

# THE TIMES

of  
Scotch Plains - Fanwood



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OUR 38th YEAR - 1

ISSN 0020-9620  
Postpaid - Postage Paid at Scotch Plains, N.J.

Thursday, December 25, 1997

Published  
Every Thursday

232-4407

FIFTY CENTS



SEVEN SWANS A SWIMMING...Just in time for the holiday season comes this photograph submitted by a reader from Mountainside of seven swans in Echo Lake.

## School Board Approves Bidding To Finance Modular Classrooms

By SUSAN M. DYCKMAN  
Specially Written for The Times

As part of its continuing effort to make up the 1997-1998 budget shortfall, the Scotch Plains-Fanwood Board of Education voted unanimously on December 18 to authorize bidding on the district's lease-purchase financing of the six modular classrooms in the amount of \$410,000.

This amount represents the balance due on the original purchase price of \$745,302.

The board also voted to retain the services of the Apris Group, Ltd. Municipal Lessors/Financial Advisory of Clinton, to secure the bids for the lease purchase financing.

The fee for the Apris Group is \$5,000. The board originally intended to pay for the modular classrooms with free balance moneys. However, the district's free balance going into the 1997-1998 school year dissipated as a result of unanticipated increases in insurance costs, tuition and additional appropriations.

School Business Administrator and Board Secretary Matthew A. Clarke explained lease-purchase financing in this way: the district purchases the modular classrooms; the bank then buys the classrooms from the district, and leases them back.

The district will finance the modular classrooms at a rate of 5 percent over five years, resulting in an additional expenditure of \$59,000.

In defending the added expenditure, Finance Committee Chairman Edward J. Saridaki said, "With the

lease purchase), we will go to the taxpayers for a smaller increase than you'd need for a (lumpsum) \$410,000 payment."

He called the lease purchase a "sound business practice" at a good rate.

The timing of the decision to pursue lease-purchase financing came about because of the board's imminent need to approve the financial reports for October 1997, a particularly expensive month for the district.

"If we don't make an allowance before approving October's numbers," explained Mr. Saridaki, "we would be overdrawn and be in violation" of state law.

Under this statute, school districts must certify (upon approval of monthly financial reports) that "no major account or fund has been over expended...and that sufficient funds are available to meet the district's financial obligations for the remainder of the fiscal year."

"But for this (lease purchase)," board member Richard R. Meade said, "we'd need to find savings elsewhere, (perhaps) painful cutbacks like staff reduction. This is a far superior solution."

He added, "This is good, but we still need further belt tightening."

Board member Theresa Larkin said the lease purchase seemed like a "prudent" decision, but asked Mr. Clarke to review the district's outstanding debt situation for the benefit of the public.

The district's debt service is presently \$487,000 (\$300,000 in principal; \$187,000 in interest) which resulted from a bond issuance to pay for

## DOCUMENT NEEDED IN ORDER TO PUSH LEASE OF INCINERATOR FORWARD

# County Freeholders OK Solid Waste Plan To Initiate Voluntary Disposal System

By PAUL J. PEYTON  
Specially Written for The Times

The first step in the process of saving the financially-strapped Union County Resource Recovery Facility, more commonly known as the garbage incinerator, has moved forward with the approval by the county Freeholder board of an amendment to the county's Solid Waste Management Plan.

The plan was approved, 6-3, with the three Republicans on the board voting against it, citing pending legislation at the state level which would provide funds to the Union County Utilities Authority (UCUA) to help keep the incinerator financially stable in a free market system.

Also, GOP members wanted questions posed during the hearing answered before voting on the plan.

The plan, as put forward by the UCUA, addresses a new voluntary system whereby the UCUA, which owns the incinerator, will lease the facility for the next 25 years to Ogden Martin Systems of Union, Inc., the builder of the waste-to-energy incinerator.

The lease deal, UCUA officials explained, is in response to a federal court ruling in July, 1996 which found New Jersey's system of waste flow controls to be unconstitutional. The ruling was upheld on appeal and just last month the United States Supreme Court refused to hear the case, thus ending waste flow controls in the state.

Without waste flow controls, haulers not under contract are free to dump garbage out of state at much lower disposal rates.

One aspect that some municipal officials and members of the public have questioned is the Environmental Investment Charge (EIC) which will be charged on all garbage leaving Union County. The \$18.06 fee per ton includes \$13.50 towards the incinerator debt, \$2.50 for administrative costs, \$13.53 for recovery of debt and a \$2.03 stranded host fee.

A system of weigh stations will be set up to weigh trash leaving the county in order to administer the EIC charge.

Union County municipalities have been given first crack at signing con-

tracts with the UCUA for 25 years at a disposal fee of \$50 per ton, with increases based on the Consumer Price Index, set at a maximum of 3 percent per year.

A number of communities which currently contract with haulers for disposal services are said to be ready to sign pacts with the utilities authority. Currently, 14 towns include such services in their budgets.

Seven communities, including Westfield, Mountainside, Scotch Plains and Fanwood, which do not contract for such services within their municipal budgets, still appear leery about such a long-term deal.

The Fanwood Borough Council, for one, recently passed a resolution confirming that the municipality will not be signing a contract with the UCUA, since the borough has no agreement with haulers and therefore cannot direct them where to dispose of trash.

UCUA Special Counsel Jonathan Williams said the authority will also seek to fill capacity as part of the lease arrangement by offering deals to commercial trash generators in the county and then to businesses, towns and haulers outside of the county.

While municipalities could enter into such a long-term deal with the UCUA, garbage haulers -- as is the case with any other municipal contractor -- are limited to a contract of not more than five years.

One thing that might help those seven towns that do not include garbage disposal services within their budget is the UCUA's plan to offer capacity to haulers which service these towns. However, it is not clear if smaller companies will be able to afford to make such a commitment.

The resolution adopted by the

Fanwood Council encourages such an agreement between the UCUA and haulers who contract with borough residents, so that customers will benefit from the reduced tipping fees.

Given the statement by the New Jersey Local Finance Board that the state will not allow utilities authorities to default on outstanding bonds issued for construction of incinerators, Union County is left with two scenarios as alternatives should the lease agreement not go through, according to Dr. Joseph Spatola, Executive Director of the UCUA.

He said the incinerator could be shut down with the county absorbing the outstanding debt, estimated at \$293 million. He said this would have to be done through a general tax levy "which would result in enormous tax increases to all Union County residents."

The UCUA could decide to enter the spot market, whereby those towns or haulers looking for a place to dump trash would be offered capacity at the county's burner.

However, in this case, he said the EIC would be "far in excess" of the \$18 fee included in the plan amendment.

Mr. Williams said Ogden Martin will pay the UCUA \$175 million over the course of the lease. The money will be used to pay off a portion of the remaining debt on the incinerator.

To retire the remaining debt after the lease revenues are factored in, the UCUA plans to use \$47 million from its funds, including debt service reserve funds and unspent bond proceeds. The remaining debt will be refinanced by the UCUA over a longer term.

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## Fanwood Board of Adjustment Holds Final Meeting After Nearly Half a Century

By SUZETTE STALKER  
Specially Written for The Times

Members of the Fanwood Board of Adjustment convened for the final time last Thursday, approving two applications before bringing down the curtain on the board's 47-year history. As of January, the Planning

Board will assume the responsibilities of the now-disbanded Board of Adjustment.

Since its inception in the 1950s, the Board of Adjustment had dealt with issues ranging from zoning regulations to typical home renovations. The Borough Council adopted an

ordinance on December 11 which decreed that the Planning and Adjustment Boards be merged, citing a decline in volunteers and applications as the chief reasons for maintaining only one municipal board.

Opening the 544th meeting of the board was an appeal by David and Mary Bencivengo of 181 Coriell Avenue, who required bulk variances to construct a 12-foot by 12-foot deck on the rear of their four-bedroom home. The lot, located in an R-75 zone, is considered underzoned for the area.

Mr. Bencivengo said the proposed deck, which will stand approximately 2 1/2 feet off the ground, will replace an existing 10-foot by 10-foot flat slab. The new structure, he added, will give the family more room for patio-type furniture.

The couple required variances to compensate for their lot area, which measures 5,000 feet, in contrast to the 7,500-foot minimum lot area required under the Borough Code, and for their rear-yard setback. The permitted setback is 25 feet, while the proposed distance with the deck is 13 feet.

Mr. Bencivengo confirmed that his neighbor to the rear had planted a row of hemlocks along the property line which will serve as a buffer. Board member John Celardo motioned to approve the application, which was seconded by his colleague Cynthia Swindlehurst. The couple was awarded their variances.

In the second application of the evening, Mark E. Williams of 22 Kempshall Terrace sought the board's approval to construct a detached, one-car garage at the end of the driveway which he and his wife, Connie, share with their next door neighbor.

The applicants required bulk variances to accommodate their lot area of 6,600 feet, which is less than the minimum lot area of 7,500 feet

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## Fanwood Bd. Plans Budget Covering '98

By ALEXANDRA JELKES  
Specially Written for The Times

The Fanwood Planning Board made preliminary recommendations Monday for its 1998 budget, revealing that the total amount needed for the upcoming year is \$4,290.

The Planning Board and Zoning Board of Adjustment have been combined and, thus, the overall costs to the borough will be reduced. The Planning Board will assume the responsibilities previously held by the Zoning Board.

The existing items that need funding deal with the review of

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## Early Deadlines Told For Upcoming Issues

The offices of this newspaper will be closed on Thursday, December 25. Copy for the issue of Thursday, January 1, was due in our offices on December 24.

Sports news will be accepted by 10 a.m. on Monday, December 29, with obituaries accepted until 5 p.m.

Press releases and letters to the editor for the Thursday, January 8 issue must be received by 4 p.m. on Friday, January 2. Sports news will be accepted up until noon on Monday, January 5, with obituaries taken until 5 p.m. on Tuesday, January 6.

## Milestones, Transitions and Achievements Make for Eventful '97 in Fanwood Borough

By SUZETTE STALKER  
Specially Written for The Times

The year 1997 dawned in Fanwood with Republican Councilmen Louis C. Jung and Stuart S. Kline being sworn in during the governing body's annual reorganizational meeting on New Year's Day. Mayor Maryanne S. Connolly, reflecting on her first year in office, described it as having been "a year of first and farewells." She also administered the oaths of office to members of the Fanwood Volunteer Fire Department and the Fanwood Volunteer Rescue Squad, which traditionally had been done on a separate occasion.

Former Fanwood Mayor Linda d. Stender took the helm as Chairwoman of the Union County Board of Chosen Freeholders the first week of the new year, while Kathleen Rice was named later in the month to head up the Fanwood Board of Adjustment. Officials and area residents also gave a warm welcome in January to the Chelsea at Fanwood, a new assisted-living facility on the site of the former Mansion Hotel on South Avenue.

In what Councilman William E. Populus, Jr. called an historic event for the borough, the governing body introduced a flat municipal budget for 1997 on February 13. The \$5.5 million spending plan, representing a 0 percent municipal tax increase, was also completed in accordance

with the state's deadline. It was formally adopted by the council on March 13.

Other milestones were commemorated by Fanwood Girl Scouts, who joined their peers from neighboring communities in celebration of the Washington Rock Girl Scout Council's 40th anniversary, and the Philadelphians, a Depression-era local theater troupe, wrapped up its 65th season.

Although there were no borough seats available in this year's race for three vacancies on the Scotch Plains-Fanwood Board of Education, Fanwood residents turned out for a March 19 "Candidates Night," which spotlighted the eight nominees and their views on such issues as magnet schools, flexibility in school curriculum and the 1997-1998 school budget. Fanwoodians also joined their Scotch Plains neighbors in supporting the \$36,935,929 tax levy for the \$41 million budget during the April 15 school elections.

Eighty-four people, ranging from toddlers to senior citizens, took part in the borough's community clean-up on April 19, which was held in conjunction with Earth Day. Promoting the theme "Pick Up Litter, Help Fanwood Glitter," participants met early in the morning at the southside train station, where they were divided into groups and assigned to

specific areas in the borough. Afterwards, the volunteers were treated to refreshments donated by local merchants. The Fanwood Earth Day program was organized by the Fanwood Clean Community Committee, in conjunction with the Department of Public Works.

Nine people were appointed by the Borough Council in May to the Fanwood Community Assessment Committee, which was charged with analyzing the community's strengths and weaknesses and with developing improvement strategies to be implemented through the year 2000. In addition, the Fanwood Downtown Redevelopment Committee continued working throughout the year with officials, merchants, members of the public and representatives of the RBA Group, a Morristown consulting firm, in formulating plans for rejuvenating the borough's business district.

The Fanwood Memorial Library's Children's Department, which had been closed for several months following storm damage the previous October, held its grand reopening on May 15. More than 150 people turned out for the festivities, which included entertainment, refreshments, souvenirs and a look at the newly-refurbished downstairs section. Other events which took place this month were the "Spring Classic '97" car show, sponsored on May 18 by the

# Happy Hanukkah



# Merry Christmas

## May The Peace and Joy of The Holiday Season Be Your's Throughout The Year