

Two Republicans, One Democrat Seeking Two Council Seats Square Off During Issue-Oriented Candidate Forum in Borough of Mountainside

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there will be a total of 85 spaces. The project will cost \$190,000, which there is a grant for \$180,000. The reason for the parking lot is that the town found that there were a number of commuters parking now at Borough Hall. There were a number of commuters parking by the fire department.

"The problem with parking in Borough Hall is functions. On municipal court day we don't have the proper amount of parking. The problem with parking over by the fire department is that you can not get into the fire department during the day. If there is a fire during the day the volunteers going to the fire department do not have a place to park might have to park in the library.

"The commuter parking lot is something that is needed in Mountainside. There is open vacant space over there. Certainly to spend \$10,000 when were getting a \$190,000 parking lot is just in line with what we feel we can provide for the borough at a minimized cost.

"This past weekend while I was at the soccer field I had two people say to me that they are willing to pay for the parking, because it is so deeply needed and they wanted to know when the lot is going to be done. I can tell you that it is under construction now. It is something that the community needs with little cost to our taxpayers."

Mr. Brociner: "There is nothing spectacular about making a lot through grant money. I don't feel as though this is any great earth shaking thing. Based on the activity of the council it's just part of what you are suppose to be doing."

Leader: "What do you feel is the number one concern for residents of Mountainside that should be addressed by Mayor and council?"

Mr. Turner: "Overall I feel that it is the high property values, the flat municipal tax rate. I feel it is all the improvements made, in the roads, in the recreation department and in the services provided for the borough, while maintaining low cost to the taxpayers. Also, the new Borough Hall is important to residents as well as improvements to the rescue squad and fire house."

Mr. Brociner: "You know it's funny all these things that are done. I really don't understand why you would feel that they are accomplishments when its just your responsibility. Also, most of the people in the town didn't want a new municipal building and voted against it."

Leader: "Last spring Police Chief James Debbie was appointed as the borough's Acting Administrator after the departure of Gregory Bonin. How do you see this arrangement is working and do you feel it should become permanent?"

Mr. Brociner: "I think the chief knows what he feels that he can handle. I don't know why we were paying a person a large salary for a full-time position and all of a sudden found that we don't need to do that." No quote

Mr. Turner: "We have found that more responsibility and spending more hours here and we felt that that, along with the unfortunate resignation of Mr. Bonin, we found with the added jobs council took on we didn't need a full-time administrator and we would try a part-time Acting Administrator."

"It came down to timing. The timing was right. The Mayor and council felt that the Chief is doing a great job as the Chief. He has an excellent staff to carry-out the duties of the police department and so council approached Chief Debbie to ask him if he was willing to put in more than his 40 hours a week and put in maybe 50 hours a week to take on the role as Acting Administrator."

"As long as he feels comfortable and does not compromise his job as Police Chief, I think its a good arrangement. I think its a win-win situation for everyone. He is doing a great job and saving the borough money in wages and benefits."

Mr. Mirabelli: "I would like to just add that with the completed project of

the de-regionalization of the high school and the completion of Borough Hall addition, the Mayor took on a tremendous amount of additional responsibility. Why maybe we need a full-time administrator that we need someone who would be available for the staff.

"We also need someone with administrative skills. We felt we needed someone that had computer skills and fortunate for us that person was sitting right here in Borough Hall. He had the administrative abilities for the job."

Leader: "How can citizens of the borough become more involved or informed about issues facing Mountainside and how have you seen council address issues of public concern in the past?"

Mr. Mirabelli: "Well, one way for the residents to become more involved is to watch the council meeting broadcasts on Channel No. 35. We have recently hired a part-time TV-35 Coordinator. With the new Comcast franchise renewal there will be even more shows on our channel now that we have our own channel."

"We have a tremendous borough staff. Anyone who comes to Borough Hall and needs a question answered will be given the answer. We have a recreation newsletter that goes out to all the residents and lets them know about all of our recreational programs. We have what is called the Mountainside Passport that goes out to all residents that gives the residents all of the borough employees and how to get in touch with them, so for example, like when we had our recent hurricane, residents can find who it is they need to contact for help at the borough."

"It also includes all of the borough's community organizations with their contact people and phone numbers. Residents can also come to our meetings and address the council at the public portion of the meeting. They might not always get the answer that they want to hear, but they always have the opportunity to address issues that they need too."

Mr. Brociner: "Well maybe I am missing something, but isn't that what the police departments and fire departments do? Help its citizens."

"Maybe I am really missing something because elected officials in this town have a responsibility to their constituents saying, 'I'm responsible for public safety or I am responsible for public works. Here I am, you voted for me, you put me in office and guess what, I am told to go to town hall and talk to one of the clerks.'"

Leader: "What are your views of the relationship of the borough government with other agencies such as the public school system, neighboring governments, county and state governments?"

Mr. Turner: "As I stated earlier I think we need to take a look at some important issues and those are the relationship of the borough with the de-regionalization of the high school."

Mr. Brociner: "We were promised by our Mayor that we would see 5-600 bucks a piece as a result of de-regionalization. I never saw it. I often wonder how we can talk out of both sides of our mouths at the same time. We need to open up a little bit to keep this town going and recognize that maybe there might be a differing opinion."

Leader: "There is one final question that was touched on briefly before by Councilman Mirabelli. Do you feel the emergency communication systems within the borough, the county and the state need improvement in light of events from Hurricane Floyd? What do you think should be done?"

Mr. Brociner: "We are talking about a highly technical answer to a question like that. I think we should leave it to the professionals to upgrade our communication system. I wouldn't mind paying higher taxes to do something like that. I would certainly be in favor of it. I am not technologically competent to answer a question of this magnitude. I wonder if anyone here would be."

Mr. Mirabelli: "As they say, I think the proof is in the pudding. Again I go back to our police department, rescue

squad, fire department and public works. They certainly all knew what to do during the hurricane.

"As a matter of fact a day prior to the hurricane, I understand that Chief Debbie and one of his Lieutenants had an emergency management meeting with the county so that when the hurricane hit we were prepared for it. We are ready for an emergency. We don't need any media consultant to come in here and tell us if our lines of communication are open."

"We have a state of the art police department and police facility and a renovated rescue squad building. We have given our rescue squad volunteers a per call stipend. We have crossed trained our police officers to be EMTs, so that in the event when we are short of volunteers particularly during the day, we have the added staff needed. The same thing goes for the fire department."

"We have a new stipend program to attract more volunteers and maintain current members. Even right now we are renovating our Fire House and we are getting ready to pull out of the ground a 25-year old tank and upgrade our heating system to put in gas."

"We are doing everything that we can to support all of our emergency services. We use mutual aid. In the event that we need additional coverage other towns that are on the Mountainside border will be there to help out. Right now I think that Mountainside are in excellent shape for any emergency. We have a great staff."

CLOSING STATEMENTS
Mr. Mirabelli: "My job as councilman is to make local government responsive to the needs of our residents. What I mean by fully responsive is to make sure our residents feel safe and secure on their own and in their communities."

"It means providing an enhanced quality of life to our residents of our community. It also means to provide the public with the physical facilities to make sure that we have an effective and efficient delivery of our services and the means to do it at a cost that is affordable. To meet these goals, recently the police department has a brand new state of the art facility in Mountainside in which to serve the Mountainside residents."

"We have our Cops in School Grant of which we are using to put a police officer in our schools and what perfect timing. Scott Werford, who is our police officer there, just stepped in. In addition, our police department has worked with the Board of Education to produce a security program to make sure all of our students, when they attend Deerfield, are safe."

"We continue to support the fire department and rescue squad in getting volunteers. We have added an additional recreation person in order to provide a broad range of recreational programs and we have done it with keeping taxes down. We have also done this with the grants that we have gotten."

"I just want to touch on one last thing. Volunteerism has a long tradition in Mountainside. We need to show and lead by example. I volunteer my time by not only volunteering here but as a coach of basketball, baseball. I am also a founding director of the Mountainside PAL and am also a legal council."

Mr. Turner: "I consider it a privilege to serve the borough as Councilman for the past nine years. I am a lifelong resident of Mountainside; my brother is a

police officer in Mountainside and my parents have been here since they located here back in the 50s.

"I have a strong history in Mountainside and am proud to have served as a councilman and as Council President and it gives me great insight to needs of our residents. Mountainside residents want experience. Mountainside has the lowest effect tax rate and one of the highest property values makes it a crown jewel of Union County."

"This didn't happen by accident. It happened by prudent fiscal management.

Fanwood Borough Council Candidates Discuss Key Issues During Forum

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to the Mayor and council in December of 1998, and a number of positive results came about.

"Long-range planning, downtown revitalization, our communication committee, the regular publication and mailing of our community newsletter, the Volunteer Day, an upcoming volunteer recognition celebration will be held for the first time this year."

"My point being, as a result of Bill's initiative and town-wide assessment, volunteerism increased in numbers and it increased greatly in scope."

Mr. Kline: "Certainly, with respect to volunteerism, we have a very active community here in Fanwood. The Assessment Committee was mentioned. I think one illustration of working together, in a bipartisan manner, is the way that Lou Jung and Bill Populus, in the downtown revitalization effort, have worked with that Assessment Committee."

"I think that one of the important areas in which council can help is to provide the resources, the financial wherewithal, where appropriate, whether it is marketing efforts or consultants to make this effort a success, because without the active support, without the dollars to back it up, I'm not sure that the volunteers would get very far."

"So what this council has tried to do is to provide the financial wherewithal that has made the volunteer efforts very successful."

The Times: All local governments must operate on efficient budgets with limited resources to best apply the property tax allocations. How is the homeowner's property tax split between the borough, the public schools and the county? Are there ways for the council to work with the schools and the county to keep taxes to a minimum?"

Mr. Kline: "Everyone in this town pays property taxes. When you add them all into the pot that comes to about \$14 million. Sixty-one percent of that \$14 million goes to the schools. Eighteen percent of that 14 goes to the county and the borough retains about 22 percent. I think that equates into about \$3 million."

"With the addition of state revenues, fees and the like, the municipal budget is some \$5.4 million. The second part of the question addresses the schools and how we can work together with the schools. The Fanwood-Scotch Plains school dis-

trict is a separate entity.
"This council has no direct involvement with that budget, to the extent that, if the voters did not approve the school board budget over the course of the year, that budget is then reviewed by the councils of both Scotch Plains and Fanwood."

"I think one area where we could get more involved is in utilizing school resources. We had a very successful example, where the high school students involved in the civic group DECA assisted this town in developing a marketing survey for use in prioritizing issues addressed by the Assessment Committee."

"One other area of cost effective spending would be to explore cooperative purchasing efforts with the school for certain supplies, whether it be for salt or sand."

Mr. Plante: "As Mr. Kline so eloquently pointed out, the Fanwood budget gives a lot of the taxes away to the schools and to the county. We are very lucky to have someone as talented as Councilman Populus in our Administration and Finance Committee, because not only does he use the dollars wisely, but he also goes out and finds creative ways to enhance that by getting grant money for downtown revitalization and for our parks."

"Remember someone saying we have got Bill Populus as our Liaison and we got all new parks. So we have been very lucky to have Bill there. It is a very precarious balance trying to enhance our community and keep taxes down. I'm on the Shared Services Committee with the county, and, hopefully, I'll be able to bring a lot back to Fanwood in terms of shared services that will bring dollars and services back into town."

The Times: During your campaigning and discussing issues with your neighbors, how do citizens feel about the job that government is doing in Fanwood? What do you believe they expect of you for next year?"

Mr. Plante: "I have talked to a lot of people. I have knocked on doors. I have talked to my friends. I've talked to a lot of the volunteers in town. The big issue that always comes up is taxes. For the most part, we can't say 'I'm going to reduce your taxes.' But what we can do is go out and find ways to enhance your quality of life, without putting the bur-

den on the homeowners.
"Going back to Bill Populus, he has gotten a lot of grant money and Adele is very adept at writing grants and that can make a difference in the money that's available to the borough. There are shared services that can be brought back to the community that doesn't necessarily cost the borough anything."

But you need to be aggressive and proactive. You have to go out and find these things. They are not going to come knocking on your door. I know that I am aggressive enough to do that. I know that Bill has set a good example for all of us. Adele has already been down that road and, hopefully, she'll get more of an opportunity to provide more of that to the borough."

But taxes seem to be the big issue. And the downtown revitalization. I know that Councilwoman (Karen M.) Shurtz was very involved in the Downtown Revitalization Committee when it began. There was a plan put in place. Some funds were available for some smaller things initially. Since then, larger sums of money have been obtained through the Community Block Grants."

Thank you, Bill Populus. Hopefully, we'll be seeing some real changes in our downtown. I went to the business and professional association meeting. We need to find ways to work together so that it benefits everyone in the community."

Mr. Ryan: "We have actually gone door to door. We have knocked on three quarters of the doors in Fanwood. We have spoken to hundreds of the citizens. And we discussed a wide range of issues. The primary concern that most of them have explained to us is that the downtown has not changed in a significant amount of time."

The Democrats have been in power in this town for over 12 years, and there has been no significant change to the downtown. We're interested in doing something about that. We have a plan to do something about that. It was suggested moving the Post Office, which was definitely and obviously opposed by, along partisan lines, this past summer."

We obtained over 300 signatures of folks who were interested in that plan. Establishing a viable, strong, commercial downtown is the basis of our campaign. This is something that our voters are most concerned with."

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