

# THE TIMES

of

## Scotch Plains - Fanwood



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LISTEN UP...Bill Ilge, a volunteer firefighter from Caldwell, teaches children at Fanwood's LaGrande Park the importance of having a meeting place at their home. The St. Barnabas fire safety house is pictured in the background.

## Council Reviews Funding Needs For Downtown Revitalization

By SUZANNE MARKERT  
Specially Written for The Times

The Fanwood Borough Council discussed downtown revitalization and funding for the Fanwood Fire Department and Rescue Squad at its agenda meeting on July 2.

Jack Molenaar, Chairman of the Fanwood Downtown Revitalization Committee, gave a presentation to the council concerning the best use of funds to improve the downtown district, which includes Martine, La Grande and South Avenues. He proposed the addition of benches, planters, murals and trees, as well as seasonal banners. The borough already has brackets for the banners along South Avenue, as well as holiday banners from last winter.

Mr. Molenaar suggested three additional sets of banners, with the themes, "Welcome to Fanwood," "patriotic" and "fall." However, he added, there was a possible liability issue with utility companies along Martine Avenue which would have to be worked out before banner brackets could be installed there.

The second part of the revitalization plan is merchant involvement. Mr. Molenaar said, citing merchants as a large part of the committee's "fall campaign." The committee has been assembling a database of store hours, merchant owners and property owners. Only with merchant support, Mr. Molenaar said, can anything be done to the back parts of stores.

"That's a big undertaking, and there's no way we can do that without the merchants," he added. No proposals for cleaning up the rear areas have been proposed yet. "I can't get them (the merchants) involved until I show them we're doing something," he reasoned. "Without them, we can't push this further... The buzzword is 'partnership.'"

Councilman Louis C. Jung asked Mr. Molenaar about the committee's specific plans to involve merchants. Mr. Molenaar responded that the committee will meet with merchants in the fall to compare their needs with the committee's before making specific plans.

According to Mr. Molenaar, the committee will require more funds in the future. "It's a consistent, constant investment," Mr. Molenaar said. "When you put something in, you need money put aside to maintain it. This is a full town-wide, nonprofit group, everyone-involved sort of thing. But yes, we do need more funding for next year to continue with this. Otherwise it will die."

Councilman William E. Populus, Jr. also questioned possible ways to market the former Dean Oil site on La Grande Avenue and First Street. Presently, he said, the site is not being marketed for any particular use, and is simply marked "Land for Sale." Mr. Molenaar commented that community members have asked whether or not the site was clean, adding that therefore "what we should be doing is a big sendoff on 'This is clean,' to market this site and work with the Realtor." According to Mr. Molenaar, the site has been marketed by several Realtors, most recently Burgdorff ERA.

The property was recently declared clean of soil contamination by the State Department of Environmental Protection.

A resolution was made supporting the annual CONTACT We Care 5K race, and two appointments were made: one, to extend the term of Tax Collector Alice Parenti, and another, to name Margaret Ferreiro to the Library Board of Trustees. Correspondence to the council was also read and discussed.

The Fanwood Volunteer Fire Company announced its annual picnic on Sunday, September 7, and the Jersey City Historic Preservation Commission asked the council for its support in the commission's fight to save the Apple Tree House in Jersey City, which is located next to a bank which wants to expand onto the Apple Tree House site. The Jersey City Council, according to the commission, will not reach a vote on preserving the house. Mayor Maryanne S. Connelly said that she would like to investigate why the city's council has not yet voted before she gives her support.

The Department of Environmental Protection also sent the council correspondence concerning old "Exit" signs. The old signs contain radioactive materials which can be released if the signs are not properly disposed of. The letter said that local code enforcement officials are responsible for finding and properly disposing of any remaining signs. However, no action was taken. "All of our (signs) in the borough are not radioactive," said Borough Administrator and Clerk Eleanor McGovern, though she added that the borough will check businesses for the signs.

A summary of letters sent to the council regarding aircraft noise in Scotch Plains and Fanwood was then handed out to officials. No resolutions were made.

A request from New Providence was read, which asked for support for a resolution that senior citizens

receive a 20 percent reduction in school taxes. Qualified seniors would have to be either at least 65 and living on the property, or at least 55, retired and the primary family income source.

"I'll support that the day that they freeze my Social Security and Medicare taxes," commented Councilman Stuart S. Kline.

Councilwoman Karen M. Schurtz agreed with the theory of lowered taxes for seniors, but questioned the practice. "What other source of funding will they have?" she asked. "Whose taxes will they increase in order to offset this?"

"We are a community," stressed Mr. Kline, who said that he disagreed with the principle of the resolution. "I support elderly, I support those who can't work - I do it because I am a member of the community. And for one segment of the community to say simply because they don't have kids in school that they don't benefit from education - that, fragments the community."

The resolution was defeated by a vote of 4-2.

A letter from Fire Chief Daniel Librandy stated that Engine No. 5 is not working properly. There are problems with the brakes and water pump, which cannot be fixed because of a lack of available parts. Engine No. 5 is the third backup rig. Mr. Populus supported the purchase of a new engine, "for the safety and security of the community, and for the firemen themselves."

There was also concern that fire insurance assessments could rise if a new rig was not purchased. Though at first, the Administration and Finance Committee recommended putting \$50,000 toward a bond to purchase a new engine, which costs approximately \$300,000, this would prevent the Fanwood Volunteer Rescue Squad from receiving the \$25,000 needed to purchase a new ambulance. The current ambulance, while relatively new, is too small to handle the rescue squad's equipment and active members. A new ambulance would cost \$105,000, and so far the squad has raised \$75,000 toward it.

Also, the rescue squad is celebrating its 100th anniversary next year, and Mayor Connelly wanted the squad to have its new rig for the event. "I think we're just lucky and so fortunate that we have volunteers that do this work," she said. "So many other towns have had to go to paid rescue squads."

"I find it very difficult to say 'no' to people who volunteer for the community," said Mr. Populus. "In fact, I can't say 'no' because they've given so much to the community and it's something that's good for all of us."

Therefore the council discussed ways to purchase both a new fire engine and a new ambulance. According to Mrs. McGovern, there are three possible ways to purchase both rigs. First, an emergency appropriation could be requested. Second, the ambulance could be purchased in the borough's name and the title could then be sold to the squad. Third, the ambulance could be put into next year's budget.

It was eventually decided that, since it takes over a year of preparation to get a fire engine, the engine can be appropriated for in next

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## CHIEF PARENTI: COMMUNITIES NEEDED ADDITIONAL TIME

# Police Chief to Retire Jan. 1 While Law Grants Borough Six Months for Transition

By SUZETTE STALKER  
Specially Written for The Times

Fanwood Police Chief Anthony J. Parenti, who has headed the borough's police department for 22 years, will remain on the job until January 1 thanks to a bill signed into law June 30 by Governor Christine Todd Whitman. The legislation grants law enforcement personnel a six-month extension on mandatory retirement and allows municipalities additional time to find replacements for their officers.

State Attorney General Peter Verniero, in response to federal mandates issued in February, reactivated a state law last September calling for all police and fire personnel who have reached age 65 to retire. The Division of Pensions had determined July 1 as the retirement date. The new legislation allows police personnel who have reached retirement age or who will turn 65 later this year to remain on the job until New Year's Day, although fire personnel had to adhere to the original deadline.

The extension of the mandatory retirement deadline will give Fanwood and other municipalities affected by the law additional time to make the necessary transitions regarding the chain of command within their police departments. Mayor Maryanne S. Connelly and the Borough Council had discussed the law's potential impact during several recent meetings of the governing body.

Chief Parenti, who turned 65 in May, said on Monday that he felt the state "did the right thing" by extending the retirement age deadline. He proposed that the ideal avenue would have been to abolish the age regulations altogether, allowing people to serve as long as they were capable, and added that he felt the law also discriminated against younger people who are seeking to join municipal police or fire departments after age 35. The chief has served on the Fanwood force for 41 years.

Beginning next year, all police and fire personnel will have to retire on the first day of the month following their 65th birthday. The state law also prohibits the hiring of police and fire personnel over the age of 35. For the past five years, the state's mandatory retirement law for police and fire officials had not been enforced, allowing persons age 35 and older to be hired and to remain on the job for

25 years in order to receive their maximum pension benefits.

In October, Bill No. 2492 was introduced in the Assembly which would have allowed police and fire personnel to delay retirement by adding up to five years of past military service to their tenure. It would also have allowed individuals seeking to become police officers or firefighters after age 35 to subtract from their age the number of years they served in the military. The bill, which excluded those who did not serve in the military, eventually became obsolete.

A later measure, Bill No. 2574, sponsored by Assemblymen Alan M. Augustine and Richard H. Bagger, called for police and fire personnel who reached age 65 to postpone their retirement for five years regardless of whether they had served in the military or not, according to Nancy Malool, Chief Legislative Aide to Assemblyman Augustine. Mr. Augustine and Mr. Bagger both represent the 22nd Legislative District, which includes Fanwood and Scotch Plains.

The bill was subsequently amended, proposing that these employees be allowed to remain on the job until they had an opportunity to take a test which is being developed by the federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration, and expected to be in place by October of the year 2000. The test would determine a person's ability to perform the functions of their job, according to Ms. Malool.

Additional revisions to the bill reduced the retirement deadline to two years, then to 18 months, which would have allowed persons turning 65 this year to work up until January 1, 1999. Similar legislation was sponsored in the State Senate by Senator C. Louis Bassano of Union. The measure was ultimately reduced to the six-month version which was signed by Governor Whitman.

Chief Parenti, who testified before the Assembly and the Senate on behalf of Bill 2574 several times during May and June, argued that during the years when the state guidelines were not enforced, "the state of New Jersey didn't fall apart." He added that if a person "could give a good 10 or 12 more years, they should be able to do it. I don't see anything wrong with it."

"I wasn't in this for me," said the chief, who revealed that he had planned to retire anyway in 1998. "It's because I believe very strongly

that they should be weighed on their ability."

The chief, who oversees a department of 20 officers, confirmed that the law will affect a number of other law enforcement officials, including police chiefs in Bernards Township and Dunellen. Former Westfield Fire Chief Walter Ridge, who turned 65 last August, officially retired on July 1 after 38 years with the town's fire department.

He remarked that the State Attorney General's ruling did not give municipalities enough time to make the transitions necessary when high ranking officers retire or move up in their departments. "When the top guy goes it moves right down the line," he observed, adding that he needed time to complete his own retirement plans as well as make preparations for a new chief to take over.

He stated that he expects to meet soon with the Borough Council's Public Safety Committee to discuss the pending transition. The chief's likely successor is Captain Robert Carbo, a long-time member of the Fanwood Police Department. While Chief Parenti acknowledged that he would like to see the captain succeed him, he said the ultimate course of action will be determined by the governing body. He predicted that the council would render its decision sometime in the fall.

In an ironic twist, the chief described how years ago he successfully fought for special legislation allowing Captain Carbo to return to the force. The captain, who had served for 10 years with the Fanwood Police Department and then left for four years, was 36 when he wanted to return - one year over the mandatory hiring age. "I felt he was being discriminated against," the chief commented.

Concerning his support for an extension on the mandatory retirement age, the chief stressed that "you have to have a good, smooth, orderly transition to make everything work right. We needed some transition time... I couldn't just turn my back on the town and say 'you're on your own.'"

He reflected on his long career with the borough as "a good, good working relationship," adding that the community "has been very good to me." He noted that some of Fanwood's crime prevention programs have been implemented around the state and the country, and that one local project was even introduced in London, England.

## Planning Board Hears Further Testimony on Reserve Project

By JUSTIN BRIDGE  
Specially Written for The Times

The Scotch Plains Planning Board met last Monday to continue hearing testimony on the proposed development known as The Reserve. The site, owned by the Donato family of Scotch Plains, is going to be developed by K. Hovnanian.

K. Hovnanian is seeking to build 116 townhouse condominiums, 16 of which will satisfy the Mount Laurel Housing requirements. Robert Krause, the attorney representing K. Hovnanian, produced two witnesses to testify in favor of The Reserve. However, due to time constraints and an intense cross-examination of the first witness by attorney William A.

Butler, the second witness was unable to testify at this meeting.

Mr. Butler, of Westfield, is representing Wel-Don Materials. Wel-Don is opposing The Reserve because, according to Mr. Butler, there is some concern over building the development downstream of a dam.

Mr. Butler himself claimed that he "wonders if this is a safe, suitable site. I'm talking about life and limb." Mr. Butler worries that, in the event of a dam break, the residents of The Reserve will be endangered by the flood waters.

The only witness that Mr. Krause could produce at the meeting was Robert N. Rodgers, a planning engineer with Orth-Rodgers & Associ-

ates, Inc. from Bridgewater. Mr. Rodgers was hired by K. Hovnanian to study the traffic impact the development would have in the area.

Mr. Rodgers studied the following roads: Route No. 22, New Providence Road, Meadow Street, and Union Avenue. All of these roads either border the site or are close enough for the development to impact upon.

Mr. Rodgers came to the conclusion that the peak hours for traffic in the area on an average day are between 7:15 and 8:15 a.m. and between 5 and 6 p.m.

In addition, Mr. Rodgers listed statistics as to the volume of cars that travel on these various roads between the peak hours and how long these cars wait at any of the intersections. Mr. Rodgers also made advanced projections based on traffic in the year 2000.

When asked if he thought the development would affect local traffic, Mr. Rodgers said yes, although it would be a slight increase, by as much as 1 to 3 percent.

Mr. Rodgers also noted a potential hazard in the development, in this case a small concrete island at the entrance to the development on Meadow Street. He called for the removal of the island on the grounds that it might cause problems pulling into and out of The Reserve.

However, Paul Ferreiro, an engineer representing Scotch Plains, asked if the island could be moved back into the development. Mr. Ferreiro claimed that he would like to see the island

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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 goledar@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 must 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.