

Harding Township Civic Association

THUMBNAIL ACCOUNTS OF CIVIC AFFAIRS

December 2009

ANNOUNCEMENTS AND UPCOMING EVENTS

The **First Presbyterian Church of New Vernon** cordially invites Harding residents to **attend Christmas Eve Candlelight services on Thursday, December 24**. There will be two services. The first, which will be geared to families, will be at 5:00 PM, the second at 11:00 PM. Dr. Sweeney will present the first person story told from the perspective of "The Other Wiseman" by Henry VanDyke. Both Services will be traditional with Lessons and Carols. Artist and event planner, David Mitchell is preparing to turn the sanctuary into a star-filled scene.

For more information, please contact the church office at (973) 538-8394.

THE LIBRARY

Story Time with Children's Librarian, Jennifer Carlin, **Tuesdays at 10 a.m.** Children and their parents will enjoy stories, songs, and a theme-related craft. Dec. 22, *Christmas and Hanukkah*; Dec. 29, *Fun in the Tub*; Jan. 5, *Stories by Rosemary Wells* (in honor of her birthday this month); Jan. 12, *Birthday Stories* (in honor of Miss Jen's birthday today ~ expect a special treat!).

Holiday books and children's videos and DVDs, both old and new, are now on display and ready for borrowing. Check the book sale cart in the lobby for holiday gift ideas. Also available for sale are colorful note cards and laminated book marks designed by Harding artist Tine Kirkland Graham. Donors to the **Enriching Our Community** campaign, please ask at the desk for a gold sticker to place on your library card.

Evening Book Group's next selection is *My Life in France* by Julia Child. Call the Library at 973-267-8000 X 132 for date and time.

Early closings: Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve, the Library will close at 1 p.m. The Library will also be closed on December 25, 26, and January 1. During these busy days, what could be more relaxing than to take time out with a good book? Come and see us!

Harding Township Historical Society: The Annual Meeting of HTHS takes place on **Tuesday, January 19 at 7:30 p.m.** at the Parish Life Hall, Church of Christ the King. The guest speaker is Philip Kunhardt, well known author and producer of numerous historical documentaries, the most recent of which was "Looking for Lincoln" aired on PBS in February, 2009. The title of Kunhardt's talk, "*Abraham Lincoln: Why He Still Matters,*" explores the enigmatic appeal of a President who is arguably the most important in American history. We are delighted to welcome this gifted and inspiring public speaker and renowned Lincoln scholar to Harding. HTHS members are admitted free of charge, non-members are \$5.00 per person. Seating is limited, so reservations are a must. Call (973) 292-3661 or email hardinghist@comcast.net.

Harding Township Historical Society welcomes new members to join the Board of Trustees in order to replace those who are leaving at the beginning of 2010. The only requirement is an appreciation of the unique history of Harding and hands-on participation in activities such as programs, events, newsletters and more. Please contact mfiller@gti.net.

From the **HARDING LAND TRUST**

We have had a very productive year. There are many important conservation opportunities in Harding and we have had the privilege of discussing preservation with a number of landowners who are interested in preserving their large, beautiful properties. We often only consider the scenic, ecological and recreational benefits of preserved land but in these challenging economic times, we should remember that open space stabilizes the municipal tax base and enhances the value of other properties. It is also central to what makes Harding special and is reinforced in virtually every element of the Harding's Master Plan.

We have worked hard to restore and steward Land Trust properties this year with improvements to Waterman Meadow to manage invasive species and improve wetland habitat. We are removing invasive vines, dead trees and pruning trees along the edge of the Koven Pine Brook property and we hope you will appreciate the newly improved views of Pine Brook traveling down Dickson's Mill Road. We will be continuing our efforts to improve grassland nesting bird habitat on Frelinghuysen Fields partially through additional funding from the State and Federal wildlife programs.

A hardy thanks to our members, landowners, and partners for their tremendous support this year. We hope you enjoyed the first issue of our semiannual newsletter, intended to keep our members better informed of projects and ways to be involved in the community. Thank you to our Trustees for walking every acre of Land Trust properties this year and ensuring they are being protected as intended. Thanks also to Harding voters for supporting the ballot measure to continue funding for the Garden State Preservation Trust. This program has been enormously successful in providing great returns for Harding tax dollars.

The Land Trust is in the middle of our annual membership drive, so if you haven't already, please join us! Let's ensure that forests, farms and fields remain in Harding's future. Let Harding continue to be a haven for wildlife and for the fortunate residents who call this special place, "Home".

We wish you much joy in this and every Holiday season, from the Trustees of the Harding Land Trust

Harding Civic Association News

The Harding Township Civic Association welcomes residents who may be interested in joining the Civic Association. We need volunteers to help us, so if you have been thinking about volunteering, now is the time. Please write Barbara Brennan at BarbaraJBrennan@preludeinc.com or call 973-267-2624. You can send in announcements for posting on our calendar of events, see the Civic Association website www.hardingcivic.org for instructions. We also can send you the Thumbnail via e-mail, sign up also on our website www.hardingcivic.org.

HARDING ALLIANCE AGAINST SUBSTANCE ABUSE note that key changes in NJ Motor Vehicle Laws will take effective May 1, 2010:

1. Curfew for young drivers will start one hour earlier at 11pm (last to 5am)
2. The new driver's "Provisional license" will be renamed a "probationary license".
3. Language in the motor vehicle laws regarding cell phone usage has been clarified to include a restriction on any hand held device (i.e. texting)
4. Fine for violating the night time driving or interactive wireless device restrictions is \$100.00 plus costs and fees, but no points for these offenses.

Good news, NJ State traffic fatality numbers are down versus 2008. Thru 11/23 there were

520 against 590 last years. Teen fatalities have fallen the last three years from 73 (2006), to 68 (2007) to 59 (2008). However, pedestrian fatalities have been on the rise. And watch out, a statewide Driving under the Influence crackdown starts Monday, December 7th and will last thru New Years Day.

The mission of Harding Alliance is to provide education and resources to promote healthy decision-making and to avoid substance abuse and risky behaviors. More information, including our meeting schedule, can be found at <http://hardingalliance.hardingnj.org>. Copies of our handout ‘Legal and Other Consequences of Substance Abuse’ are available at the Kirby Municipal Building rotunda. Similar information can be found at section 4 of our website. Our next meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, January 20 at 8:45 AM in the Guidance Office of Harding Township School. We are also seeking representatives for the Alliance that can help organize parent programming. This is not a major time commitment, nor does it involve fundraising. If you have any questions or comments, please contact Judy Malloy, Chairperson, at judymotown@comcast.net.

JAMES RYBKA resigned from the Township Committee in early December. He sent a letter of information:

“Just as a matter of courtesy, I wanted to let everyone know that I have resigned from the Township Committee. This was a very difficult and disappointing decision for me, and I certainly did not make it lightly. While I deeply regret that I will not be able to fulfill my obligation to Harding’s residents and employees, I do take some comfort in knowing that our town is amply blessed with very intelligent, talented and community-minded individuals, any one of whom would be able to quickly and seamlessly fill the vacant position. We are fortunate indeed to have such folks who are willing to give so much of their time and energy for the betterment of our community, and my former Township Committee colleagues most certainly exemplify that very type of volunteer community spirit. Thank you, everyone, for all the support and assistance you have given me – it was greatly appreciated. Jim”

TOWNSHIP NEWS

Township Committee Continues to Wrestle with the Budget Dragon

At the November Township Committee (TC) meeting (11/18/09) after dispensing with the usual perfunctory items, the real work began – the budget for 2010 and beyond.

Recall from our piece on the October TC meeting, that preliminary projections show substantial red ink for 2010 and 2011 due to falling revenues and steadily increasing costs. The TC, led by finance committee persons Egea and Ward, is attacking the problem early (now rather than next spring) and is taking a multi-year view (3 years rather than one).

To try to come up with a balanced budget, the TC is looking at each functional area and attempting to find incremental revenue or cost saving opportunities. At the October meeting the focus was the Police Department. This month, the focus is on (1) Construction Department, (2) Planning and Zoning Board and (3) Township Administration function. But first, a portrait of the overall municipal finances was presented...

1. The total amount of property taxes collected from Harding Township property owners in 2009 is about \$21.4 million, up 3% from 2008. In 2008, the total tax take was \$20.7 mm, again up about 3% from the prior year's \$20.0mm.
2. These taxes are earmarked to fund five areas:
 - a. Harding Schools – about \$9 mm, up 7% in 2009
 - b. Morris County Operations – about \$5.3 mm, up 4% in 2009
 - c. Harding Township Operations – about \$5.3 mm, up 6% in 2009
 - d. Morris County Open Space – about \$0.8 mm, down 25% in 2009
 - e. Harding Township Open Space – about \$0.7 mm, down 10% in 2009
 - f. Note: These five figures don't total exactly to \$21.4mm due to error estimating from a graph.
3. Citizens should be aware that your TC has jurisdiction only over the HT Open Space tax and HT Operations. HT Schools (by far the largest use of your property taxes) and Morris County (both operations and Open Space) are outside of the TC's purview. So in effect, the TC "controls" only about 28% of your tax bill. So if you are concerned about your property taxes, then you should also look to spending by the HT school and the County. Even the 28% of your taxes that IS the bailiwick of the TC, is constrained to a degree by mandates from Trenton.
4. Focusing on HT Municipal Operations (Police, DPW, Administration, Court, etc), we find that it is supported from two sources – Local Property Tax Levy (the \$5.3mm discussed above) and "Other Revenues" (\$3.6mm for 2009). "Other Revenues" derive from a host of sources:
 - a. Surplus \$2,125,000
 - b. Utility Tax/State Aid 492,000
 - c. UCC 215,000 (construction related permit fees)
 - d. Delinquent Tax Receipts 200,000

e. COAH	200,000	(rent on our affordable housing)
f. Municipal Court	153,000	(fines and fees)
g. Interest on investments	125,000	(interest on working cash balance)
h. Fees/Permits/Licenses	64,000	
i. Int. on Delinquent Taxes	55,000	

Total Others Revs \$3,639,000

Though it appears that property taxes support 60% of the town's operations and "Other" sources support the balance, it's not quite that simple, since the largest piece of "Other" is "Surplus" which is merely excess from prior years a lot of which was from property taxes.

The TC is two months into the task of creating a balanced budget for 2010 Municipal Operations – the roughly \$9mm that pays for police, administration, courts, public works, etc. This year (2009), township operations will consume \$8.94mm, up about 3% from 2008. The local tax levy was up 6% in 2009, while Other Revenues were about flat.

The expectation is that in 2010, Other Revenue sources will be down 13% or \$478K a significant amount in a \$9mm budget. What sources are falling? Almost everything:

a. Surplus	-\$313,000	down 15%
b. Utility Tax/State Aid	- 25,000	down 5%
c. UCC	- 75,000	down 35%
d. COAH	-20,000	down 10%
e. Delinquent Tax Receipts	flat	
f. Municipal Court	+12,000	up 8%
g. Interest on Investments	-55,000	down 44%
h. Fees/Permits/Licenses	-42,000	down 65%
i. Interest on Taxes	flat	

However, unless action is taken, expenses march along an upward path. About 55% of the budget is personnel related – 35% for salaries (1% increase), 15% for health insurance (9% increase), 5% for pensions (20% increase). Debt Service (15% of spending) should drop 4% and departmental operating expenses (12% of the budget) are promised to drop 5%.

So the bottom line is that the bottom line, as currently projected, is written in red ink of about \$600-800K – due to a combination of falling "other revenues" and steadily increasing expenses...even if property taxes are increased by the 4% maximum allowable.

The TC's department by department review in November, focused on the Construction Department, the Planning & Zoning Boards, and Administration (including Finance and Tax functions).

Construction Department – Used to Run a Surplus, Now Runs A Deficit...

Not surprisingly, revenues from building permit fees have fallen off a cliff in 2009 from roughly \$235K to about \$160K as construction activity has collapsed. The number of permits and updates has dropped from 548 to 453 in 2009. The budget calls for no rebound in activity nor for a further drop off in 2010. To increase revenues, permit fees will be increased sharply by 45%. **This will help to close the expected budget gap by about \$57K.** So Construction Department revenues are forecast to be about \$218K in 2010. Expenses for this department, which ran about \$250K each year in 2008 and 2009, are budgeted to rise to about \$265K.

The hope, as expressed the forecasts, is that building activity will rebound 15% in 2011 and 25% in 2012. Even so the Construction Department, which used to run a surplus (2005-2007) but has been in the red last year and this year, is forecast to run a deficit at least until 2012.

A member of the public asked if this department could be made a shared service – ie. shut down the department and pay a neighboring town to do our inspections for a fee. This idea will be investigated.

Planning & Zoning Boards – Fees to be Raised

These two boards are staffed with unpaid citizen volunteers, unlike in a larger towns and cities. However, both used some administrative man hours and generate engineering and consulting fees to accomplish their mission. The bottom line of the review of this activity is a total of about \$70K (through increased revenue and decreased expenses) could be contributed to decrease the 2010 budget gap (assuming the fees become effective 1/1/10).

Administration

The Administration budget is about \$381,000 of which about \$240K is salaries and benefits. Administration is 2.5 people including the township administrator and municipal clerk. From 2004-7, the administration department staffing ranged from 3.5 to 4 full timers.

The budget review found \$82.3K in savings, or 22% from the original. The savings came from (1) reduction in human resources training, (2) deferral of IT upgrades, (3) deferral of police department IT upgrade, (4) reduction of in-house computer support, (5) elimination of GIS support, a project to create computer maps of subdivisions and easements.

Where Do We Go from Here?

At its December 16 meeting, the TC will review the budget for the Court, Heath Department, Public Works, Capital projects and HOST (Harding Open Space Trust).

Then at the January 20 meeting, the TC will review the actual financial results from 2009 came out and then outline and discuss options for 2010.

HARDING TOWNSHIP HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION, Dec.3, 2009
CONCEPT REVIEW

- **McFayden, 48 Lake Trail East, Block 44, Lot 8.** The applicant seeks to remove the existing contributing Mt Kemble Lake cottage-style dwelling, and construct a replacement residence of similar style. The Commission noted that, due to an oversight in the historic properties survey, the property is not in a historic district and the demolition delay will not apply. Specifically, the property was identified in the survey as a contributing site in the individual sites district BUT was referenced in error by the adjacent lot number. Therefore, until the master plan is updated to correct the error in the survey, it is not “technically” a contributing property. With that in mind, the Commission appreciates that the overall scale and styling of the proposed replacement home are consistent with other homes in the area, and acknowledges that the proposed reconstruction will have no impact on viewscape given that it has a similar footprint and dimensions as the existing house. The Commission expressed concern that, from the front, the proposed home will appear as three-stories, which could potentially have a negative impact on streetscape. In order to simplify the façade and minimize the impact on streetscape, the Commission suggested that the applicant retain as many of the existing mature trees as possible, omit the two bottom columns and replace them with a masonry pier to match, reduce the number of windows, and include landscaping along the home’s base. The Commission made special note of their desire to see a landscaping plan, and emphasized that their ultimate approval of this proposal will be contingent upon this as way to minimize the impact on streetscape.

CONSTRUCTION

- **Windolf, 22 Featherbed Lane, Block 16, Lot 18.01.** The Commission issued no comment on this proposal to add a 55 square foot addition to the rear of the house. The proposed plans do not impact the contributing structure or the streetscape.

PLANNING BOARD

- **Hartington J. Trust, 2 & 20 Griffin Lane and 507 Van Beuren Road, Block 7, Lots 1.01, 1.02, 4.02.** This proposal seeks to expand the existing approved 3 lot subdivision in the Silver Lake Historic District into 5 residential lots. The Commission expressed concern that the building envelope of proposed Lot 1.01 is undersize for the size of the lot. This

would likely force new construction towards the road, requiring numerous variances and creating development that is insensitive to the rural streetscape. The Commission further noted that, based on the current plans, the stacking of driveways off the road appears to add well over 100 feet of asphalt, which would also have a potentially negative impact on the rural streetscape of Harding. In light of these concerns, the Commission strongly feels that this proposed subdivision should be capped at 4 lots. The Commission recommends consolidating Lots 1.01 and 1.02 into one larger lot, with the rationale that this would provide more room to site the house, reduce the number of future variances required, and minimize the project's overall impact on Harding's rural streetscape. The Commission also recommends the creation of an additional Tree Conservation Easement beyond the standard 25 feet for the lots that face Van Beuren Road, in order to better preserve the rural and open character.

PLANNING BOARD MEETING- November meeting was cancelled
BOARD OF ADJUSTMENT, no report
HARDING TOWNSHIP BOARD OF EDUCATION, no report

Civic Association News and Announcements

Civic Association: The **DEADLINES FOR THE next 2 issues OF THE THUMBNAIL are January 8 and February 5**, respectively. Current and past issues of Thumbnail, as well as the Directory are also on our Website: <http://www.hardingcivic.org>. Send questions or comments about Thumbnail to editor, **email address: *hesnaj@verizon.net***, or the Harding Township Civic Association, PO Box 72, New Vernon, NJ 07976.

TOWNSHIP RECYCLING

Commingled Recyclables: consists of all aluminum and tin cans, glass bottles, and only plastic bottles and containers with the Recycling symbol, and #1 or #2. Try to crush plastic bottle to conserve space. Please remember no plastic or paper bags. **Commingled Mixed Paper recycling;** consists of all paper, cardboard, newspaper, office paper, magazines, and books. Please put loose or shredded paper in paper bag. Please flatten all boxes or fill with other paper products. **Other accepted items;** Batteries; automotive (car) and household (rechargeable accepted); Computers and all related peripherals, i.e. printers and monitors; Automotive and light truck tires, (on or off rim) and Propane tanks (BBQ size only) **The Hours of operation are every Wednesday** from 7AM. to noon (7- 9AM self service); and **Saturdays: 11/21, 12/5, 12/19, 9AM to noon.**

DATES TO REMEMBER, meetings as noted.

Municipal Court (1 st and 3 rd Tuesday)	3:00 PM
Municipal Court (2 nd and 4 th Friday)	11 AM
Environmental Commission (1 st Monday)	7:30 PM
Seniors (2 nd and 4 th Thursday)Christ the King Church	11:00 AM
Planning Board (4 th Monday)	7:30 PM
Historical Preservation Comm (1 st Thursday)	8:00 PM
Board of Health (2 nd Thursday)	8:00 PM
Board of Education (2 nd and 4 th Monday)	7:30 PM
Board of Adjustment (3 rd Thursday)	7:30 PM
Township Committee(3 rd Wed)	7:30 PM
Harding Twp Civic Association (1 st Monday)	7:30 PM