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Political Reform Push by Grassroots Groups May Result in Positive Government Changes

In the age of big money politics, candidates and elected officials concede that fund raising and awarding of contracts are out of control. But, they find it impossible or undesirable to reform the system. For real changes to occur, outside organizations are attempting to intercede.

The Common Cause New Jersey Citizens Army is a political watchdog group working for reform. The group's "clean government" ordinances have been adopted by several municipal governing bodies throughout the state. These ordinances ban fundraising on public property and require developers to disclose campaign contributions when applying for major variances before Planning and Zoning Board of Adjustments.

Reportedly, there are about 500 Citizens Army members in Westfield voicing their concerns and urging reform. Last March, Westfield became the first town in Union County to forbid public facilities from being used for political fundraising purposes. Mountainside also has passed an ordinance in this regard, and Fanwood and Scotch Plains are considering similar ordinances.

According to Common Cause, New Jersey presently does not ban solicitation or acceptance of contributions by public office holders and employers while on public property. Nor does New Jersey state law prohibit political solicitations from using public facilities.

The Westfield Town Council's Laws and Rules Committee is drafting an ordinance, as proposed by Common Cause, that hopes to remove politics from the process of hiring professional services. This ordinance intends to reduce the potential for political contributions from unduly influencing the selection process. Law firms and engineering consultants are frequently hired by municipalities. If the ordinance in Westfield is approved, all future contracts for professional services would go through the "Request For Proposals" (RFP) process.

In order to maintain a system of "qualification-based, competitive, negotiation procedures that ensure open and fair competition for professional service contracts through published rules and decision-making criteria," the council would hire professional services "on the basis of competitive negotiation," according to the draft of the ordinance.

So, if the town needed to hire a professional, such as a bond counsel, a RFP would be issued to qualified firms under consideration. Submittals would be reviewed based on qualifications, experience and rates

for services. Then, the town would evaluate the options and make a choice based on the information received. The information and the process becomes public record and available for review.

The goal of the ordinance on professional service contracts is to ensure that the most qualified firm or professional is hired. Of course, price should not be the soul determining factor here. A list of clients, professional reputation, qualifications and experience in a specific area of expertise must be considered.

The New Jersey Public Contracts Law requires that competitive bidding occur for non-professional services, such as road paving and leaf removal. Sealed bids are received by the Town Clerk and read into the record at a public meeting of the Town Council. Prior to receiving bids, public legal notices are placed in designated legal newspapers under the term "invitation to bid."

Under non-professional services, the lowest bidder is awarded the contract, provided the bidder meets all the specifications and bid criteria set by the governing body of the town. This is not necessarily the way things are done in business, and it doesn't leave room for negotiation. The lowest bidder process places a heavy burden on the accuracy of the bid specifications.

The costs and time can be very high to ensure exacting specifications, and there is very little room for exercising good judgement. Sometimes, it becomes more of a game of lawyer versus lawyer rather than getting the job done. We don't know what can be done about this problem because there have been many abuses on both sides of the issue. Maybe Common Cause and others can look into the matter and provide recommendations.

Common Cause has had a number of victories over the last 12 months in gaining passage of "clean government" legislation. In addition to Westfield and Mountainside, political fundraising on public property has been banned in Metuchen, Morristown, East Brunswick, Sayreville, Princeton and Camden. In addition, Morristown and Camden now require campaign disclosures by developers applying for major variances.

Starting at the local level and working their way up, the national Common Cause movement's ultimate goal is to encourage Congress to halt what it deems is "runaway political fundraising."

We applaud Common Cause's efforts and hope that other groups will pursue similar goals.

Letters to the Editor

Former Westfielder 'Greatly Disturbed' By Memorial Park and Pool Proposal

Editor's Note: The following letter was sent to Mayor Thomas C. Jardim.

When I was born in 1955 my parents had been Westfield residents for several years. My parents chose to move to Westfield because it is such a pretty town. My mother remarks often that there is no place as beautiful as Westfield in the spring.

I enjoyed growing up in Westfield and I have a tremendous pride in the town. Although I now reside in Mountainside, I will always consider Westfield "home." My parents still live in the house where I grew up, and three of my siblings live in town.

I am greatly disturbed by the Recreation Commission's renovation plans for the Memorial Pool and Park. As I see construction on every vacant scrap of property in Westfield, I am incredulous that the town would even consider the destruction of one of its few remaining wooded areas for a parking lot.

Was an environmental impact study on this included in the Recreation Commission's extravagant plans?

Sharing Talents and Skills Program Volunteers Lauded by School District

I would like to thank the more than 100 members of the Westfield community who have signed up this school year to become participants in the Sharing Talents and Skills (STS) program of the Westfield Public Schools.

Sharing Talents and Skills provides guest speakers for classrooms on a volunteer basis. Kindergarten through 12th grade students and their teachers benefit from the experiences of these speakers who provide a valuable supplement to the curriculum.

It's also an ideal opportunity for students to meet with adults in the community who show them that they care about our young people.

The volunteers share their careers, hobbies, travels, language skills, collections and interests with students in the

proposed entrance to this parking lot is on the west end of Drake Place, a narrow, one block, dead end street, with only two houses, and without sidewalks or curbs. It is difficult now for drivers to negotiate passing in opposite directions on that block, not to mention trying to exit onto North Scotch Plains Avenue, as it is with all of the side streets on North Scotch Plains Avenue.

Speeding is an enormous problem on North Scotch Plains Avenue; drivers coming from the light at South Avenue race up toward West Broad Street, and drivers going toward South Avenue race toward the traffic light hoping to catch it green. I can imagine the nightmare that increased traffic will bring to that area.

I do not believe that it is necessary for Memorial Pool and Park to be the town's central recreational area. That neighborhood is unable to accommodate such a large expansion of the park facilities, and I fervently hope that the town will reconsider these plans and keep Westfield the beautiful town that it is.

Eileen L. Biskup
Mountainside

classroom during the school day. They are parents, business men and women, civic and religious leaders, health care professionals, retired citizens, etc., who graciously give up their time to share a topic of mutual interest with students and their teacher.

We are currently celebrating STS-in-the-Schools Week in Westfield by providing our public school teachers with an updated directory of speakers and by reaching out to thank those who have recently volunteered.

If a member of the public has not volunteered as an STS speaker and would like to do so, please call the STS office at (908) 789-4463.

Lorrie Korecky
STS Coordinator
Westfield Public Schools

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Recreation Commission Lauds Times For Open Space Referendum Article

The Scotch Plains Recreation Commission would like to thank the newspaper for the recent article it ran on the front page of the paper talking about the open space referendum that is on the November 2 ballot.

As Chairman of the Commission for the past two years, and a part of it for the past six years, I am proud of our residents and commissioners who have taken an active role in making our parks and recreation a little better each year.

Anyone who has come to a public meeting offering a suggestion or voicing a concern knows that our focus is always looking to satisfy the people within the parameters of what we have to work with.

Over the past year, we have worked with multiple associations throughout our community in trying to develop a strategy for what has been our No. 1 nemesis — a lack of adequate ballfields.

We have worked long and hard when introducing our conceptual plan in developing a portion of the Ash Brook Reservation into a park that addresses many of the concerns of Scotch Plains and the county in their Master Plan.

We applaud the paper for not only giving our side of the story, but also printing the concerns of the Arthur Kill Coalition. This is an environmental group who intends to voice their opinions to our Township Council and the Union County Freeholders during the public hearings that will be held prior to any lease arrangements being formalized.

Hopefully, when they see how we are attempting to build this park in the area of the reservation that is not designated in the flood plan, it will alleviate some of the concerns that they have addressed in this article.

What concerns the Recreation Commission is the misinformation that has been brought to our attention. Someone has prepared a one-page flyer (anonymously, of course), indicating a 10-acre parcel of property in the Winchester Estates was being developed into a "mas-

Letters to the Editor

Water Company President Explains Primary Treatment Plant Aftermath

I'd like to take a moment to explain the events surrounding the shutdown of Elizabethtown Water Company's primary water treatment plant late on Thursday, September 16, in the aftermath of Tropical Storm Floyd and to thank our customers for their support and cooperation, which were critical to our response to the crisis.

The Raritan-Millstone Water Treatment Plant was built at its location in 1931 because of its proximity to the Raritan and Millstone rivers, so it could provide an ample water supply to the region. After flooding from Hurricane Doria in 1971, the company constructed berms to protect against the 100-year flood.

Unfortunately, Hurricane Floyd was a truly extraordinary event. Flood elevations exceeded the highest flood on record (Hurricane Doria) by about five feet.

According to the United States Geological Survey, an event of this severity can be expected to occur once in 500 years.

Recognizing the Raritan-Millstone Plant's vulnerability to flooding, as well as expected service area growth, the company purchased land for a new plant in 1980 high above the flood plain. This plant, located in Franklin Township, was completed in 1996 and proved to be critical in providing water supply to the entire region for several days.

Late on Thursday, September 16, and within a few minutes of recognizing the magnitude of the inevitable flooding that would overtake the Raritan-Millstone plant, employees turned off all equipment and electrical power to minimize damage to the facilities.

The company notified the local and county Department of Health, the state and county Offices of Emergency Management and the media of the plant's closure and issued a boil water advisory and asked customers to conserve water. Many local officials assisted in spreading the word by passing out flyers and making announcements.

It is important to note that the company issued the boil water advisory as a precaution in case contamination entered the water distribution system due to low pressure in the mains. At no time did the Company distribute non-potable water to its customers. We did, however, expect low pressure because of our ability to supply water fell short of customer use.

Accordingly, we issued the boil water advisory in case low pressure allowed contamination to enter the system.

The company then turned its focus to meeting the immediate needs of its customers. Where alternate supplies were available, the company shut off supply to its wholesale customers to maximize pressure and service to retail customers.

The company took steps to maximize production from its water treatment plant in Franklin and from wells throughout the distribution system.

The company then called upon neighboring water suppliers for assistance. The cities of Newark and Trenton and Middlesex Water Company provided water through emergency interconnections.

The company also asked its business customers to conserve water. Large business customers cut back their water usage and several voluntarily shut down their operations to help out. These voluntary efforts proved critical to the company's ability to maintain safe, adequate fire protection.

In an effort to answer customer questions, the company opened the customer service call center around-the-clock and added additional phone lines. Customer Service representatives handled nearly 80,000 calls by midweek — a volume normally handled over four months.

The strategy for restarting the plant began with getting certain components operating immediately, even if in a manual mode. With the help of local fire departments the company pumped out the flooded underground chambers of the plant and managed to get some pumps running by Sunday.

By Monday afternoon the plant began

sive sportsplex."

A more accurate representation of this parcel would be when the subdivision was originally approved, all the homeowners at this location were to formalize a homeowners association and pay the taxes on this property which was designated for open space.

To date, the back taxes on this property are approximately \$67,000. If the homeowners ever formalize an association and pay the taxes, it would not even be considered an opportunity for the township to look into.

If anyone has any questions about the referendum, or anything that is going on in recreation, we invite you to give us the opportunity to respond. Please contact the Recreation Office and let your voices be heard.

The warm response was much appreciated on Scotch Plains Day when many of the commissioners had the opportunity to speak to hundreds of our residents; some that never heard of what the open space referendum was all about. The feedback was very positive, and on November 2, we all have the ability to have our voices heard.

Ed Zazzali
Chairman, Recreation Commission
Scotch Plains

Local Groups Presented 'Splendid' Multi-Cultural Festival in Fanwood

The Fanwood Cultural Arts Committee and the Fanwood Millennium Committee managed to present a splendid Multi-Cultural Festival on Sunday, October 10, despite soggy grounds around the Kuran Center and a rainy afternoon.

As a member of the Cultural Arts Committee, I would like to thank all the talented performers, their friends and families, the wonderful audience that enjoyed the music and dancing, our committee members and the leaders of our

producing about 20 million gallons per day (mgd) compared to its usual 155 mgd capacity.

The situation steadily improved through the week as capacity was added in 20 mgd increments. Key to the speed of the recovery was the around-the-clock effort by key personnel and the resources provided by many contractors.

As of September 20, all Elizabethtown retail customers had service and adequate pressure. All wholesale and business customers were able to resume purchasing water in the days that followed. The company is continuing to make repairs in an effort to reach full capacity.

Water quality test results from samples taken throughout the week showed no signs of bacteriological contamination in the distribution system and the company lifted the boil water advisory on Friday, September 24, with the Department of Environmental Protection Agency's (DEP) approval.

While the response by all involved enabled the company to restore service quickly in light of the substantial damage done, there is still much to be learned from the experience. The company is making plans to increase capacity at its other treatment plant and also to protect the Raritan-Millstone Plant against future flooding.

Andrew Chapman
President Elizabethtown Water Company

Troublesome Traffic Circle Compared To Race Track; Improvements Needed

Recently having experienced my first fender-bender, after 45 years of driving, while attempting to negotiate the NASCAR track, known locally as the Broad Street/South Avenue Circle, I viewed, first with skepticism and then unrestrained elation, the new lane markings and yield signs put in place by our wise and ever vigilant traffic department.

"Hooray," I shouted as for the first time I observed traffic flowing and merging smoothly in all directions around the infamous circle like the shuffling of a deck of playing cards in the hands of a skilled magician.

But, alas, as I ought to have realized, "twas too good to be true. I had once again neglected to take into consideration the intractability of human nature. People (not all, mind you, but enough to make us a dangerous species) are loathe to change their behavior patterns, expecting, nay, demanding others to change theirs first.

A couple of weeks following the placement of the new traffic-flow patterns, I again see indications of driving attitudes which will ultimately result in a demoli-



BOWERY

"The Bow'ry, the Bow'ry!
They say such things,
and they do strange things.
On the Bow'ry, the Bow'ry.
I'll never go there any more!"

These lyrics were from an 1891 musical entitled *A Trip to Chinatown* written by Hoyt and Gaunt. In Manhattan, the bowery is defined as "a New York City street extending from Chatham Square to East Fourth Street, noted for cheap hotels, saloons and peopled by the destitute and homeless."

Unfortunately, the last part of this definition describes a lot of other neighborhoods in today's Big Apple.

The name Bowery comes from the Dutch word *bowerij*, meaning "a farm." The land where this street now rests was part of a farm or bowery that was purchased by Peter Stuyvesant in 1631 for 6,400 guilders. In the 1670s it was a popular rural area for summer picnics.

Not too much has changed on the Bow'ry since the lyrics at the top of this column were written. However, not too many people go to the Bowery anymore unless, of course, they are looking for lamps, restaurant supplies or are just plain down on their luck.

One thing is certain, though: today's Bowery is no "picnic!"

tion derby. "Yield" once again only applies to vehicles smaller than SUVs or trucks, while "proper lane" means whichever lane will allow you to bully your way through or around the circle before the vehicles in front of you.

I would like to recommend two things in this regard to the powers that be in Westfield:

1. During the busiest traffic periods, e.g., just before and after school, and Saturday from about 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., install a traffic officer in the center piece of the circle to take down license plate numbers for mailing out of tickets.

2. Place strategically large signs which read "Beware All Ye Who Enter Here." 'Tis all too true — Murphy is alive and well, dwelling in a little tent in the sylvan swath of greenery which forms the center of the Board Street/South Avenue Circle. He sits on a little stool and chortles each time he sees two or more vehicles approaching the same lane at high speed playing a so-called grownup version of chicken.

Richard A. Wilson
Westfield

Councilman Jung Clears Up Comments Made About Fire, Police, Rescue Squad

I would like to offer my sincerest apologies to Chief John Piccola and the Fanwood Fire Department, as well as the Fanwood Rescue Squad and the Fanwood Police Department.

Last week, I was quite surprised to read a letter to the editor from Mr. Piccola that appeared in *The Times*. In the letter, Mr. Piccola apparently interpreted a campaign press release that I authorized as being critical of the emergency service efforts of the fire department, rescue squad and police department.

I am very sorry if Mr. Piccola or anyone else interpreted my press release as somehow being critical of Fanwood's emergency services. To the contrary, I was especially proud of all their efforts during the recent Hurricane Floyd emergency and last year's Labor Day storm and its aftermath.

Indeed, I have always been impressed by their services. I also believe our Fanwood emergency services personnel to be one of the major strengths of our community.

My press release was merely intended to offer a suggestion in response to the comments of some citizens made to me as I campaigned door to door following the hurricane. These citizens expressed

their concern that they did not possess sufficient information regarding the status of the crisis.

Some were not aware of the Elizabethtown Water Company problem until a day or more after it was announced. They did not know how long they should be boiling their water, for example. Others wanted to know where they could obtain bottled water as the stores were in short supply.

In response, I offered a suggestion in the press release for coordination of efforts to disseminate information to residents regarding the status of any future crisis.

On another reading of my press release in light of Mr. Piccola's comments, I can see that my message should have been stated more clearly. However, I never meant to be critical of the emergency services provided by our police, fire and rescue personnel.

They are an outstanding group. I hope they will each accept my sincerest apology.

Louis C. Jung
Fanwood Councilman
Candidate for Mayor

Town Council's Primary Role Is to Build Sense of Community

Westfield has always had a large turnover of residents, but that turnover seems to have accelerated in recent years. To maintain our town's vitality, we must constantly work to integrate our new residents into the fabric of the community.

A primary role for members of our Town Council is to help build that sense of community. Members of the council have a special opportunity to be catalysts in the process of making residents feel that they belong — that Westfield is truly their home.

As a candidate for council, I take that opportunity seriously. I will have visited extensively on every street in the Second Ward by Election Day. I make a special effort to remember something about every resident I meet. This effort to know those whom I may represent in local government is one of my most important qualifications for the position of Councilman.

Building community is a long-standing element of my interest in serving our town. Let me share with you a few of the things that I have been able to do recently

in this context:

I suggested 10 different names of Westfield residents, both Republicans and Democrats, for appointment to Union County boards, resulting in several appointments.

I identified a minority candidate for the board of a community organization to help them meet their goals for board diversity.

I was able to solve a housing maintenance issue by involving a faith community in a home improvement project.

I have provided voter registration forms to countless new residents.

The hope of community rests not on government solving all our problems, but on all the people working together to solve problems. I will use my knowledge of our Ward to build that sense of community in the coming year. As a member of Town Council, I hope to use that knowledge even more effectively.

Joe Stoner
Candidate for Town Council,
Second Ward
Westfield

NOTICE EARLY DEADLINE

The *Westfield Leader* and *The Times of Scotch Plains-Fanwood* will be publishing their annual election issues on October 28, 1999.

The town-wide circulation requires us to go to press earlier than usual and, as a result, the deadline for sports and all forms of advertising will also be earlier. Please consult the appropriate section of this paper for complete information.

Tom Plante
Fanwood