

January 2014

ANNOUNCEMENTS AND UPCOMING EVENTS

Kemmerer Library

Operating hours: Monday-Friday: 10-5. Saturday: 10-1. Sunday: 12-3.

Ongoing Children's Programs:

Tuesdays, 10:30 am: Story Time: Children aged 1-4 listen to stories, sing songs and do a craft.

Wednesdays, 11 am: Pre-K Play Group and Lunch Bunch. Games play and bring your lunch.

Thursdays, 10:30 am: Baby Play Group: Moms and babies, 6 months-12 months of age, meet to play/chat and sing songs.

Children's Special Events:

Wednesday, January 14, 4:00 pm: Ninjago Party: Calling all Lego fans for an hour of stories, fun, games and a craft. Registration required, please.

Children's Book Clubs: 6-7th Grade: Next meeting, Monday, January 20, 5:30 p.m. If you enjoy reading and love to chat about what you have read, this book club is for you! We'll talk, do a craft, have a nice snack – and have lots of fun. Led by expert book club leader, Lynn Hughes. Next title: Skellig by David Almond. Come get your copy at the Library.

50 shades of taking Charge: 11:00 a.m. January 5: Roger Knowles, PhD.: New Developments in Alzheimer Research. January 19: Pat Russomano, RN: Advocating for Yourself and a Loved one. Light lunch will be served. *Registration required, please.*

Tuesdays, January 14 and 28, 4:30 p.m. iPhone Workshop for Beginners: Caitlin Trought, expert on everything Apple will lead the workshops. Basics, apps, organizing information, syncing content, and more will be covered. \$5 suggested donation per meeting. *Membership limited to 15, so register soon.*

Yarn Circle Knitting Club, Every Wednesday, 1-2 pm. Join us for conversation, inspiration and instruction by the fireplace. Fun for beginners and experienced knitters alike.

Mondays at 10:30 am. Mat Yoga: MJ Turnbull's classes are good for both body and soul. Gentle Chair Yoga has been discontinued until further notice. All are welcome. A donation of \$10 per session is suggested.

Wednesday, January 31, 7:30 pm. Evening Book Group: This month's selection is Orphan Train by Christina Kline. All are welcome. Book or Kindle available at the Library.

Thursdays, 12-2 pm Mah Jongg Club: Social play. All are welcome.

An Evening of Scotch: Whiskey Tasting with Culture. Friday, January 31, 7:30 p.m. Join us for a delightful evening of Scottish poetry, music, and tastes of usquebae! Sponsored by the Friends of the Library. \$75 per person.

TOWNSHIP NEWS:

TOWNSHIP COMMITTEE

Township Committee Meeting - December 17, 2013

All Committee members present.

Property Tax Reduction in the Offing / Preliminary 2014 Budget Presented.

The Township presented a preliminary budget for next year. It shows appropriations (aka spending) lower by about 2.2% and a larger (4.5%) reduction in property taxes. Driving this cut, is the absence of emergency spending for Super Storm Sandy (about \$250K). So by this reckoning, the total municipal budget drops from \$8.88 mm to \$8.68 mm. Salaries and benefit expense increases 1.9%.

But before we celebrate (and spend!) a reduction in our tax bill, remember that municipal taxes account for slightly less than one quarter of our property tax bill. The Morris County assessment makes up over a quarter and the School budget, the biggest chunk, accounts for about half of your taxes.

As always, the largest percentage of HT revenues (63.4%) derives from property taxes while the balance is from surplus (being added to again this year), fees, fines, grants,

etc. On the outlay side, 54.5% goes to compensation (salary and benefits) and 17.6% to “Other” (maintenance, miscellaneous, utilities, legal, library, engineering, a police car, etc etc.). Debt service (about 8.8% of total spending) is dropping a tad. Readers interested in detailed spending and revenue numbers can access the presentation on the Township’s website.

The presentation then turned to a policy question: What to do with \$146K from FEMA for Sandy reimbursement? Attentive readers will recall that in 2013, the TC took the conservative approach to pay for \$250K of Sandy expenses – they raised taxes immediately rather than gamble on an uncertain reimbursement. To date our deficit plagued Federal government has given HT \$146K in reimbursement money. (In fact the expectation is that we will get another \$100K+ in the future – this from a Federal government that borrows about 40 cents of every dollar it spends.)

Four options were delineated for utilizing the \$146K already received: (1) Refund to taxpayers in the form of decreasing the 2014 tax levy; (2) Increase HT’s surplus, ie “bank it” (Current surplus was characterized as healthy.); (3) Increase spending. (Example: early payoff of the balance of the costs for the Kirby Hall parking lot renovation); (4) Combination of those options.

An informal headcount showed the TC overwhelmingly favored option #1. But our Township Administrator and CFO both voiced caution regarding lowering taxes based on a one-time revenue source (FEMA reimbursement). The counter to that concern is that the 2013 increase in taxes was also driven by non-recurring expense, Sandy. At least we hope Super Storms are non-recurring. Lastly, your reporter recalls that at the time of the sharp increase in taxes to pay for Sandy, the strong suggestion (though certainly not a promise) was that it would be rolled back in 2014.

A member of the public asked what budget assumptions have been made regarding the outcome of the PBA contract negotiation. TC response – “can’t comment”.

In January, the Capital Plan and Open Space budget will be presented along with a review of expenses by department. In February or March, the budget will be formally introduced. Then in March or April, the final budget will be presented for public hearing with adoption thereafter.

More Talk About Cross Walks

The crosswalks in “downtown” New Vernon are considered by many observers to be unsafe, including a recent task force that examined the vitality, beauty and safety of the center of New Vernon. A major concern is that even though the speed limit was cut to 25 mph, cars still barrel through the area between the traffic light at “four corners” (Lee’s Hill/Blue Mill and Village Road/Glen Alpin Rd) and Millbrook Road (the NV Fire Dept). Pedestrians attempting to cross from say the Post Office to the Deli or Chase Bank are at risk.

Over the last couple of years, various solutions have been examined. (Example: full size “tin man” with flashing lights. Rejected on aesthetics).

The latest potential solution is a system that uses pedestrian-activated, flashing lights embedded in the roadway to warn drivers to slow down. The pedestrian would press a button and four lights would flash at drivers coming from both directions. The lights are bright enough to be seen in the daytime and shut themselves off after a period of time that allows the pedestrian to cross. The Township put the job out to bid. The lowest bid was \$107K, of which \$55K could come from the NJ Department of Transportation.

After the shock of the cost wore off, a lively discuss ensued. “Are the current painted crosswalks not working?” “The speed limit should be enforced – this will get their attention.” “The painted cross walks are in the wrong place.” “How about making Millbrook and Village intersection a 4-Way Stop?” “We can’t just do what we want without a study and approval by Morris County since it’s a county road.”

A resolution was passed to reject all the bids on the road embedded flashing lights pending further study and exploring other options. For the moment: Pedestrians, be careful. Drivers: Slow the heck down!

Tennis Anyone? (I know, I know - it’s a cliché)

The HT school informed the TC that new tennis courts behind the school are available for public use when not being used by students. This likely impacts the decision on whether or not to restore the courts at Kirby Hall – a decision which will likely be taken up (again) with the capital budget next month.

ENVIRONMENTAL COMMISSION

No report this month

BOARD OF ADJUSTMENT

No report this month

HARDING TOWNSHIP BOARD OF EDUCATION

Board of Education Meeting – 5:30pm, Monday, December, 02, 2013

The Board began meeting at 5:30 pm on this date in order to accomplish the annual mandatory two hour ethics training program. It was administered by the New Jersey School Board Association and, among other items, discussed various case scenarios which could or could not result in ethics violations. Some of situations were not obvious and elicited a good deal of discussion. After a short break, the regular meeting was called to order at about 7:35.

The Superintendent discussed the NJASK Student Growth Profile testing which emphasizes improvement in test scores from one year to the next, and such performance is reflected in up to 30% of the teacher's evaluation. While this can be seen as a positive motivation in under-performing schools, it can cause a problem for high performance wherein a score of, say, 291 (out of a possible 300) in one year is followed by a student's score of 285 the next year. In such a case, the two very high scores will be reported as declining (low growth), adversely affecting the teacher's performance evaluation and giving a misleading impression of how such students are actually doing. This conundrum was discussed by the Board at some length.

As is general practice, a progressive selection of the policies and regulations are presented in advance to the Board for review (with changes as recommended by committee), and are voted on as a first (preliminary) reading and, at the subsequent meeting, a second reading for approval. In this way any Board member has the opportunity to bring up for discussion any policy or regulation as part of the review process. Otherwise these items are approved *en masse*. In tonight's session, Policy 2464 Gifted and Talented Pupils was discussed at length regarding how detailed this policy should be, especially regarding student selection criteria. It was decided to look into this element in greater detail after study by the Board members.

At the end of the meeting, a parent of a 5th grade student noted that there were no written comments on the report cards, just grades. She thought it would be helpful to include some brief comments by the teachers. The Board discussed this and decided to look into the matter. Apparently, comments are included for students in grades 6, 7, and 8, but not for the lower grades.

(Note: the purpose of this brief report is to help Harding residents connect with the School by highlighting significant items addressed by the Board. The "meeting minutes" are filed by the Board Secretary and placed on the Harding School website for all to view, generally about a month after the meeting date.)

Board of Education Meeting – 7:30pm, Monday, December, 16, 2013

The discussion continued regarding the Policy 2464 Gifted and Talented Pupils . The point was made that a student could be talented in one area but not suitable for the gifted (QUEST) program which involves many study areas. Thus a student who was musically inclined or mathematically advanced but average in language arts, for instance, would get no opportunity to enrich his/her specialty. Since the Policy is intended to further the gifted and talented, what responsibility does the Board have to develop a talented student? At this point the Superintendent noted that over 24% of students (grades 3 – 8) have qualified for Quest whereas the norm for other districts is only 2% - 4%. It was decided to examine in greater detail the policies and regulations of other school boards in this regard and continue the discussion at the next meeting. The Special Education Committee, comprised of Harding teachers and other Child Study Team members, reported on the 2013 NJASK results for the "classified" students at Harding. (Based on scores and other factors, students may be "classified" for Special Education. A student thus classified will be evaluated by specialists, and, if suitable, will be provided with help for improvement. This need could be academic or behavioral.) Of the approximately 300 Harding students, 45 are so classified, about 14% of the population. During the Board's ensuing discussion with the Committee it was revealed some students do not apply themselves to the taking of the NJASK tests – simply making random answers or omitting making responses altogether. Of those with this behavior, about 80% are boys. Such action can classify students into the Special Education Program.

The Business Administrator reported that the second phase of the air conditioning/ventilator project, estimated at about \$270K, has been funded and programmed for next summer, facilitated in part by the receipt of a state grant for \$108K, or approximately 40% of the estimate.

At the end of the meeting a parent remarked on the great value of the QUEST program because of the independent, multidiscipline study it provided the students and suggesting that all the students should have such a study opportunity.

Another parent referred to the "dashboard" information that is supplied to parents about how their child is performing as measured by numerous factors, and requested that, if

possible, measurements be provided showing how the child is doing relative to others in the peer group county or state-wide. The Superintendent responded that this information was already provided to parents (via NJASK results or the Measures of Academic Progress - MAP) and the purpose of the dashboard was not to compare students to other students.

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PLANNING BOARD

No report this month.

FROM THE SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENT, ALEX ANEMONE

No report this month.

Civic Association News and Announcements

Civic Association: If you have announcements for early March, send in to be included in the February issue, please. **PLEASE NOTE: NEW DEADLINES FOR THUMBNAIL SUBMISSION: THE THIRD FRIDAY OF THE MONTH. The DEADLINES FOR THE NEXT 3 ISSUES OF THE THUMBNAIL are January 17, February 21 and March 21.** 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:** HTCA@mail.com OR submissions@hardingcivic.org OR the Harding Township Civic Association, PO Box 72, New Vernon, NJ 07976. The Civic Association website, www.hardingcivic.org, is updated frequently; we post events sent to our e-mail address: HTCA@mail.com

TOWNSHIP RECYCLING

The Hours of operation are every Wednesday from 7AM. to noon (7– 9AM self service); and every other **Sat.: 9AM to noon.**

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); Automotive and light truck tires, (on or off rim) and Propane tanks (BBQ size only)

Computers, monitors, laptops and televisions cannot be put into household trash. However, they **can** be brought to the Harding Twp DPW recycling center at the regular hours of operation. Tracy Toribio of Harding Twp DPW will answer your recycling questions 973 267 2448, Mon- Fri 8:30 am to 3 pm.

DATES TO REMEMBER, meetings as noted.

Environmental Commission (1 st Monday)	7:30 PM
Seniors (2 nd & 4 th Thursday) Christ The King Church	11:00 AM
Planning Board (4 th Monday)	7:30 PM
Historical Preservation Committee (1 st Thursday)	7:30 PM
Board of Health (2 nd Thursday)	7:30 PM
Board of Education (1st & 3rd Monday)	7:30 PM
Board of Adjustment (3 rd Thursday)	7:30 PM
Township Committee (1 st & 2 nd Monday)	7:30 PM
Harding Open Space (2 nd Wed)	7:30 PM
Harding TWP Civic Association (2 nd Monday)	7:30 PM

DATED MATERIAL