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EAST SECOND ST. WESTFIELD & PLAINFIELD AVE.'S WOULD BE NAMED 'TOWNE CENTRE'

Downtown Development Committee's Report Proposes New Front on Municipal Building

By JEANNE WHITNEY
Specially Written for The Times

The Scotch Plains Downtown Development Committee (DDC) gave the Township Council a wish list last week that included proposals for re-naming East Second Street, designing a new facade for the Municipal Building and selling township property along Park Avenue for commercial development.

According to the committee, the nine recommendations seek "to improve the business district image and make it a vital, attractive and competitive provider of services to our

community."

The committee, chaired by resident Arthur J. Grisi, asked the council for \$30,000 in "seed money" from next year's municipal budget so that a task force can begin to pursue the DDC's recommendations. The committee was appointed by Mayor Irene T. Schmidt in January.

The DDC reports that selling the township property on the edge of the Municipal Building parking lot on Park Avenue — and its subsequent development — would pay for most of the committee's other proposals. Professional planners hired by the

township see room for six retail stores with professional offices above on the strip of property next to Fagioli Restaurant, according to the plan.

Councilman Martin Marks, Liaison to the Development Committee, said during a council conference that professional planners insist businesses must be on both sides of Park Avenue for downtown development to succeed.

Deputy Mayor Joan Papen objected to the notion of selling the strip of township property where there are now hedges and signs.

"I don't want to change the character of our downtown," she said.

Other proposed changes to the township business district include identifying it as the "Towne Centre" and adding the name "Centre Boulevard" to East Second Street and Westfield and Plainfield Avenues within the township. Banners with a new logo and motto, "Enjoy the Home-town Feeling," would be added to utility poles in the district.

Twenty-five sidewalk benches are also part of the plan.

The committee's recommendation to add a new front to the present Municipal Building took some officials by surprise.

According to the DDC report, "The architectural look of the Municipal Building is not in line with the traditional facade style we are striving for. A new facade would add to the attractiveness of the downtown and present an example to landlords and developers of the style of buildings we want to have."

Mr. Grisi told the council that, "The focal point of the district ought to be Town Hall and right now, the look of it is not appealing."

A specific historical style for the building's facade was not mentioned in the committee's report, although some have said that the township's founding in 1684 would indicate a Colonial theme. Others have said they favor, for example, Victorian-era street lamp designs.

Other DDC suggestions included looking at sign and zoning ordinances, adding outdoor directory signs in the district and signs along Route No. 22 for "Towne Centre."

Officials said \$25,000 out of the

\$30,000 needed to fund the committee's recommendations would be included in next year's municipal budget proposals and council members could then decide whether to approve it.

On a separate matter, the council said the township was communicating with private garbage haulers after the township did not buy into a 25-year contract with the Union County Utilities Authority in a deal to guarantee the financial survival — in a post waste flow controls era — of the Union County Resource Recovery Facility, commonly known as the incinerator, last month.

In other business, the council agreed during its conference session to support legislation to add public playgrounds and other recreation facilities to a "drug free school zone" law where fines and jail sentences are automatically doubled if offenders are within 1,000 feet of schools.

The council also agreed to support the South Orange Village Township in its bid for state legislation to allow "incentive zones" in municipal commercial areas. Under the plan, towns would be able to keep state sales tax funds collected that is above an annual baseline amount owed to the state.

It is thought the measure could ultimately provide funding for improvements to revitalize downtowns. Another measure to require landlords to register the names of tenants with the township was endorsed by council members. Mayor Schmidt called the recommendation from the township Construction Department "a good idea."

During last week's regular meeting, the council withdrew an ordinance to sell township property for a minimum bid of \$10,000 at 599 Jerusalem Road, saying the property would be a buffer between commercial and residential zones.

The public hearing had been scheduled to continue from the last meeting when it was withdrawn.

Ordinances to appropriate funds totaling \$255,000 from the state Department of Transportation were approved by the council at the regular meeting. An ordinance that dovetails with state legislation to provide public defense in municipal courts also received a unanimous vote from the council.

On other matters, the council agreed to consider adding curbs and fixing potholes on Hamlette Place after residents complained. Officials said there were violations connected with two vacant lots on the street.

Two strips of property originally designated as streets named Shepards and Gables along Terrill Road between Front Street and the Green Brook will be vacated by the township since they were never developed, according to the council.

Two residents got the okay from the

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READY FOR THE HOLIDAYS...The Fanwood Lions Club decorated this tree during last year's celebration with donated eyeglasses which were collected during the year. The club maintains an eyeglass drop-off box on South Avenue during the year. Pictured, left to right, are: Bob McCarthy, Paul Krzyvanowski, June McCarthy and Fanwood Councilman Dr. Chester R. Lindsey. Please see a story on Page 9.

TWO FLOATER POSITIONS CONSIDERED TO CUT CUSTODIAL 'TIME AND A HALF' COSTS

McGinn 'Authors' Share Hardcover Books With BOE as Part of 'Leap to Literacy' Grant

By SUBAN DYCKMAN
Specially Written for The Times

During its public meeting on November 23, the Scotch Plains-Fanwood Board of Education enjoyed a series of readings from McGinn Elementary School students who were eager to share the hardcover books they had written and illustrated as part of the "Leap to Literacy" grant obtained by teacher Joan Costello.

Students Michael Bello, Jillian and Chelsea Lusk, Laura Webb, James Alfano, and Nicole and Colleen Hagerty were featured during the meeting. Titles ranged from "The Strange Jellyfish" and "The New York Rangers" to "Can A Bear Be President?"

When Ms. Costello first applied to the Educational Enrichment Foundation for the grant, she intended to use it solely for her first-grade students.

With the support of McGinn's present and former principals, Mariana Cassidy and Barbara Newbaker, Parent-Teacher Association (PTA), teachers and staff, Ms. Costello (now a third-grade teacher) parlayed the program into a project for the entire student body — more than 500 students.

"Every student in the school had the opportunity to produce their own book," she said.

"The grant (symbolized) two things I hold dear," Ms. Costello added, "that children learn to read by reading and that reading and writing are intertwined."

In addition to presenting their creations at an "Author's Night" last June, students who participated in the program have the pleasure of having their books shelved in the school library for fellow students and parents to enjoy.

Successful in getting the grant renewed for a second year, Ms. Costello took the "Leap to Literacy" a step further by creating a buddy program between McGinn's Kindergarten and third-grade students.

The older children serve as readers, writers and editors for the younger students.

"The final product," said Ms. Costello, "is a hardcover book."

During the regular portion of the meeting, the board discussed correspondence received from Terrill Middle School regarding its lift for physically-disabled students.

"The lift was installed four years ago," said Board President Dr. Donald E. Sheldon, "to facilitate the movement of physically-handicapped children between the first and second floors."

Superintendent of Schools, Dr. Carol B. Choye, added that the track record for lifts within the district (one at Terrill and two at Scotch Plains-Fanwood High School) is "not very positive."

She noted that the Terrill lift had broken down three times last week alone. The high school lift is used infrequently.

While the administration is investigating the possibility of installing elevators in lieu of the lifts to accommodate special-needs students, the Superintendent said that decision would not be inexpensive, necessitating a budget question sometime in the future, and would be time-consuming — taking six months or more to install.

In the meantime, said Dr. Choye, "teachers are trying to figure out a way to keep physically-disabled students' moves (from floor to floor) to one per day." In addition, Terrill Principal John C. Foulks is trying to re-route children using other staircases. If a lift is in operation, the staircase

can not be used by students on foot.

Under the Superintendent's Report, the board voted to approve the new Technology Plan, "Structuring the Future: Advancing the New Literacy." The board also approved the Kindergarten to grade 12 Science Content Standards and Proficiencies.

To date, board members have approved content standards and proficiencies for mathematics, science, technology and world language. The next program up for review is special education.

In other business, the board approved a series of mini grants to teachers across the elementary, middle and high schools. Grants include titles such as "Battle of the Books: Grades 4 and 5," "A Study on the Constitution and Government: Grade 7," "Introducing Geometry on the Personal Computer: Grades 6-8" and "Physical Science with Computers and Universal Lab Interfaces: Grades 11-12."

"These are an excellent example of good teaching and good learning for our students," said Board member Theresa A. Larkin.

Dr. Choye added, "The quality of these programs and their focus on the importance of learning is extraordinary."

After much discussion, the board voted unanimously to approve the administration's recommended adjustments to the 1997-1998 budget for the month of July.

Finance Committee Chairman Edward J. Saridaki, Jr. said that, by allowing the School Business Administrator/Board Secretary Matthew Clarke to obtain a "hard close" on the district's financial report for the month of July, the administration and board will be able to determine where the "glitches" are in the accounting software.

He said the board's approval of these adjustments for the first month of the budget year is critical to prevent creation "of a large snowball which will be difficult to correct." Mr. Saridaki expects the budget adjustments to be up to date by January.

Prior to the vote, several board members, including Mrs. Larkin, Richard R. Meade and August A. Ruggiero, expressed concern that they were being asked to vote on information they had received on November 21.

Mr. Meade raised the possibility of hiring temporary help to facilitate Mr. Clarke's efforts to bring the budget reports up to date as quickly as possible.

In thanking Mr. Meade, Dr. Choye said, "It's good to have that suggestion come from the board if we need some extra support."

She assured board members that information would be delivered to them in a more timely fashion as the board returns to its regular Thursday meeting schedule in December.

At the conclusion of the business portion of the agenda, Dr. Choye presented an update on the under-budgeted areas in the current school budget. These include: substitute teachers, maintenance, telephone and custodial overtime.

Of greatest concern to Dr. Choye was the \$67,779 spent through the months of July, August and September on custodial overtime. The entire budget for the year amounts to \$80,000.

Dr. Choye did point out that expenditures for those months were \$11,221 less than the \$79,000 spent during the same period in 1996.

She assured the board it would be seeing the results of cost-control measures shortly.

"We will need to come back to you with a budget adjustment (in this area)," Dr. Choye said.

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CARD CATALOG WOULD BE PUT ON COMPUTER WITH 18 TERMINALS TO BE ADDED

Mayor Schmidt Urges Council to Move Ahead With Automation of Scotch Plains Library

By JEANNE WHITNEY
Specially Written for The Times

Nearly at the year's end, Scotch Plains Mayor Irene T. Schmidt encouraged the Township Council on Tuesday in a conference meeting to move ahead with plans to "automate" or computerize the township's public library, saying, "Let's make it a Christmas present to the town."

Councilman William F. McClintock, Jr., council liaison to the library Board of Trustees, said the board — with the help of the council's Technology Advisory Committee — is satisfied with the lowest bid on a proposal to put the card catalog on computer and add 18 more terminals to the library at a cost of about \$180,000.

The so-called automation system is the same one used by neighboring Westfield, Mountainside, Berkeley Heights and others, he said.

The cost alone of converting the existing card catalog to the new system is \$47,000 and will take six months to a year and a half to do, according to the plan. Residents will be able to access the card catalog in their search for books and other materials from home computers via the Internet when it is finished.

A maintenance contract on the computer system for the succeeding four or five years will be an additional \$10,000 to \$12,000 a year, Mr. McClintock said.

"We've been gradually moving into technology at the library over the past five years," Mr. McClintock said, with returned books being scanned into a computer system.

"Even though fewer books are being checked out each year, over the past few years, library usage has gone up," he said, attributing the change to a higher use of technology for information gathering rather than books.

Township officials said 75 percent of the automation project, or an estimated \$135,000, would be funded through a bond ordinance and 25 per-

cent, or \$45,000, from private donations collected by the library over the years.

Township Manager Thomas E. Atkins said, "Once approved and in the budget, we can move ahead pretty quickly on this."

According to officials, the library board, chaired by Library Director Norbert Bernstein, also indicated that another capital improvement project in the future for the library would be overhauling the air-conditioning and heating systems for an estimated \$125,000.

On a different matter, the township is set to move ahead with an estimated

\$1.83 million project to upgrade its sanitary sewer pumping stations on the south side over the next year.

Officials indicated the \$1.7 million bond issue is in place to fund the work. In September, the council approved a separate purchase of a \$17,000 portable generator for use during the construction.

The four pumping stations scheduled for improvements — Raritan Road, Lamberts Mill Road, West Broad Street and Greenview — are part of the Rahway Valley Sewerage Authority. The work will include adding new pipes parallel to the existing system to handle an increase in sewer

age flow.

Officials said there should be minimal disruption to residents during the work and they noted that Ashbrook Nursing Home, in particular, should benefit from the upgrade at Raritan Road.

In other business, the council indicated it will stick by its decision to keep the township welfare system local rather than consolidate under the Work First New Jersey plan that went into effect April 1. The council must make the decision official with a resolution by January 1.

According to township Welfare

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CANDY FOR SALE...Brownies from Troop No. 310 at McGinn Elementary School, which enrolls students from Scotch Plains and Fanwood, recently participated in a Washington Rock Girl Scout Council fundraiser by selling candy bars in front of Irma's Hallmark, located in downtown Fanwood. The girls raised money to partially fund their trip in January to the Crayola Crayon Factory in Easton, Pennsylvania. Pictured selling their wares, left to right, are: Katie Johnson, Julia Joseph, Lisa Gattuzzi and Cande Koutur.

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 press@goleader.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 materials.

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, upper and lower case, 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.