, a long-time member of the Scotch Plains-Fanwood Music Boosters, currently is Chairman of school board's Negotiating Committee which has been in ongoing contract talks with the Scotch Plains-Fanwood Education Association

since last January. In Fanwood, incumbent Mrs. Jessica D. Simpson is being challenged by Mrs. Virginia C. Manducca.

Mrs. Simpson was originally appointed to the board in May, 1992 to fill a one-year vacancy and was elected to a full-three-year term in 1993.

During her tenure on the board Mrs. Simpson has served as Chairwoman of the Policy Committee and as the board's representative to the Delegate Assembly of the New Jersey School Boards Association.

The candidate has been employed as a claims representative with the Social Security Administration for the past 22 years and has served on the Parent-Teacher Association Boards of School One and the Park Middle School.

Mrs. Manducca owns a computer integration firm based in Union. She has been employed for 17 years by American Telephone and Telegraph Company in middle management positions.

She teaches Sunday School at St. Bartholomew Roman Catholic Church in Scotch Plains.

The candidate belongs to the Garden State Coalition of Schools and is a member of the district's Assessment Committee.

Mrs. Manducca was unsuccessful in her attempt to win a seat on the board last spring against incumbent Richard R. Meade. Mrs. Manducca garnered 42 percent of the votes cast.