

Taxes Going Up Between Four And 13 Percent; SP Up 4.22 Percent

By PAUL J. PEYTON

Specially Written for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times

AREA – Homeowners in the county will soon receive tax bills with hikes ranging from \$400 to \$900 (or 4 to 13 percent) from last year.

Westfield taxpayers face an average property tax bill hike of \$655 (or 6.5 percent) for a total bill of \$12,238, according to tax information obtained by *The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times* from the town's tax collector's office.

School taxes are going up \$334 to \$7,529, county taxes are up \$150 to \$2,448, and Westfield municipal taxes are up \$164 to \$2,150. The open space tax is up \$7. Town taxes are based on an average home assessment of \$183,500 in 2008 and \$181,500 in 2007.

School taxes account for 61 percent of the Westfield property tax, while the county and town represent 20 and 18 percent of the tax bill, respectively.

"Overall, between county, school and

town, it is not as bad as it could have been. Unfortunately, it's going to be worse next year," said Town Administrator Jim Gildea, saying that municipal pensions will not be exempt from the 4 percent cap on tax increases next year, as was the case in 2008.

Property taxes in Scotch Plains are going up 4.22 percent on average, according to the Scotch Plains Township Manager Tom Atkins. The increase, based on an assessment of \$121,000, is \$415.

The total township tax average bill this year will be \$10,254. Broken down by tax entity, township residents will pay \$6,590 to the Scotch Plains-Fanwood Board of Education, an increase of \$264 over 2007; \$1,840 to the township, a \$96 increase, and \$1,722 to the County of Union, up \$53 over last year.

The school tax accounts for 64.27 percent of the total township tax bill,

followed by the municipal tax of 17.95 percent and the county, which represents 16.79 percent of the tax bill.

Scotch Plains residents will also pay open space taxes of \$77 to the county and \$24 to the township.

"It's (the 2008 increase) probably a little less [than in previous years]," he said. "We have seen years when [taxes] went up by \$500 to \$600.

"We have not been under 4 percent in years, unfortunately," he acknowledged.

Mr. Atkins predicted that in future years, many towns would face budget years like Fanwood did this year, resulting in "elimination of programs."

Garwood and Fanwood have yet to adopt their municipal budgets as both had to wait for the state to approve their extraordinary aid requests. Those numbers were announced July 11.

Based on tax rates supplied by Garwood's chief financial officer, Sandy Bruns, Garwood residents will pay \$7,794 in property taxes, \$887 or 13 percent more than 2007, based on an assessed home of \$100,000. This year, residents will pay an average of \$3,500 for their local school tax, \$173 over last year; \$1,640 to the county, a \$534 hike, and \$54 for the county's open space tax for a total of \$5,194, excluding the municipal tax, which will not be re-



BBQ IGNITES HOME...A house located at 38 Shady Lane in Fanwood caught fire last Saturday night. Neighbors reported that the homeowners were barbecuing around 6 p.m., left the grill on and went inside the house. Shortly after, someone heard a pop from the back of the house, and realized it was on fire. Residents Wayne and Angie Mags and their guests all escaped unharmed. Shady Lane residents (specifically Kate Franciscus at 26 Shady Lane) are taking up a collection to help the owners with any immediate needs.

Courtesy Squad Lt. Tom FitzGibbon



FW Council Hears Suggestions

On Tuesday, Municipal Board

The Rescue Squad responded to a house fire at 38 Shady Lane on Saturday, July 19, 2008, which left the home uninhabitable. The fire was started by a malfunction in a propane barbecue grill. No one was injured. Thanks to the Scotch Plains, Garwood and Westfield squads for providing mutual aid. Click the picture on the left to see a web album of more pictures. Responders for the Rescue Squad included 2nd Lt. Tom FitzGibbon, Sgt. Robert Levine, TJ FitzGibbon, Patty Buckridee, Bob Hoyer, Bob Kruthers, Courtney Slaten, Wayne Lamore, Steve Siegal, Nancy D'Ambrosio and Anthony D'Ambrosio. Thanks!