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SEWER SYSTEM REPAIRS TO BEGIN ON WILLOUGHBY ROAD

Fanwood Council Unveils \$5.5 Million Budget for '97 on Time With 0 Percent Municipal Tax Increase for Residents

By SUZETTE STALKER
Specially Written for The Times

In what was described by one member as an historic event, the Fanwood Borough Council last Thursday introduced the 1997 municipal budget which not only calls for a 0 percent tax increase but also was completed in accordance with the state's February 10 deadline.

Pending approval by the state, the budget will be formally adopted fol-

lowing a public hearing at the council's next regular meeting on March 13.

The governing body's proposed \$5,512,787.41 spending plan represents an increase of \$211,256, or 3.98 percent, from last year's budget of \$5,301,531.22, according to Borough Clerk Eleanor McGovern. Officials attributed the flat budget to increased revenues as well as a state refund, although Mrs. McGovern said that state aid "was down a little bit" this year.

Mayor Maryanne S. Connelly remarked that "this is the first time in a long time" that the council has been able to present a budget with no increase to the municipal portion of residents' tax bills. She added that this year "was really the earliest" that the council had introduced its annual budget.

The state reimbursed Fanwood \$254,000 through a grant for work done on Second and Helen Streets which the borough had paid for up front. The refund covered the increase in this year's budget which would otherwise have been borne by taxpayers, with the remaining funds going into surplus.

The Mayor reported that this year's budget was hammered out in less than eight meetings, approximately half the amount of time it has taken other years. She also thanked Mrs. McGovern and Councilman William E. Populus, Jr., the Administration and Finance Committee Chairman,

for their efforts, saying that "the process moved along very well."

Mr. Populus in turn commended the Mayor and council for their work in developing the budget, commenting that it's "an historic event that we can deliver a flat budget on time." He noted that another contributing factor was that municipal department heads submitted their budget requests on schedule. The public may review and comment on the budget between now and the anticipated adoption of the budget next month.

The council also approved on first reading a bond ordinance appropriating \$110,000 and authorizing issuance of \$104,500 in bonds for repairs to the borough's sewer system. Problems with the aging infrastructure were recently brought to light by residents of Willoughby Road, who testified before the council in November that sewage was backing up into their homes, particularly after heavy storms, and appealed for relief. Officials confirmed last week that repairs to the sewer system would commence with Willoughby.

Also passed on first reading was a bond ordinance appropriating \$406,080 and authorizing the issuance of \$385,766 in bonds for various general improvements to borough structures, and an ordinance covering salaries of municipal employees.

The council supported an amendment to its by-laws covering circumstances under which a member can abstain from voting. Representatives having "an actual personal or economic conflict" with an issue being voted on by the governing body may automatically abstain, but in situations where a council member seeks to abstain because he or she feels they lack sufficient information on the matter, the council may delay its vote or the member may be obligated to vote at that time.

Councilman Louis C. Jung recommended that council members be given the freedom to abstain from

voting on an issue, noting that this privilege is afforded to members of Congress and other elected bodies. Mayor Connelly responded that "we're elected officials and unless there is a valid reason for abstaining we should vote yes or no."

Members of the governing body passed a resolution in support of Assembly Bill No. 2492, which would allow police officers and firefighters who have reached age 65 to delay mandatory retirement by adding up to five years of past military service onto their tenure. It is expected to receive a hearing before the Assembly's Veterans Committee on Monday, March 3.

The bill, which was sponsored by Assemblyman and former Scotch Plains Alan M. Augustine, directly impacts Fanwood because Fanwood Police Chief Anthony J. Parenti will turn 65 years old in May. The Chief,

who served on active duty during the Korean Conflict, said last week he intended to continue in his position if the bill succeeds.

The governing body also passed a resolution asking that the state release monies from a fund for the training of Emergency Medical Technicians (EMTs), but which have so far been withheld. The fund is intended to help defray training costs for local squads, which are expensive and sometimes must be borne by the individual volunteers themselves, according to Fanwood Rescue Squad Captain Susan Davis.

Mrs. Davis explained that basic training for new EMTs costs between \$250 and \$350, and that EMTs must complete 48 credits of continuing education in order to be recertified after three years. In addition, EMTs must be annually recertified in cardiopulmonary resuscitation and in cardiac defibrillation if they will be using a defibrillator. Supplemental instruction in specialized pediatric training and trauma life support can

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QUIZ KIDS... Pictured above with their teacher, Nancy McCabe, far left, are the winning St. Bartholomew's team members, left to right, Richard Stewart, Matthew Boyle, Steven Grabowski and Katherine Berka. The children competed with students from Our Lady of Mount Virgin in Middlesex in a quiz-bowl featuring selected fiction books. Please see a story on Page 10.

Terrill Middle School Chorus Cited For Appearance in Broadway Show

By BRIAN CAROVILLANO
Specially Written for The Times

The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Board of Education kicked things off on a high note last Thursday, with the Terrill Middle School "Select" Chorus performing a serenade to the tune of "God Bless Us Every One," under the direction of Mary Lu Farrell.

These 30 young crooners were fresh off their first Broadway appearance, in the Paramount Theater's production of Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*. The chorus was selected from a tough field of challengers representing schools all over the metropolitan area.

In recognition of this accomplishment, the board had drafted a resolution to be presented to the students and their teacher, recognizing them not only for their feats outside the classroom, but for their continued attention to their studies amidst all that distraction as well. Mrs. Farrell thanked the board on behalf of the entire chorus, pointing out to the board members and parents who were in attendance that, "if we need any more proof that we need to keep music in the schools, this is it," she said.

Mrs. Farrell also noted that this group of students might be quickly headed to its second Broadway appearance. This time, the seasoned stage veterans are hoping to be cast in a Broadway production of *The Wizard of Oz*, which will star television's Roseanne Arnold as the Wicked Witch of the West.

After cookies and refreshments, the board moved to executive session, and then reconvened for its regularly-scheduled agenda meeting for the month.

As usual, there was further fret over the status of Governor Christine Todd Whitman's school funding plan. Superintendent of Schools Dr. Carol B. Choye and Board President, Dr. Donald E. Sheldon, reported from a meeting they attended of the Garden State Coalition, a task force organized to deal with and combat the loss of school funding.

Dr. Sheldon pointed out that for every school superintendent or board president in attendance at the meeting, there was a different interpretation of what the new funding plan offered.

"Many of the changes we thought we'd agreed to in the legislation have changed in the interpretation that has come out lately," he lamented.

"The statutes went to the legislature suddenly, and they hurriedly approved it," a statement supported by the fact that many legislators did not even read far enough into the bill to see the school choice provision, which was then unwittingly voted in, he said.

"The same process is occurring with the drafting of regulations (by the State Education Commission)," said Dr. Sheldon.

Other business included the drafting of special education waivers which were approved by the state, and were read to the board by Susan Tillis, Director of Special Services. The waivers provide for broader in-

terpretation of state limits on group sizes and replacement instruction for kids classified for speech therapy and other special education programs that are not a part of regular classroom instruction.

Among other things, the waivers increase allowable group size for speech therapy from three to five. "We still feel this is a workable group size," said Mrs. Tillis, who also pointed out that now a group of five would not have to be divided into two groups and scheduled separately. The larger group size also allows for increased interaction and stimulation, according to Mrs. Tillis.

Talk later shifted to the drafting of a 1997-1998 school calendar, which may or may not include the traditional four-day weekend for the

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Scotch Plains Council Expected To Introduce Budget on March 4

By JEANNE WHITNEY
Specially Written for The Times

Scotch Plains township officials indicated Tuesday night that the Township Council may be ready to introduce the 1997 municipal budget by Tuesday, March 4, during a special meeting. It is not known what changes, if any, will be made to the \$15,345,937 proposed annual municipal budget.

The figure represents a \$538,077 or 3.63 percent increase over last year. The council would hold the public hearing on Tuesday, April 8, officials added. At least 28 days are required between introduction and adoption of a municipal budget, to allow for a state review of the proposed budget. The council has scheduled its own weekly budget review meetings since the proposal was submitted by the Municipal Manager's office on January 29 and the council members said their review was, indeed, "almost done."

Officials also indicated that the council needed to approve an additional \$45,000 for the municipal "buildings and grounds" temporary budget, saying that the initial council approval contained a typographical error which lowered the allotment by that amount.

On a separate matter, the council said it would be determining how to best use a \$78,000 grant from the Union County Community Development Office. The township had originally asked for a combined total of \$215,000 to improve Green Forest Park and create additional parking at the Senior Citizen Housing site. Both projects qualify for community development funding according to Federal government standards, officials added.

Officials indicated that the council "may be ready soon" to move ahead with plans to repair portions of the historic Osborn Cannonball House. The council said it received an architect's report on the proposed work and would be analyzing estimated costs before applying at the state and federal levels for matching funds and historic certification. The township has already hired preservation specialist Nancy Zerbe to walk the township through the application process. Late last year, members of the township Historic Commission told the council that the leaky wood shingle roof on the pre-Revolutionary War house threatened to damage the interior and stored artifacts and costumes.

On a different matter, the World War II Commemorative Committee,

which recently dedicated a time capsule, recommended to the council that the steel flag pole structure on the "Liberty Island" war monument be shortened. Chairman of the Committee, Thomas L. Perrucci, said the flag currently flies at "half-mast" because the top of the 80-foot structure can only be reached with a fire ladder truck. "It is inappropriate," Mr. Perrucci said, for the seal flag to not fly at "full peak." The council said it will consider the committee's request to allow the township Department of Public Works to shorten the steel structure by the length of the existing flag pole.

The council said it will ask Rose Marie Dutter of Rosie's Treasures Boutique to request a new Special Use Permit, instead of a renewal, to put mannequins outside her shop doors since the business has moved to a different location since last year. Zoning officials indicated that her initial application included a request to place a flag with the store name out front, which is not allowed under the "special use" code.

The council said it would also recommend that several eateries requesting special use permits for seasonal outdoor dining be limited to two or three tables of four seats each. An

attorney for the township said the council's decision on this was "reasonable and consistent."

On a separate issue, Mayor Irene T. Schmidt said she would like to examine the possibility of a study, including Watchung and Somerset County, in an effort to save some of the traffic congestion in the township on state and county roads.

Municipal Manager Thomas E. Atkins told the council that the Suburban Municipal Joint Insurance Fund — of which the township is a member — was looking into the possible creation of a joint health insurance fund. Mr. Atkins said the council should not rule out consideration of a joint health fund after the township policy with CIGNA runs out in October 1999. A joint health insurance plan can be started with a minimum of 1,000 employees which can be shared among neighboring municipal governments, he said. Mr. Atkins also provided the council with a chart showing rate increases over the years of the state health insurance plan as high as 32 percent in one year. Decreases were as low as -5 per cent, according to the chart.

The council's next meeting on Tuesday, February 25, will have a special program in honor of Black History Month, Mayor Schmidt said.

At Least Four Expected To Vie for Seats on BOE

By SUZETTE STALKER
Specially Written for The Times

Three candidates, including two of the three incumbents whose seats on the Scotch Plains-Fanwood Board of Education are available this year, have filed petitions so far to run in the annual school election on Tuesday, April 15, Board Secretary and Business Administrator Richard J. Marshall's office confirmed on Tuesday.

All three vacancies on the school board are held by representatives from Scotch Plains, including board Vice President Lillian M. Dettmar, August L. Ruggiero and Theresa Larkin. They are being challenged by newcomer Thomas Russo, a township resident for 31 years and an attorney with an office in Scotch Plains. No Fanwood seats are open this year.

Mr. Marshall's office reported that petitions have been submitted by Mr. Ruggiero and Mrs. Dettmar, along with Mr. Russo. Mrs. Larkin said that she intended to file by the end of this week. The deadline for school board candidates to return their petitions, which require 10 signatures, is Monday, February 24, at 4 p.m.

Each of the candidates will be running for three-year terms on the school board. Mrs. Dettmar is a former business teacher who has been a member of the Board of Education for 16 years. Mr. Ruggiero, a community college mathematics teacher, has served on the board since the 1970s. Mrs. Larkin anticipates running for her second term on the school board this year.

Mr. Russo, 41, was educated through the local school system and graduated from Scotch Plains-Fanwood High School. The candidate and his wife, Marla, have two children, Christopher and Alex, both of whom attend Brunner Elementary School. He has served on the Citizens Budget Committee and the Strategic Planning Committee.

The candidate also serves as counsel to the Scotch Plains-Fanwood High School Alumni Association and the Old Men's Softball League of St. Bartholomew the Apostle Roman Catholic Church in Scotch Plains, where he also teaches Confraternity of Christian Doctrine classes. He is a Past President of the Scotch Plains-Fanwood Rotary Club and had been Vice President and Director of the local Jaycees.

Mr. Russo said this week that because of his long-time association with the Scotch Plains-Fanwood school district, he feels that he brings an "historic perspective of where the district has been and some ideas of where it should be going." He added that the school system "did well for me and I want to make sure it continues."

Interested persons may pick up petitions from the receptionist at the board's administrative offices at Evergreen Avenue and Cedar Street in Scotch Plains.



OPENING FOR SEASON... The Osborn Cannonball House, located at 1840 Front Street in Scotch Plains, will reopen on Sunday, March 2, from 2 to 4 p.m. A program of Scherenschnitte will be presented, with a demonstration by Evelyn Kennelly. The earliest form of this traditional paper cutting was done in Germany in the 1600s, a museum spokesman said, noting that German immigrants brought the art to Pennsylvania when they settled there in the late 18th century. Docents will give tours of the circa-1760 museum. There is no admission charge and all visitors are invited.

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.