

Sigh. For those of you who are curious about a week in the life of Daily Local Dan, here are all of the articles I filed from Monday, Nov. 30 to Friday, Dec. 4. The total word count is 6,626. All of the reporting that went into these articles was done this week. Danielle Lynch got the tip that led to the double-bylined article, and she did much of the legwork involved. I did a few of the interviews and wrote all of the words, so I've added it to my weekly word count. The articles in this document are as-submitted – the have not been edited by anyone but me.

Dan Kristie
West Chester, Pa.
Dec. 4, 2009.
11:30 p.m.

By DAN KRISTIE
Staff Writer

Pat Sellers, a Wallace Township resident who has been involved in Coatesville politics, said on Nov. 22 that he would seek the Republican nomination to run for the 6th District congressional seat.

He made the announcement at an End the Fed rally that was held in front of the Federal Reserve Bank in Philadelphia.

Sellers' announcement was not well-publicized. A news release regarding the announcement came out on Nov. 24, at 9 p.m. – more than 48 hours after the announcement itself. He has also launched a rudimentary website, which contains some speeches he made at recent Tea Party events.

He could not be reached by phone on Monday for comment.

In the news release, Sellers said he made his campaign announcement at the Nov. 22 anti-Federal Reserve rally because “sound money” will be one of his top campaign issues.

“The Federal Reserve needs to be audited, and its books and ownership need to be transparent,” Sellers said in the release.

Sellers, who appears at this point to be a long shot candidate, is entering an already-crowded primary field.

Also seeking the Republican nomination are State Rep. Curt Schroder, R-155th of Downingtown; Chester County Recorder of Deeds Ryan Costello; Montgomery County businessman Steve Welch; and Lower Merion business consultant Howard Cohen.

Welch, who lives just outside the 6th District, has a large personal fortune, and has already begun to loan his campaign money. Schroder is well-known among Chester County voters, and Costello and Cohen have their own corners of support within the GOP.

Sellers has a fair amount of name recognition in Coatesville, his past involvement in city politics could be a detriment to his campaign.

Sellers, a former Coatesville Area School Board member, began earlier this decade to publicly oppose Coatesville City's proposal to take by eminent domain a farm owned by Richard and Nancy Saha, of neighboring Valley Township

The city wanted to turn the farm into a golf course, but this proposal failed.

The organized opposition to the city's plan to take the Saha farm led to the election of four controversial city council members. These members went on to hire City Manager Harry Walker and former Police Chief William Matthews.

Many blame the city's stalled redevelopment effort on Walker. And after Matthews took charge of the police department, nearly half of the city's police officers – including many with broad and deep knowledge of the city – left. Gun violence escalated during Matthew's time with the department, and he resigned earlier this year, in the wake of the arson crisis.

In his campaign press release, Sellers summed up his position as follows:

“By having a non-interventionist policy, by having peaceful, friendly relations with those who wish to trade with us, by refusing to interfere with other nation's (sic) internal affairs, by withdrawing from the despotically controlled U.N., and, (sic) by securing our wide open borders, we will begin to fulfill our obligation, our duty to our children and our children's children, to make this a better, safer, and more prosperous world in which to live.”

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By DAN KRISTIE
Staff Writer

WEST CHESTER – It is possible that, by the end of today, Zukin Realty will have received permission to build a 90 foot, 126 room hotel at East Gay and North Walnut streets.

The second part of the last round of the seemingly interminable Zukin Hotel conditional use hearing will take place tonight at borough hall at 6:30 p.m. This hearing has lasted about two years.

Council will hear testimony from historic preservation experts, people who own buildings near the proposed hotel, and several borough residents and. Then, council members will discuss Zukin's proposal and, possibly, render a decision.

For more than two years, Zukin has sought permission to build a hotel at this site. The realty company first proposed a huge building that majorly deviated from existing zoning. It has gradually been scaling its proposal down.

The latest iteration, which it presented to the borough in August, required only a few zoning variances. Zukin obtained these variances in October.

Now that Zukin has all of the necessary variances, it will be difficult, and arguably illegal, for borough council to withhold permission to build the hotel.

The first part of the last round of the hearing took place on Monday night. Mary Ann Rossi, Zukin's attorney, called several witnesses, all of whom delivered testimony regarding the impacts the building will have on tax revenue, traffic congestion and borough architecture. The witnesses stated that the building would have, at most, a negligible impact on the borough.

Traffic engineer Frank Tavini, a consultant hired by Zukin, said that the hotel would cause some nearby intersections to become more congested. But, he said, the impact

would not be so great that the intersections would become drastically worse than they now are.

Real Estate consultant Ray Ott said that the hotel would bring the borough \$48,000 in additional annual tax revenue. But, he added, the hotel would likely eat up \$47,000 worth of municipal services, rendering it revenue neutral for the borough.

Arthur Bernardin, the hotel's architect, stated that the hotel would incorporate the historic façade of the Spence Café, a restaurant which now sits on the portion of Gay Street along which Zukin plans to build the hotel. The restaurant leases its building from Zukin, and Zukin plans to move the restaurant to the second floor of the hotel.

Bernardin also said that the hotel would replicate now-demolished historic features of the Gay Street streetscape. He testified that the hotel would, on the whole, preserve Gay Street's historic feel.

Council members, however, said that they had doubts about the optimistic picture the witnesses painted.

For example, Council President Sue Bayne asked Ott, the real estate consultant, if his calculations took into account the fact that Zukin will be removing 11 of its apartments in order to build the hotel.

The borough, Bayne pointed out, relies heavily on earned income tax revenue, and this is collected only from residents. When the apartments go, the earned income tax revenue their residents provide will also go, Bayne said.

Ott said that he had no precise figures on how much earned income tax the hotel project would wipe out.

Councilman Jim Jones also questioned Ott's testimony regarding the number of jobs the hotel would create. Ott said that the hotel would have 97 employees, but Jones wanted to know how many of those employees would simply transfer from the current Spence Café to the new Spence Café. Ott said he did not know how many employees the current Spence Café has.

Councilwoman Holly Brown questioned the implications of preserving the Spence Café façade rather than preserving the whole building. Zukin plans to demolish the Spence building and put part of the hotel behind and around it.

"Is the intent to preserve the buildings so that we preserve the town, or is it to have Mickey Mouse facades down the street so that the town is like Disney Land?" Brown said. She said that, if all that remains of old buildings is their facades, and if these facades become imbedded in newer buildings, West Chester will look more like a movie set than a historic town.

Several council members also questioned the traffic consultant's methodology and projections. For example, Councilman Jones pointed out that, while the consultant studied eight intersections near the hotel, he did not study the often congested intersection of Gay and Matlak streets, which is just one block from the hotel.

Tavini, the traffic consultant, said that this intersection would likely be affected less than the other intersections he studied. He said that, when preparing his study, he did not select this intersection for inclusion.

The Monday night portion of the hearing lasted three and a half hours. At its end, Rossi said that Zukin rested its case.

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By DAN KRISTIE
Staff Writer

The three congressmen who represent Chester County said on Tuesday night that they support President Obama's decision to send more troops to Afghanistan.

The president's strategy, which he announced in a Tuesday night speech, is to send 30,000 more troops to Afghanistan but would begin bringing troops home in mid-2011. While the local congressmen' support came with caveats, this was a rare moment of agreement among them.

U.S. Rep. Joe Sestak, D-7th of Edgmont, said that Obama's plan will allow the U.S. to finally eliminate the Al Qaeda terrorists who struck the U.S. on Sept. 11, 2001.

But, he said, he wants to hear more details about the President's plan. He said that he is opposed to a fixed timetable for the withdrawal of the troops. And, he said, he is opposed to "nation building" in Afghanistan and would like eliminating Al Qaeda in Pakistan to be the top priority.

"First, the clear emphasis of our overall goal must remain focused on eliminating the safe haven in Pakistan," Sestak said. "And second, we should measure our progress not by a fixed timetable, but by benchmarks of achieving America's security."

Sestak added that he would like the Obama Administration to provide information on what those benchmarks would be.

U.S. Rep. Joe Pitts, R-16th of East Marlborough, said that he supports the concept of sending more troops. But he said that he will wait until he hears additional testimony from the commander of U.S. operations in Afghanistan before he forms a more in-depth opinion of the strategy.

"The President's decision to authorize 30,000 more troops will certainly aid our efforts in the region," Pitts said. "I want to make sure that we have the resources, both personnel and equipment, to succeed, and I look forward to hearing directly from our Afghanistan commander, General McChrystal, when he testifies on Capitol Hill."

Congressman Jim Gerlach, R-6th of West Pikeland, also expressed support for the President's Afghanistan strategy.

"I support the President's decision to send more American troops into Afghanistan and certainly hope that our nation's strategy continues to be based on the recommendations of military commanders rather than political pressure from liberal interest groups," Gerlach said.

Like Sestak, Gerlach said that he opposes a set timeline by which the troops would be withdrawn. He said he would prefer benchmarks that, once met, would trigger the removal of troops and the transfer of power to the people of Afghanistan.

"The President correctly pointed out that the objective must be preventing Afghanistan from becoming a safe haven for Al Qaida, the Taliban and other radicals plotting to kill American citizens, U.S. troops and our Allies," Gerlach said. "I have complete confidence that the outstanding men and women in the military will rise to the occasion – just as they have done so many times in the past when called to duty."

Gerlach is seeking the Republican nomination to run for governor. Sestak is seeking the Democratic nomination to run for U.S. Senate. Pitts is seeking reelection to the 16th District seat.

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Staff Reports

WEST CHESTER – The 30th annual West Chester Old Fashioned Christmas Parade will take place on Friday.

The parade will start at 8 p.m. at the corner of South New and West Market streets, and will proceed north on New Street, East on Gay Street, South on Matlack Street and West on Market Street.

Before the parade begins, there will be several events of interest.

Beginning at 5:30 p.m., many businesses in downtown West Chester will be open for refreshments and entertainment.

And at 7 p.m., the first annual Jingle Elf Run will take place. The run will follow the parade route, which is approximately a mile.

This year, the parade, which is traditionally run by the Greater West Chester Chamber of Commerce, will have an additional sponsor: Mars Drinks North America, which is a division of Mars, Inc.

The parade, therefore, will be called “The Flavia Old-Fashioned Christmas Parade.”

Flavia is a brand of coffee product.

In order that all parade goers – officials say there will be thousands – can see Santa Claus’s arrival, Santa will not depart from his float at the historic Chester County Courthouse, as he has in years past. Rather, he will remain on the float until the end of the parade route.

Additionally, there will be no special performances at the courthouse. Instead, performers will perform continually, all along the parade route.

The Elf Run will be offered in three sizes – a half-mile route for kids, a mile route for walkers, and a two mile route for runners. All who preregister will be guaranteed a jingle bell adorned Santa Hat.

For more information on the parade or to register for the Elf Run, go to the Greater West Chester Chamber of Commerce Web site, at www.gwcc.org.

By DAN KRISTIE

Staff Writer

WEST CHESTER – President Obama’s Tuesday announcement that the U.S. will send 30,000 more troops to Afghanistan is likely to change the dynamic of the two demonstrations that every Saturday morning take place in front of the Historic Chester County Courthouse.

Specifically, it is likely to increase the number of Peace Movement demonstrators and change the Victory Movement demonstrators’ message. At least that is what the founders of the movements said on Wednesday.

Karen Porter, the founder and organizer of the Chester County Peace Movement, said that Obama’s decision has irritated many of his supporters. It may, she said, reinvigorate peace protestors who, assuming that Obama would bring peace, packed up their picket signs after he was inaugurated.

During the Bush years, the Peace Movement rallies were well-attended. But the number of demonstrators decreased after Obama was elected.

Porter said that she disagrees with Obama's decision to send more troops. But, she added, she opposes the war, not the president.

"I am a very loyal Obama supporter, and I don't want to undermine his presidency,"

Porter said. "But I will object strongly to the situation in Afghanistan."

Porter said that some Peace Movement demonstrators are likely to take their criticisms further, even to the point of denouncing Obama.

"The Peace Movement is a coalition of different viewpoints," Porter said. She added that, while the movement formed specifically to oppose the Iraq war, many demonstrators now carry signs criticizing the war in Afghanistan.

Rich Davis, the founder and organizer of the Chester County Victory Movement, said that his group is likely to begin criticizing Obama for not sending more troops to Afghanistan. He said he believes 30,000 troops are not enough to succeed there.

"We call ourselves the Victory Movement because we think our troops should be victorious," Davis said. "I might start to carry a sign saying 'Fight to Win or Bring Them Home.' "

Davis said he believes that, unless Obama gives U.S. military commanders the 40,000 troops they asked for, the war in Afghanistan is not worth fighting.

And, he said, he thinks it is wrong to set a deadline for withdrawal from Afghanistan.

Although the details of Obama's strategy are still being hammered out, it appears that Obama wants to begin withdrawing troops in mid-2011.

Davis added that he believes that as soon as Afghanistan has free and open elections, free speech, and access for women to education, the U.S. will have succeeded there.

The Victory Movement formed in 2007 to oppose the efforts of the Chester County Peace Movement. Davis and his fellow demonstrators said that the Peace Movement was demoralizing the troops and their families.

Although the competing demonstrations, which take place from 11 p.m. to 12 p.m. each Saturday at the intersection of High and Market streets, are ostensibly focused on issues of defense, demonstrators regularly stray from the stated message.

The Peace Movement demonstrations have become a catch-all for left-wing messages, while the Victory Movement demonstrations have become a catch-all for right-wing messages.

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By DAN KRISTIE

Staff Writer

WEST CHESTER – The end of the seemingly endless Zukin Realty hotel conditional use hearing appears to be in sight.

Borough Council members, after listening to seven and a half hours of testimony over the course of two evenings, voted 5 to 2 on Tuesday to close the record of the hearing. This means that Zukin and the other parties involved in the hearing are no longer able to present evidence.

Council members voted to schedule for their Dec. 16 meeting the delivery of their decision regarding Zukin's conditional use application. Borough Solicitor Kristin Camp said that, during the two weeks leading up to Dec. 16, borough council members will come up with the conditions they wish to impose on Zukin's project.

Zukin wants to build a 90-foot, 126-room hotel at East Gay and North Walnut streets. While hotels are permitted in this area, developers wishing to build them must first obtain from borough council what is referred to as "conditional use approval."

This approval is granted or denied at the close of a conditional use hearing. Developers seeking conditional use approval must prove that their proposed project will not be a detriment to West Chester's health, safety and welfare.

These hearings also give borough council a chance to impose conditions on developers. In the instance of the Zukin Hotel, borough council is unlikely to deny conditional use approval. But council may have some control over the shape of the project.

Even if Zukin receives conditional use approval, the hotel project will still have to go through several other levels of approval. The start of construction could be years off. The Zukin hotel conditional use hearing has already been going on for about two years. But council members have said that they want to finish the hearing before the end of 2009.

This, council members said, is because two council members who have been present for the duration of the hearing will leave council at year's end. They will be replaced by two council members who are less well-versed in the history and details of Zukin's project. During the hearing's two years, Zukin has gradually scaled down the proposed hotel. The first proposals showed hotels that were far taller and wider than was permitted by borough zoning. These iterations of the project would have required significant zoning relief, or even a change to the borough's zoning ordinance.

Subsequent proposals showed smaller hotels, but these hotels would have still required zoning relief that even Zukin's attorney said the borough was unlikely to grant.

Zukin's most recent proposal – the one that is now on the table – shows a hotel that conforms, except in a few places, to existing zoning. Zukin in October received the variances necessary to build the hotel, which makes it harder for borough council to ultimately deny conditional use approval.

Zukin's proposal calls for a hotel with conference facilities. It will connect to the soon-to-be-built Mosteller Replacement Garage via a second story pedestrian walkway. The Spence Café, which leases its restaurant space from Zukin and is located in one of the buildings Zukin proposes to demolish to make way for the hotel, will be relocated to the hotel's second floor.

The parties involved in the hearing spent much of Tuesday night talking about the future of the Spence building. Zukin proposes to save the building's façade, but to demolish the rest of it. The façade would then be incorporated into the hotel's front.

Borough Resident Gordon Woodrow, a party to the hearing, harshly criticized this idea. He said that the Spence building is vital to downtown West Chester's historic feel and called Zukin's façade-saving idea "clip-on ornamentation."

Former Borough Council Member Bill Scott, also a party to the hearing, called witnesses who testified that if the building were demolished, West Chester would lose a valuable historic resource.

Town planning consultant Jane Dorchester, one of Scott's witnesses, said that Zukin should preserve more of the Spence building. She said that Zukin's current proposal would render the Spence façade a "shallow package" that has "no connection to West Chester's historic past" or to its "own interior."

Mary Ann Rossi, Zukin's attorney, said that, even after the conditional use hearing is complete and borough council has rendered its decision, the borough will have an opportunity to work with Zukin on the treatment of the Spence building.

Councilwoman Sue Bayne, who voted against closing the conditional use record, said that she is concerned about the second-story balcony that is part of Zukin's proposal. Zukin wants to build a balcony over Gay Street. This balcony would provide outdoor seating for the Spence Café. Bayne said that, because this balcony will hover over a borough right-of-way, she is concerned the borough could be held liable for any accidents the balcony brings about.

Bayne alluded to the possibility of drunk college students attempting to climb onto it and of diners accidentally dropping glass off of it.

Stan Zukin, of Zukin Realty, said that he would agree to assume liability for any accidents the balcony might cause. Zukin said the balcony is an attempt to recreate the façade of the historic, now-demolished Harrison Theater/Eagle Hotel building. This building had a balcony.

Zukin added that he believes the balcony is essential to the physical appearance of his hotel.

"To take the balcony off of the project is the equivalent of taking the crown off of the queen or jewelry off a woman," Zukin said. "It is the jewel of the whole corner."

Councilman Jim Jones, the other councilmember who voted against closing the conditional use hearing, called balconies that hover over streets a historic feature that the borough, in contemporary times, could safely do away with. He said that outhouses and over-sidewalk balconies are equally anachronistic.

Jones also said he was concerned with the traffic study Zukin's traffic consultant presented on Monday night, the first night of this round of the hearing. The study looked at many intersections around the hotel site, but it did not look at the often congested intersection of Gay and Matlack streets, which is one block east of the hotel site.

Jones and Bayne said they were concerned, as well, with the tax revenue figures that Ray Ott, the town planning consultant Zukin hired, presented on Monday and Tuesday nights. On Monday night Ott said that the Hotel would be revenue-neutral for the borough – he said it would bring just enough tax revenue to compensate the borough for the additional municipal services it will require.

But on Tuesday, after tweaking his figures, Ott said that the hotel would result in nearly \$30,000 of increased tax revenue for the borough. And while on Monday he said it would result in an additional \$224,000 for the West Chester Area School District, he said on Tuesday that his revised projection indicated it would actually result in a \$154,000 benefit for the district.

Borough council scheduled this final round of the hearing for two consecutive nights, Monday and Tuesday night.

On Monday, Zukin's attorney called three witnesses, and their testimony took up 3 and a half hours.

The Tuesday night portion of the hearing lasted four hours. Evidence was presented by the other parties to the hearing, who included Scott, Woodrow, business owner Patrick Comeeford, and representatives from East Gay Street Associates, the company that owns the Gawthrop Greenwood law firm building which neighbors the Zukin hotel site. Borough Resident Joe Norely, who opposes the hotel, engaged in somewhat of a spat with Stan Zukin. The two have a sour past that involves a lawsuit. Stan Zukin, a principal at Zukin realty, is one of the major landowners in the borough, and has been involved in borough real estate for decades.

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By DANIELLE LYNCH and DAN KRISTIE
Staff Writers

COATESVILLE – One of State Rep. Tim Hennessey’s staffers was charged on Thursday with possessing and conspiring to sell cocaine.

Lisa A. Johnson, 46, of Coatesville, turned herself in to Magisterial District Judge Gregory Hines around 2:30 p.m. on Thursday. She works as an administrative assistant in Hennessey’s Coatesville office.

Hennessey, R-26th of North Coventry, said that he knows Johnson well and is surprised by the allegations against her.

“She has been with me for 17 years, and I was totally surprised when I heard about it,” Hennessey said. “I find it hard to believe she would be knowingly involved in anything like this.”

Hennessey said he has informed the House Republican Caucus of the charges. Although Johnson works in Hennessey’s office, the caucus is her employer and will decide what happens to her as a result of the charges, Hennessey said.

“She is presumed innocent right now,” Hennessey said. “We’ll let the system work. She’ll be treated the same as anyone else.”

The allegations against Johnson are related to the recent allegations against John Clayton Tinson, the Coatesville City codes enforcement officer who was charged on Nov. 19 with selling cocaine.

Johnson and Tinson, 51, live together on the 700 block of Coates Street, and police allege that both participated in a September drug sale that took place on their block.

An individual came to their block on Sept. 20 to purchased cocaine, police alleged. The individual, police alleged, gave money to Johnson, whereupon Tinson gave the individual cocaine.

Police also allege that, on Aug. 30, an individual came to Tinson and Johnson’s block seeking cocaine. Tinson allegedly sold the individual cocaine, according to police.

Police did not identify the individual who purchased the cocaine. The charges against Tinson and Johnson came as the result of an investigation conducted this summer, police said.

Johnson was released on \$5,000 unsecured bail, and Tinson is also out on bail. Each will have a preliminary hearing before Judge Hines.

Johnson’s defense attorney, Thomas Bellwoar, of West Chester, accompanied her to the Thursday arraignment. He said she would fight the charges against her.

“We look forward to having our day in court when the time comes,” Bellowar said during a phone interview.

A full two weeks separates the day Tinson was charged and the day Johnson was charged. Coatesville Police Chief Julius Canale said that the District Attorney’s office is responsible for the gap.

“The District Attorney’s office has been reviewing everything surrounding the case and today gave approval to make the arrest,” Canale said during a Thursday phone interview. Canale said that the gap has nothing to do with Johnson’s employment at Hennessey’s office.

“I don’t care where anybody works in the city,” Canale said. “If somebody commits a crime, we take appropriate action.”

Canale said that no one came to him to comment on the significance of Johnson’s position with Hennessey.

Johnson is a Republican committeewoman and is the mother of a key witness in a recent murder trial.

In the trial of Earl “Marblez” Handfield II, the prosecution’s lead witness was Johnson’s son, David C. “Science” Johnson. A jury found Handfield, a local rapper, guilty of first-degree murder. Handfield fatally shot a man in 2005 because he was angry at the man for stealing a gold chain.

Tinson, Johnson’s alleged accomplice, continued to work for and receive pay from Coatesville for nearly two weeks after his arrest. He was suspended, without pay, on Tuesday, the day the Daily Local News learned of his arrest.

Tinson has twice worked for Coatesville. From 1994 to 2005, he worked for the Public Works Department. He was fired in 2005, but was hired as a full times codes enforcement officer in June of this year, according to Coatesville Spokeswoman Kristin Geiger.

Geiger said that, because Tinson’s firing and hiring are “personnel and legal matters,” she is not authorized to speak about them.

Tinson and Johnson’s alleged drug sales took place within 1000 feet of a school zone. This adds weight to their offense.

Staff Writer Michael P. Rellahan contributed reporting.

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By DAN KRISTIE
Staff Writer

WEST GOSHEN – The West Chester Area School District’s Community Budget Task Force, a citizens group the district charged with identifying possible cuts to the proposed 2010-2011 district budget, has come up with more than \$8 million in potential reductions. The task force announced its findings at a public meeting on Wednesday. Its recommendations, which are non-binding, will now be sent to the school board. The school board will decide which of the recommendations to accept.

The district is looking for around \$6 million in reductions to its approximately \$206 million 2010-2011 budget. If it does not achieve these cuts, it could have to raise taxes beyond the state-mandated limit.

The state is likely to allow the district to raise property taxes by no more than 2.9 percent next year. If the district wishes to exceed this limit, it will need to seek approval by means of a voter referendum.

According to current figures, the district must make around \$5 million in budget cuts to meet the 2.9 percent limit. But officials have said that, because the poor economy and real estate market are likely to result in lower than expected tax revenue, they want to identify more than \$6 million in cuts.

The task force, which is made up of West Chester Area residents, school board members, and district faculty members and employees, broke into seven subcommittees, each of which looked at an individual budget area.

On Wednesday, representatives each subcommittee highlighted some of the findings.

The Energy and Facilities subcommittee, for example, identified \$568,000 in savings. Subcommittee co-chair Gary Bevilacqua, a district parent and coach, said these can be achieved by conserving energy, reducing hallway lighting, eliminating four custodial positions, and charging higher fees to outside groups that rent district facilities.

The Special Education Subcommittee determined that \$425,000 could be saved over two years by eliminating five school psychologist positions, according to committee co-chair Sigmund Fleck, a district parent. The drawback, he said, would be that it could cause the district to be unable to conduct the mandated number of student evaluations.

The Transportation Subcommittee determined that the district could save \$600,000 next year by adjusting the bell schedule at its elementary schools, according to co-chair Matt Washlick, a parent and business owner.

Superintendent Jim Scanlon said that all 10 elementary schools now start at 8:55 a.m.

But, he said, if half started at 8:40 a.m. and the other half started at 9:10 a.m. some buses could do double runs. This, he said, would result in the elimination of about 20 buses and in a savings of \$1 million over two years.

Scanlon, who joined the district this summer, came up with the idea for the task force. He said that he has done similar task forces in other districts he has headed. The task forces, he said, increase communication and understanding between district officials and taxpayers.

"This was a great opportunity for the school district to sit with parents and community members," Scanlon said. "The school district learned what matters to parents and parents learned about how complicated this budget process is."

Scanlon said that the parents who participated in the task force wanted, first and foremost, high quality educational programs. Of the 54 positions the task force recommended eliminating, Scanlon said, only two were those of classroom teachers.

Scanlon added that if the school board does eliminate some of the positions the task force recommended, the positions would likely be eliminated through attrition rather than through layoffs. The district now employs 1,450 people, Scanlon said.

The school board voted earlier this year to raise taxes by 5.9 percent. This vote came during the same month that the board approved a new two-year teachers contract that gives teachers a 4.5 percent raise in each contract year.

Local political observers speculate that outrage over this concurrence led to the ouster of Board Vice President Susan Carty in the last month's general election. For newly elected members will join the board next week. During their campaign, they promised fiscal restraint. Among their first big tasks will be to review the task force's recommendations. Although the school board is technically limited next year to raising taxes by 2.9 percent, it can use exceptions to, without holding a voter referendum, knock the tax increase above 5 percent, district officials said.

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By DAN KRISTIE
Staff Writer

WEST WHITELAND – Most art students have to wait until college to get their own gallery space.

But the Exton Square Mall has given a group of art students from Bayard Rustin High School an empty store in which to temporarily hang their works.

The store is located on the first floor of the mall, next to the Macy's and across from the H&M.

Students from Rustin's chapter of the National Arts Honor Society are managing the gallery. They said that the work is not for sale. But, they said, patrons are asked to bring canned goods with them. The gallery, they said, is taking donations for the Chester County Food Bank.

Twelfth Grader Elizabeth Reindl, the president of Rustin's arts honor society chapter, said that she is thankful the mall gave the students the chance to display their work in public.

"No other school district has this opportunity," Reindl said. "It's a wonderful thing to get our art out in the community."

The Rustin gallery was once a full-sized Oriental Treasures store, mall officials said. Its walls are now covered with works that, according to the student artists, represent the aspirations and struggles that face adolescents.

Rachel Correale, an 11th grader at Rustin, painted a large oil-on-canvas of a hand lovingly holding a cracked egg. Two smaller, writhing hands are reaching out of the egg.

Correale said that her painting represents an individual's struggle to break away from a nurturing but confining force.

"Basically, the big hand could mean anything – parents, society, friends," Correale said. The small hands, she said, represent the angst-ridden struggle to become free.

Twelfth Grader Samantha McCafferty, who does public relations for the arts honor society, had on display a self-portrait that, she said, represents abandonment.

The self-portrait, a slightly surrealistic print that McCafferty created using Adobe Photoshop, contains only one part of its artist's anatomy – her left eye.

The eye is superimposed, in a ghostly way, over a blue-tinted European streetscape. A girl who is not McCafferty stands with her back to the viewer, looking down the street.

"I went along with the idea of abandonment – of being left behind," McCafferty said. "In high school, you kind of flex and flow through different groups of friends. And at the time I made this, I felt like I was being left behind by one group."

Bayard Rustin art teachers Lisa Bryan and Joe Arscott are helping the students run the gallery. Bryan said that Rustin's art students are at a very high level. She said she thought it was a shame that much of their work was sitting at the school, barely seen.

"I wanted to put their work out in the community," Bryan said.

She said that she called the Exton Square Mall this spring to see if there were any opportunities to display student art there.

The mall first allowed students to hang their works on the windows the vacant Oriental Treasures store, said mall spokeswoman Meredith Wertz. This fall, she said, the mall gave the students the entire vacant store.

Many students said they plan to go to college for art. The works in the gallery, they said, may end up in their college applications. This, they said, is part of why the works aren't for sale.

Correale, who painted the hand and egg oil on canvas, said that she plans to apply to Temple University's art school.

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By DAN KRISTIE

Staff Writer

WEST CHESTER – This year's Old Fashioned Christmas Parade was, according to some spectators, perhaps the best that has ever filed down the borough's streets.

"I've been coming to the parade for seven years, and this is by far the biggest and most enjoyable," said Joanne Vanhoorebeke, of West Goshen. "They outdid themselves this year."

First time parade attendee Michelle Worst, a senior at Henderson High School, said the parade reminded her of something that would have taken place in a big city.

"I felt like I was in Philly," Worst said. "It made West Chester seem bigger than it is. I'm so in the Christmas spirit because of all of this that I'm going to go shopping now."

The parade, which began at 8 p.m. on Friday, featured 12 local marching bands, girls twirling fiery batons, dancing elves, a human-drawn vintage fire engine, and various other holiday season spectacles.

At the end of the parade, Santa rode by, waving to the spectators who lined Gay and Market streets. He was, for kids young and not so young, the highlight of the parade.

"I came here to see Santa," said West Chester University Freshman Madeline Large. She said that, although some of her jaded classmates have stopped believing in Saint Nick, she remains a firm believer.

"I actually hang out with Santa in my free time," Large added. "It's a casual thing."

The parade, which is run by the Chamber of Commerce of Greater West Chester, is in its 30th year. But this is the first time it has had a large corporate sponsor.

Mars Drinks of North America paid for between 40 and 50 percent of the parade, according to Mike Yoder, the chamber's executive vice president.

Mars Drinks, which is headquartered on Airport Road in West Goshen, makes Flavia brand single-serve coffee, a product only available to businesses.

Brian Miller, the company's director of sales and marketing, said that Mars Drinks has been looking for more ways to give back to the West Chester community. So, he said, the company decided to sponsor the parade.

Miller added that Mars Drinks wants to let area residents know more about Flavia. With that in mind, he spent the evening distributing Flavia samples to chilly parade attendees. The temperature on Friday night, however, was well above freezing, and many spectators called the weather ideal for a winter parade.

The parade was preceded by a "Jingle Elf Run." Participants ran the parade route wearing jingle bell adorned hats. The registration fees the participants paid will support the Chamber of Commerce of Greater West Chester, Yoder said.

The parade organizers brought in professional marching band evaluators to judge the 12 high school marching bands. The best six received cash prizes. The winners, in order from first to sixth place, were Pennsbury, Downingtown, Octorara, Avon Grove, Springfield (Delaware County), and Conestoga.

The children at the parade were, as usual, enthusiastic about and fortified by the candy thrown from some of the floats.

"I like the part where they launched candy," said Lindsay Obosuenko, an exuberant Hillsdale Elementary fourth grader. "I got three warheads. I haven't tried the yellow one yet."

Obosuenko promptly tried the yellow one, and reacted to its taste with pleasure and revulsion. Warheads are sweet and shockingly sour.

Courtney Knotts, a 7th grader at Stetson Middle School, said that she liked the light displays that were projected onto buildings along the parade route.

"I'm attracted to lights," Knotts said.

"Like a moth!" her friend Megan Moore, also a 7th grader at Stetson, chimed in.

The most dangerous of the spectacles at the parade was, by popular agreement, the one put on by the Majazztic Twirlers, of Exton. They danced down Market Street twirling batons that spewed fire from both ends.

Also at the parade was Joey Page, a Radio Disney artist. He performed from one of the floats.

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