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HISTORIC HAPPENING...The Fanwood Borough Council is expected to approve changing the name of the historic Carriage House, home of the Philathallians theater group, to the Fanwood House Cultural Center. Officials anticipate opening the house for additional cultural events, and also displaying mementos of Fanwood's history at the local landmark.

David B. Corbin for The Times

Township Council Expected to Introduce Municipal Budget In March; Spending Shows \$538,000 Hike Over Last Year

By JEANNE WHITNEY
Specially Written for The Times

The Scotch Plains Township Council agreed Tuesday to transfer \$50,000 in surplus from last year's group insurance fund to the township's capital improvement account. Capital improvement expenses include township road repairs, equipment purchases and maintenance of the municipal building, council members explained.

At the same time, the council took the advice of the Recreation Committee and agreed to buy a \$15,500 eight-blade lawn mower from a Somerville tractor company for use at the Scotch Hills Golf Course. It will be paid for out of the capital improvement fund of the municipal budget, officials said.

Council members said the on-going discussions over the \$15,345,937 township budget for 1997 are "moving along" and officials said they hope to have a final version of the budget by the second week of March. The budget proposal, which appeared to be at least 250 pages long, was unveiled by

officials at the end of January. Municipal Manager Thomas E. Atkins said the total budget, at present, represents a 3.63 percent or \$538,000 increase over last year's budget.

Mr. Atkins has said that significant increases in township contributions to state police and fire pension funds has raised expenditures for 1997, as has increases in labor contracts and sewerage authority costs. On the other hand, the township has saved nearly \$100,000 in health care, he added.

The township recently signed a contract with CIGNA for municipal employee insurance in an effort to lower costs. Officials also indicated they would be considering a possible tax point increase. One tax point is equal to \$91,000 in spending in the township budget, officials added.

In other business, the council agreed by resolution to encourage Union County to study ways of sharing the expense of traffic lights in the township with the county. Councilwoman Joan Papen said that currently, even on county designated

roads, the township foots the entire bill for traffic signal maintenance.

The council also resolved to encourage Union County to pursue grant funds for a "feasibility study" to build a county animal control facility. Currently, the township is searching for an acceptable annual contract for animal warden services after rejecting a recent bid from Garden State Kennels, Inc., in Stirling, for \$21,500-a-year.

Last year, Garden State Kennels was part of a sticky township court case in which Garden State admitted releasing two potentially dangerous dogs to their owner, in apparent violation of a previous court order for the dogs to be held. Officials have suggested that a council committee tour Associated Humane Societies in Newark, the facility presently used by Westfield, Cranford and Mountainside for animal control services.

In other business, the council authorized the township to offer a strip of property for sale at 2550 Route No. 22, for purchase by property owners

adjacent to the lot. Officials said lot was near the Greenbrook Shopping Plaza. A public hearing on the ordinance will be held on Tuesday, February 25. A different ordinance passed by the council, will allow the Jewish Federation of Central New Jersey to hold a raffle on Sunday, June 1.

A resolution was also approved to authorize gaming at Bowcraft on Route No. 22.

On a separate matter, the council warmly recognized the achievements of four Scotch Plains-Fanwood High School students who were finalists in a national "ThinkQuest" competition for the design of "websites" on the Internet. James Bishop and Bon Shin won second place and \$1,500 scholarships for their design of a "Chemistry 101" website. Julienne Arnold and Anthony Cangialosi won Honorable Mention and \$1,200 scholarships for their "TECH: Teen Education and Center for Help" website.

The projects were selected from among 1,000 entries, according to teacher coaches Ted Wurster and Diane McKenna, who also received scholarships for their work. Mr. Wurster said the students spent over six months designing the projects. The contest was sponsored by Advanced Network Design of New York.

The council also recognized Dutch and Marie Sevell for a \$100,000 contribution to the township YMCA building fund. Officials said the gymnasium would be named for the couple.

Officials said township firefighters and equipment spent several hours at

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KIDS CUPS TAKE THE CAKE...Students from Laura Agnostak's first grade class at Evergreen School in Scotch Plains display their decorated cupcakes during Evergreen's newly instituted Lunchtime Enrichment Program. This program gives first graders the opportunity to expand their creativity with activities like cupcake decorating and arts and crafts. Pictured, left to right, are: Leah Oliver, Tory Painter, Nicole Marasco, Amanda Vitollo and Melissa Helock.

Plans for Magnet School To be Detailed at Meeting Tuesday Night at Vo-Tech

Union County Vocational-Technical Schools officials will explain their \$5.1 million plan for a four-year magnet high school for the intense study of science, mathematics, and technology, during a special meeting Tuesday night, February 18, at the school in Scotch Plains.

The Union County Board of Chosen Freeholders defeated a plan last summer for the proposal, with Democrats, who now hold the majority, explaining that they wanted to prioritize the numerous capital projects put before the board last year.

The site for the magnet high school is the existing 53,000 square-foot, two-story, technology building. Interior renovations of that facility are scheduled to begin sometime next month if the Freeholders approve the project. According to school officials, at the present time, the campus is interconnected with fiber and two interactive classrooms which are part of an overall county-wide interactive plan. The Interactive Television (ITV) system, for instance, can be used by students to take part in lectures or other programs throughout the county while not leaving the school's campus.

The overall renovation cost of the vocational-technical schools technical building to house the magnet school is estimated at \$5 million. The bulk of that cost, some \$4.3 million, would be used for architectural, structural, mechanical, electrical and plumbing construction.

Another \$350,000 would be needed for communication and technology, \$325,500 for architectural fees, another \$74,500 for contingency plans and \$50,000 for legal, bonding and miscellaneous expenses.

An enrollment of 270 students in grades 9 through 12 has been proposed, according to a concept paper obtained from Vocational-Technical Schools Superintendent, Dr. Thomas B. Bistocchi. The initial class, planned for this September, would have 65 students with successive students

added each year through the year 2000.

Students would attend the school full time with admission, based on competitive criteria including grade point average, an admissions test that identifies abilities in mathematics, science and communication skills, and standardized test scores.

School officials said the admissions policy also would provide a mechanism for representation from every resident district in Union County. Tuition and transportation to the school would be the responsibility of the student's resident district.

"A collaboration has been developed with Union County College so that a continuous program of science, mathematics, and technology education can be offered to our county's students," said Dr. Bistocchi.

All students would be required to take mathematics (algebra I and II, geometry, and calculus) science (biology, chemistry, physics, and an advanced placement elective in their senior year), foreign language, social studies, English, and health/fitness. Students would also be required to take a computer aided design course in their first year enrollment.

Sophomores would have the option of taking college level courses for credit in various technology areas.

In addition to the ITV classroom, a multi-media classroom with full audio, video, and data interactive capabilities would be included. Officials said the classroom would be designed with voice and video coverage, as well as a video projection system for incoming programming.

It was noted in the report of the magnet school that an existing second floor science laboratory space would be fully renovated.

Officials said the chemistry, physics and biology laboratories also would be designed with fully integrated computer technology to facilitate computer use for demonstrations and lectures as well as an integral component of student experiments.

Zoo Owner Denied Permit Renewal But Strives to Keep Facility Open

By SUZETTE STALKER
Specially Written for The Times

Despite having recently received a letter from the state Department of Environmental Protection and Energy's Division of Fish, Game and Wildlife informing him that his permits would not be renewed, the owner of the Scotch Plains Zoo was proceeding with plans this week to continue upgrading the six-acre facility on Raritan Road which he has owned for three years.

Sharon Southard, a spokeswoman for the Department of Environmental Protection and Energy, confirmed on Tuesday that a letter dated January 28 was sent to Harold Kafka telling him that his permits for the site were not being renewed because he had failed to address certain issues concerning "public safety and animal welfare."

She emphasized, however, that the decision not to renew the zoo permits does not mean that the 30-year-old facility is about to close, or that patrons will be turned away. Mr. Kafka has until Thursday, February 27, to request an administrative hearing on the matter, after which a date would be set for the zoo owner to present his case.

Mr. Kafka and his wife, Deborah, have been seeking formal site plan approval from the Scotch Plains Board of Adjustment to enable them to make multiple improvements to the zoo, which houses about 60 types of animals, including some exotic and endangered species. Among the inhabitants are a pair of bald eagles, several varieties of large cats, el-

ephants, giraffes, monkeys, llamas and goats.

The zoo has been targeted by activists from the New Jersey Animal Rights Alliance, based in Englishtown, who have staged pickets outside the establishment, claiming the animals are being maintained there under unsatisfactory conditions. During recent public hearings before the Board of Adjustment, several neighbors also said noises and odors were emanating from the zoo, which is located in a residential zone.

The Kafkas had been scheduled to present a comprehensive site plan to the board at its January 16 meeting but have so far been unable to do so because of financial complications, according to their attorney, Joseph E. Murray of Berkeley Heights. Mr. Murray said Mr. Kafka told him he had expected to make full payment yesterday, February 12, to the engineers who prepared the maps for his site plan.

The attorney confirmed that once the engineers received full payment, the maps would be released to Mr. Kafka, who could then file them with the Board of Adjustment. The board's Site Plan Subcommittee requested in December that Mr. Kafka merge his original site plan and later revisions into a comprehensive proposal with specific information about such aspects as the location and design of planned additional buildings.

As part of an overall plan to improve conditions at the zoo, the Kafkas have proposed erecting interior fencing between eight and 15 feet high in

order to keep the large cats from climbing over; enlarging the animal enclosures to provide them with more living space; expanding the giraffe area, modernizing the existing facilities, including lavatories, improving the parking lot and providing additional landscaping.

Ms. Southard said that the Division of Fish, Game and Wildlife opted not to renew Mr. Kafka's permits to possess exotic, endangered and non-game wildlife or to maintain game birds and animals on the property, based on what she characterized as the zoo owner's "current or past failures to adhere to regulations" concerning operation of the zoo. She said these regulations primarily involved cages, ventilation and "failure to feed the animals an adequate diet."

The spokeswoman said that state officials had conducted eight inspections of the facility over the past two years, and stated that the zoo was found to be lacking in certain criteria, particularly regarding shelter for the animals.

In July of 1996, Mr. Kafka was fined \$1,700 for failure to renew permits and to file quarterly or annual reports, according to Ms. Southard, who said the zoo owner was also fined \$4,000 in December in connection with other problems. She added that the facility has also been under investigation by the United States Department of Agriculture, which has jurisdiction over the site and issues permits for domestic and wildlife mammals.

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continue in their careers, Mayor Maryanne S. Connelly remarked that she felt this piece of legislation is discriminatory because there are far more male military veterans than female ones, particularly from the generation which would immediately be eligible for the retirement age extension.

"A better approach would be a change in the law allowing towns to make their own determination," concurred Council President Bruce H. Walsh, who argued that age is not automatically the determinant as to whether or not an individual is capable of performing their job duties.

"I'd rather have this be in our hands and in the hands of other municipalities than in the hands of someone who is removed from the town," the Council President continued. He added that Chief Parenti "is in excellent physical condition and does an excellent job. To lose him would be a serious blow to the town. We wouldn't be able to find another person like him."

Mr. Estis explained that the other side of the coin in these circumstances is that governing body members and colleagues of a veteran police officer or firefighter "may be too close to the situation" to objectively determine whether or not that person is still capable of performing their duties when they reach retirement age.

"This legislation is important not just for me but for every veteran in the state of New Jersey," Chief Parenti told *The Times* on Friday, noting that he plans to continue as the borough's highest-ranking law enforcement officer if the legislation passes. He noted that military veterans seeking to become police officers or firefighters after the maximum hiring age of 35 are presently allowed to subtract the number of years they served in the military from their age.

"What this bill is saying is give the same consideration to the top end," he said.

A hearing on the proposed legislation is expected to take place in Trenton on Monday, March 3, before the Assembly's Veterans Committee.

"I'm hoping that people, particularly veterans' groups, will try to get this through," Chief Parenti said, noting that the bill affects several area police chiefs who are in the retirement age bracket.

In other business, Councilman William E. Populus, Jr., Chairman of the council's Administration and Finance Committee, advised the governing body that a recent survey by Borough Clerk Eleanor McGovern found that four other communities had expressed an interest in sharing with Fanwood the services of a Tax Assessor. Officials have been considering potential shared service agreements with neighboring municipalities as a way to save money.

The board is also expected to vote on a resolution tonight concerning

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Deadlines Told For Submittals To The Times

Those persons preparing press releases for submission to *The Times* are reminded that copy should be E-mailed or faxed by 4 p.m. on the Friday prior to publication. *The Times'* E-mail address is goleader@aol.com. The fax number is 232-0473.

Releases, pictures, and letters to the editor can also be dropped off at our office located at 50 Elm Street or through our mail slot. To ensure that submittals reach our office prior to deadline we encourage E-mail or faxed material.

Sports stories which occur prior to the weekend should be in by the Friday deadline. Weekend sports events must be submitted by noon on the Monday prior to the publication date. Obituaries will be accepted up to 5 p.m. on Tuesdays.

All copy must be typed, double-spaced, no more than 500 words in length, and include a daytime telephone number where the submitter can be reached.

For events which are planned months in advance, we encourage submission of stories as early as possible prior to the event.

Please note that in addition to making our deadlines, the publication of submittals may be delayed due to space considerations. All submittals are subject to being cut due to length, edited for style and clarification at the discretion of the editor.