

THE ITEM

OF MILLBURN AND SHORT HILLS

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Budget adoption planned Tuesday

Financial shifts in the township's 1997 municipal budget compared to last year's fiscal document were the subject of a report delivered at this week's Township Committee meeting by Business Administrator Timothy P. Gordon.

The 1997 budget is scheduled for public hearing and final adoption at the Committee's meeting at 8 p.m. Tuesday night.

On the up-side of the ledger, Mr. Gordon noted this year's budget would include a \$347,149 payment from the Joint Meeting and \$456,439 from the state in road grants. The Joint Meeting payment represents a return of money paid to the regional sewer system for various capital improvement projects that were constructed under estimate.

As a result of the sewer and road funds, the special item line in the revenue section of the budget is nearly 70 percent higher in 1997 than it was last year, Mr. Gordon said.

The business administrator also reported that due to an increase in court fines and additional interest on investments, the municipality will be receiving approximately \$202,000—nearly 10 percent more—this year than it did in 1996.

Several revenue accounts, however, are at lower levels than a year ago.

Mr. Gordon reported that this year's budget contains a 23.5 percent drop in building department fees. He attributed the decline to the completion of The Mall at

Short Hills' expansion project and said the \$325,000 in fees which the department is anticipating during 1997 "should remain steady for the next three years."

Another revenue drop spotlighted by Mr. Gordon included a reduction of \$131,051—4.2 percent—in state aid.

In the review of budget expenditures, Mr. Gordon reported police department costs were up \$260,120—6.5 percent—over last year, fire departments costs were up \$87,897—2.9 percent—public works costs were up \$83,544—2.5 percent—and library costs were budgeted at \$22,600 this year, an increase of 1.5 percent.

Barring any 11th hour changes at next week's meeting, the 1997 budget will provide total spending of just under \$26 million, an increase of nearly \$1 million since last year.

The new budget calls for a 2-point rise in the municipal tax rate. The school tax rate is officially set at seven points higher than it was in 1996 and Town Hall is estimating the county rate for the current year will be a single point higher than a year ago.

The combination of municipal, school and county costs result in a projected 1997 real estate tax rate of \$4.31 per \$100 of assessed valuation. If the projected rate is correct, the 1997 property tax on the home assessed at \$204,000—the average assessment—will be \$204 higher this year than it was in 1996.



Staff photo by Jim Connelly

AN ILL WIND—Friday morning's brisk winds snapped a tree limb which in turn snapped several electrical lines which in turn ignited a fire on a lawn of a home near the corner of Old Short Hills Road and Glen Avenue. Traffic was diverted from the area until electric utility crews completed repairs.

Winds down limbs, limbs down wires

It was a bad week for GPU Energy and a bad week for hundreds of township

school as well as at homes on Short Hills, Hobart and Montview avenues.

Town rolls back FEMA's flood plain

It took nearly a half-year more than expected, but things are now back to where they were.

The "thing" in this case is an officially designated flood plain in the northwesterly section of the municipality.

The flood plain designation was approved, begrudgingly, by the Township Committee last December under orders from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

The designation, which affected approximately 50 properties along Richard Drive, Athens Road, Sparta Road, Robbins Lane, Lawrence Drive and South Orange Avenue, was opposed by the majority of homeowners, the municipality's own engineering department and even by the N.J. Department of Environmental Protection's Office of Flood Plan Management.

Residents' objections were based on fears that the flood plain designation would adversely affect the values of their properties and FEMA's requirement that any property in a flood plain be covered by flood insurance prior to a sale or a refinancing action.

In approving the designation, Committee members made clear they were doing so "under protest" and a FEMA representative promised his agency would "expeditiously" review data submitted by Town Hall's engineering department. Depending upon the outcome of that review, Robert Reynolds, FEMA's New Jersey representative, said in December, the boundary lines of the then new

administering the national flood insurance program and, among its duties, charts flood plains across the United States.

If it produces a map designating a flood plain, it is a federal mandate that the municipality in which the plain is located incorporate FEMA's map into its zoning ordinance. If a municipality fails to do so, persons with property within the plan cannot purchase flood insurance and without that insurance, the federal government prohibits the sale or the refinancing of the properties within the plan.

The flood plain action was but one of four ordinances introduced at Tuesday's Committee meeting, all of which are scheduled for public hearing and final passage at the governing body's June 17 session.

The second of the ordinances introduced authorizes the municipality to sell \$370,000 in bonds to provide financing for the construction of handicapped sidewalk ramps throughout the municipality and Americans with Disabilities Act improvements at the town swimming pool, roadwork on Hartshorn Drive from Minnissink Road to White Oak Ridge Road and installation of reflectors and drainage improvements on Old Short Hills Road.

Although the ordinance authorizes the sale of bonds, Committeeman Thomas McDermott said as he introduced the ordinance, the municipality anticipates receiving grants to finance all the work and, in essence, the town was "only buy-

Service Saturday for Dorothy King