

The Bernardsville News

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Photos by P.C. Robinson

Despite an annoying rain, browsers and buyers check out offerings at Peapack-Gladstone First Aid & Rescue Squad headquarters on St. Luke's Avenue in Gladstone during the squad's 32nd Annual Town-Wide Garage Sale on Saturday, April 26.

IN P-G, GARAGE SALE YIELDS A WET BUT WONDROUS LOCAL TREASURE

By P.C. ROBINSON
MANAGING EDITOR

PEAPACK-GLADSTONE – There was just one way Gladstone resident Valerie Zoller could spare her prize find from getting drenched during the Peapack-Gladstone First Aid and Rescue Squad's annual town-wide garage sale on Saturday, April 26: stuff it under her hoodie.

It was a formidable task, as the book was long and rectangular. But the discomfort was worth it: The 21-year-old tome celebrated the centennial of the Essex Hunt Club, the iconic private club famous for its equestrian fox hunts.

"I'm buying it, I have to find out how much it is," said Zoller, who is the squad's secretary.

PLEASE SEE SALE, PAGE 13



Tom Scanlon of Lebanon Township, president of the Peapack-Gladstone First Aid & Rescue Squad, mans a table during the squad's 32nd Annual Town-Wide Garage Sale held in the twin borough on Saturday, April 26.



Peapack-Gladstone First Aid & Rescue Squad member Jason Moke of Califon mans the grill during the squad's 32nd Annual Town-Wide Garage Sale on Saturday, April 26.

BERNARDSVILLE BOROUGH COUNCIL

Good, news bad news: Soaring property values could mean higher taxes in B'ville

By CHARLIE ZAVALICK
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

BERNARDSVILLE – Property values have risen nearly 9 percent from last year, according to data released by the Borough Council during a presentation of its \$21.3 million municipal budget for 2025 on Monday, April 28.

While that's generally seen as good news, officials acknowledged that many residents will see a corresponding increase in municipal taxes this year depending on their actual assessments.

Rising values were listed as one of the "key take-aways" during a public hearing on the budget, which was unanimously adopted by the governing body.

"Borough valuation has increased for fifth straight year, demonstrating positive momentum from investments into borough's value," according to Councilman Al Ribeiro, who chairs the council's finance committee.

Another "key take-away" highlighted during the presentation: The 2025 municipal tax rate will

remain the same as last year's, at .5 percent, or 50 cents per \$100 assessed valuation.

Including the municipal open space tax, which accounts for .02 percent, the 2025 rate will be .520, or 52 cents per \$100, the same as last year. That translates to about \$520 per \$100,000 assessed valuation.

The total property tax bill also includes separate rates for the public school district and Somerset County operations. The total rate has not yet been released.

While rising property

BEDMINSTER TOWNSHIP COMMITTEE

250 years later, a new battle

Vanderveer lease renewal sparks clash between non-profit, officials

By W. JACOB PERRY
STAFF WRITER

BEDMINSTER TWP. – Nearly 250 years ago, the Jacobus Vanderveer House played a key role in the American Revolution.

Now the River Road property, headquarters to what is considered the country's first military academy, is the subject of a lease renewal battle being waged between the township and the non-profit group that operates and maintains it.

That non-profit, Friends of the Jacobus Vanderveer House (JVH), has managed the property under the terms of a lease that dates back 25 years, to

June 1999.

At issue is how much control the township should have over those efforts.

The house served as the headquarters for Revolutionary War Gen. Henry Knox during the winter of 1777-78 while the Pluckemin Artillery Cantonment – the nation's first military academy – operated a mile or so away. In recent years, it has hosted many historical, educational and cultural events.

Last May 6, with the original 25-year lease nearing expiration, Mayor Larry Jacobs said negotiations with the Friends

PLEASE SEE LEASE, PAGE 13

PEAPACK-GLADSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

'An unusual year'

Budget to raise taxes less than 1 percent

By W. JACOB PERRY
STAFF WRITER

PEAPACK-GLADSTONE – Taxes for the average borough homeowner would increase by less than 1 percent under an \$8.32 million municipal budget adopted by the Borough Council on Tuesday, April 15.

The municipal rate, which was 53.6 cents per \$100 of assessed property value last year, is projected to fall to 49.3 cents per \$100. That would amount to \$493 per \$100,000 in value, down from \$536 per \$100,000 of assessed value last year.

But the average residential property value in the borough has risen to \$956,693, up from \$874,358 last year.

The owner of that home, therefore, would pay a municipal tax of \$4,721, up from \$4,683 last year, for an increase of \$38, according to officials.

The increase would amount to 0.8 percent, based on calculations by this newspaper.

A new 68-room hotel that opened at the Pendry Natirar luxury resort on Peapack Road last October "is taking a burden of some of the tax liability we all have," Mayor Mark Corigliano said in a budget presentation.

The municipal tax is

just one portion of the total property tax, which also includes separate rates for school and county operations.

The total property tax, which was \$1,707.7 per \$100 last year, is projected to fall to \$1,608, Corigliano said.

The owner of the average home in the borough would pay an estimated property tax of \$15,240, up from \$14,925 last year, for an increase of \$315 or 2.2 percent. But Corigliano said the increase could be higher if the school district follows through on plans to seek waiver from a 2 percent tax limit.

The borough is part of the Somerset Hills Regional School District in Bernardsville.

The borough's property tax average is higher than Somerset County's 21 towns average of \$11,400 last year, but its projected rate of \$1,608 per \$100 is below the county average of \$2,020 per \$100, the mayor noted.

The breakdown of the \$1,608 property tax includes: the borough, 49.3 cents; borough open space fund, 3 cents, unchanged from last year; public schools, 74.6 cents, down from 78.0 cents; Somerset County, 27.0 cents, down

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PLEASE SEE NEWS, PAGE 13

TAXES: Mayor said 2025 was ‘unusual year’ for spending

FROM PAGE 1

from 29.1 cents; county library tax, 3.8 cents, down from 4.0 cents; county open space tax, 3 cents, unchanged.

In terms of percentages, the breakdown includes: 32.57 percent for the borough; 46.41 percent for the public schools; and 21.03 percent for the county.

Overall, property values in the borough total \$948.09 million, up from \$868.7 million last year.

‘Unusual Year’

According to a legal notice published on March 13, the budget, at \$8,329,777, is up \$975,971 from \$7,353,806

last year.

Budget revenue was listed in the legal notice as including:

Local taxes, \$4,678,371, up \$25,616; use of surplus funds, \$2,250,000, up \$550,000; total miscellaneous revenues, \$1,301,406, up \$450,362; receipts from delinquent taxes, \$100,000, down \$50,000.

Miscellaneous revenues were boosted by \$320,000 received from selling a building lot on Willow Avenue. Other sources included \$496,856 from the Uniform Construction Code (UCC), Energy Tax Receipts (ETR) and grants; \$315,000 in interest; and \$75,000 from the municipal court.

On the spending side, the legal notice listed:

Salaries and wages, \$2,113,580, up \$113,88; “other” operating expenses, \$3,204,197, up \$341,862; deferred charges, \$616,000, up \$96,229.

Also: capital improvements, \$1,250,000, up \$650,000; debt service, \$176,000, down \$226,000; and the reserve for uncollected taxes, \$970,000, unchanged.

Corigliano characterized 2025 as an “unusual year” for capital spending, adding that extra money generated by the Willow Avenue sale was budgeted “out of necessity.”

The biggest capital expenditure is \$601,618 to-

ward a new \$1 million fire truck, for which there was a \$200,000 down payment last year, with the balance to be paid upon delivery. Corigliano said that by paying in advance, the borough saved \$150,000.

Another expenditure consists of Phase II of the municipal building roof renewal, costing \$210,392, plus \$125,000 to replace municipal building windows.

Other capital expenditures include \$160,000 for county-mandated radios for first responders, and \$96,817 in net costs for road and street resurfacing.

Corigliano credited Brad Fagan, the director of the Department of Pub-

lic Works, with saving \$110,000 in radio costs after arranging a re-bid that produced a contract for \$320,000, of which half will be paid this year and half next year.

The borough is spending less on roads than it usually does, the mayor said. Last year, it spent \$195,600 – more than twice as much.

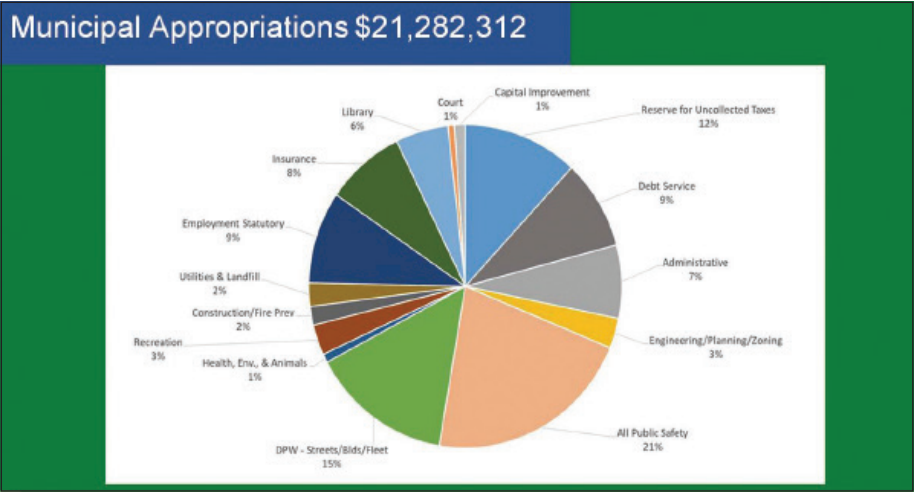
Open Space and Recreation projects for 2025 include: \$300,000 for architectural and construction work on the house at Liberty Park; \$100,000 for a tennis court renewal/replacement; and \$19,000 for Becker gym improvements and lighting.

With respect to debt,

Corigliano said the borough uses a pay-as-you-go fiscal policy that eschews borrowing and is on track to be debt-free by 2029.

During public questions and comments, Christopher Downing of Main Street in Peapack asked if the house at Liberty Park is eyed for recreational uses.

Councilwoman Jamie Murphy said possibilities are being explored. She said the basement houses the park’s utilities so it needs to be maintained. Public bathrooms could be installed there, while the first and second floors could be eliminated to make way for a pavilion for residents, she said.



Anne Zavalick

This graphic from the Bernardsville Borough Council's 2025 budget presentation on Monday, April 28 shows the percentages of spending in the borough’s \$21 million municipal appropriations.

NEWS: ‘Fiscally responsible’

FROM PAGE 1

average residential assessment was \$896,386.

Municipal taxes on the average assessed home in 2025 will be \$5,073.

The owner of the average assessed home in 2024 paid about \$4,661 in municipal taxes, according to calculations by this newspaper published in an article on May 2, 2024.

In 2023, the borough listed the average residential assessment at \$844,343. That means the average home assessment in town has risen by more than \$130,000 over the past two years.

Another chart shown during the presentation illustrated strong overall growth in total borough valuation in recent years.

According to the data, total valuation in Bernardsville rose from \$2,590,444,100 in 2024 to \$2,817,204,800 in 2025 – an increase of \$226,760,700.

The growth in total valuation in the prior year – from 2023 to 2024 – was also strong, but considerably less at \$147,005,400.

The chart shows that Bernardsville’s total valuation growth over the last five years – from 2021 to 2025 – has been \$625,303,292.

Not everyone was pleased with the budget numbers, however.

Mine Mount Road resident Howard Lemberg said he had difficulty understanding the spending increases over the past three years.

Lemberg said the borough’s total general appropriations were up by more than 25 percent in the last three years. The 2025 increase in total appropriations of 14.69 percent is the largest increase in the last 16 years, he said, and the 8.88 percent increase in local taxes for municipal purposes is the largest in more than 10 years.

Ribeiro responded by noting that the borough’s sale of the former Audi building at 65 Morristown Road skewed the budget figures.

The sale was a “a one-time item that’s hitting our budget this year and is really skewing the way the budget looks,” he said. “It represents 7 percent of the entire budget this year.”

The borough is using the \$1.5 million sale to reduce its debt. The sale adds a “new taxpayer to the tax rolls and boosts the visual appeal of our downtown,” according to the presentation.

The long vacant build-

ing is targeted for renovation by Sandsbury, LLC, for use as a high-end luxury classic car dealership under a redevelopment plan.

Ribeiro said that the average increase in the borough budget over the past three years has been 6 percent, while the average increase in valuation has been 6.5 percent.

“I do think it’s a fiscally responsible budget,” he said. “I think we were able to do all this despite inflation, the cost of materials that has risen up, increase in salaries, increase in state-mandated health benefits, significant increase in utilities, increase in roads.”

He also noted that the borough has made security upgrades and recreation improvements at the Polo Grounds athletic complex during that time.

‘Investments’

The 2025 budget “makes key investments aligned with community’s priorities,” according to the presentation.

Investments include purchasing a new ambulance, new radios for the fire department and full funding of the budget request by the municipal library.

The council adopted an ordinance appropriating \$350,000 for the new ambulance during the meeting Monday.

The library is receiving \$978,000 in the 2025 budget, an increase of about \$60,000 from last year.

The total 2025 capital budget for all departments is \$1,808,400. Officials said that amount is funded entirely with cash with no new municipal debt.

Big ticket items in the capital budget include: \$140,000 for a new police SUV; \$75,000 for a pickup truck for the public works department; and \$35,000 for a command vehicle for the Office of Emergency Management.

A total of \$1,052,600 is included in the capital budget under “engineering” for several road projects.

Projects include \$298,600 for Dayton Crescent, \$115,000 for sidewalks on West Street and Boylan Terrace and \$100,000 for a Childs Road sidewalk extension. It also includes \$519,000 for road milling and paving.

A total of \$325,000 is included in the capital budget under “administration,” including \$150,000 for general capital items and \$175,000 for security cameras and door securi-

ty.

The general items include repairs at Borough Hall and expenditures for Information Technology upgrades, Ribeiro said.

Questions were raised during the hearing about the cost of the security cameras. Borough Administrator Nancy Malo ol said 42 cameras will be purchased as part of the project, which she called “long overdue.”

The work includes installation and cables, and has a 10-year warranty. She said officials have been working with the police department on the upgrade for a year.

Existing cameras are outdated, she said, and many don’t work.

Police Sgt. Tim Richard said the security cameras are an integrated package that can be expanded. The vendor would be storing the data, he added.

A separate resolution approved by the council on Monday specifies that they borough would purchase the cameras through the Monmouth-Ocean Co-op for the police department, municipal complex, library, train station, the pool and the Polo Grounds.

“It’s a big investment in security,” Mayor Mary Jane Canose said.

The total 2025 municipal budget is \$21,282,311.50, an increase of \$2,686,718.65, or about 14.5 percent, from the 2024 budget of \$18,595,592.85.

Officials said \$12,163,486 of the budget – or 57 percent – is for “mandatory” municipal services that the borough is required by law to provide.

Non-discretionary increases include \$163,000 for health benefits, \$41,000 for utilities and \$21,000 for liability insurance and worker’s comp insurance.

A total of \$14,098,829.66 would be raised through local taxation in 2025 to support the budget.

Last year’s total was \$12,961,112.01. The budget presentation included a chart showing the “distribution of the municipal property tax levy.”

According to that data, for every \$100 in property taxes, \$56.34 funds the local schools, while \$25.14 goes for borough operations and \$1.68 supports the Bernardsville Library.

The county gets \$14.28 per \$100, \$1.48 goes toward the county open space fund and \$1.07 is for the borough’s open space fund.

SALE: Money goes to squad

FROM PAGE 1

The 32nd of its kind, the sale is held both at squad headquarters on St. Luke’s Avenue, and at various homes throughout the borough. The squad raises its money through the \$25 fee vendors pay to have their locations placed on the map given out the day of the sale.

The squad also makes money by grilling up food – pork roll, egg and cheese sandwiches for breakfast, hamburgers and hot dogs for lunch – and selling T-shirts.

Despite an annoying spritz that came and went throughout the day, the sale drew a steady stream of browsers and buyers. On Saturday morning, some could be seen mounting pieces of purchased furniture in truck beds, while others checked kids’ plush toys that went for as little as 50 cents each.

Found manning a vendor table, squad President Tom Scanlon of Lebanon Township said about 38 families were participating this year.

That was down a little from past sales, “But that could be because it’s Easter Week,” he said.

LEASE: ‘Unacceptable’

FROM PAGE 1

group had started but there were “a couple of issues of expectations” and a deal was not imminent.

On May 20, the Township Committee adopted an ordinance that extended the lease to Oct. 21, 2024. On Oct. 21, the committee voted to extend the lease to Dec. 31. On Dec. 28, it approved another extension to April 30, 2025.

There had been virtually no public comments on the status of the talks for months but that changed at the committee’s meeting on Monday, April 21.

Yolanda Cillo, president of the Friends Board of Trustees of JVH, who appeared at the meeting with other board members, approached the committee and spoke of how much her group enjoys its work.

She cited the hosting of annual events like the Field of Honor and the Colonial Christmas, the installation of a miniature, interactive model of the cantonment, and the collection of records and artifacts from the cantonment.

“We’ve worked hard to create programming for the 250th,” she added. “We love sharing American history and Bedminster Township’s role in it.”

Cillo said the township’s assistance is appreciated but the board provides many volunteer hours and “several of us provide significant financial support to our non-profit, which benefits the house and Bedminster taxpayers.

“We thought and perceived that we had a positive relationship with the township and our lease renewal would be easy, but we appear to be at an impasse,” she said.

“We’re broken-hearted. We’ve received no plausible explanation or reason. Communication to us has been limited and delayed and requests for calls ig-

nored.”

Cillo said the issue involves governance of her group, and “most citizens would agree that inserting the government into a non-profit’s by-laws is at best unseemly and inappropriate, having the appearance of government control.” She welcomed discussion of the issue but said it should not be a condition of a lease renewal.

The Friends group received notice that its lease will not be extended and will end April 30, she told the committee. “We sincerely hope that you will offer us a lease extension and renew a lease with appropriate terms.”

‘Loss Of Connection’

Jacobs then responded, saying that going back to talks last July, there was discussion about the Friends group working with the township and having one-third of its board appointed by the Township Committee “with representation from Bedminster residents.”

“Bedminster residents who pay for the upkeep of the property, the building, the paying of utilities, the maintenance of the roof, the painting of the building, the erection of the tents, DPW (Department of Public Works) services for the Field of Honor, DPW services for a whole lot of other stuff,” he said.

The mayor said that when he first raised the issue of municipal participation on the board, “the response from the board members including the president back in July last year was overwhelmingly supportive, because to some extent there has been a loss of connection with Bedminster residents.”

He said appointees could include members of the Recreation Committee which manages River Road Park, the DPW which takes care of the

buildings and grounds, the Historic Preservation Commission and possibly the Bedminster Township School District and its Parent-Teacher Organization.

Having no municipal representation while the township maintains the grounds, building and utilities “is, from my perspective, an unacceptable position for the JVH board to take with us,” Jacobs said.

A proposed 25-year lease prepared by Township Attorney John Belardo “is ready to be signed by Bedminster Township,” the mayor added.

Belardo told Cillo and the other trustees that he did not view the provision as “an unreasonable position as “the landlord, the township here.” He noted that the Friends group would still have control of the board.

The committee then moved on to other agenda items, and Cillo and the other trustees left the meeting.

The website for the Jacobus Vanderveer House lists 11 trustees who have expertise in areas such as business and the arts but who are not necessarily residents of the township.

Toward the end of the committee’s meeting, Committeewoman Renee Mareksi, who serves as the governing body’s representative on the trustee board, expressed hope that an agreement would be reached.

“I’ve had an amazingly wonderful time being their liaison and I would like to continue that,” Mareski said. “I think this new group has breathed a bunch of new life into it.”

She said that while she was not a lawyer, “I hope we can figure this out because I seriously think we’ll be missing a good chunk of our town with the Friends disappearing.”



Photo by P.C. Robinson

Valerie Zoller of Gladstone, secretary of the Peapack-Gladstone First Aid & Rescue Squad, keeps a book on the Essex Fox Hounds in her hoodie to keep it dry during the squad’s town-wide garage sale benefit on Saturday, April 26.

Via CM RRR and Regular Mail and Email to:
Mr. Craig Sutherland at craig@suthhouse.com
info@jvonderveerhouse.org

**THIRTY (30) DAY NOTICE OF NON-RESIDENTIAL
LEASE TERMINATION**

TO TENANT:

President and Director
The Friends of Jacobus
Vanderveer House
3055 River Road
Post Office Box 723
Bedminster, NJ 07921

LANDLORD:

Robin Ray, Township Administrator
Bedminster Township
One Miller Lane
Bedminster, NJ 07921

1. **PRESENT LEASE.** You are presently the Tenant and now renting a portion of the premises known as a portion of Lot 34 in Block 41, Township of Bedminster, New Jersey, the Jacobus Vanderveer House (the "Premises") pursuant to a lease agreement originating on May 28, 1999 (the "Lease").

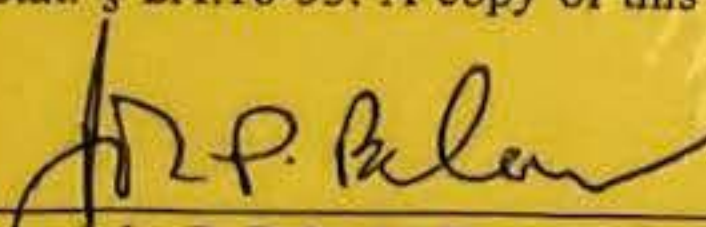
2. **NOTICE.** Please take notice that the Lease for these Premises terminated on April 30, 2025. Please accept this letter as Notice that Landlord will not be renewing your Lease at this time. As such, you and any others still in possession of the Premises must vacate the Premises on or before July 31, 2025 (the "Termination Date").

All terms and obligations of the Lease Agreement shall remain in full force and effect through the Termination Date including, but not limited to, maintaining the Premises in good condition, complying with all local municipal ordinances and other county, state and federal regulations, and fulfilling any remaining financial obligations, such as providing insurance and paying any fees associated with your moveout. State law may provide for your recovery of abandoned property (personal property you leave at the property after the Termination Date), but those rights, if any, are limited and there may be additional costs involved.

Please contact the undersigned if you have any questions about this Notice.

This Notice is in accordance with N.J. Stat. § 2A:18-53. A copy of this Notice is being served upon you pursuant to law.

Dated: June 5, 2025



John P. Belardo, Esq.
Bedminster Township Attorney

cc: Ms. Jeanne Galbraith jjso59@aol.com



Mr. Local History Project

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IRS Registered 501c3 non-profit charity
info@mrlocalhistory.org

April 30, 2025

Bernardsville News

Letter to the Editor:

As a former member of the Board of Trustees of the Friends of the Jacobus Vanderveer House, I read with great interest your story about the lease agreement between the nonprofit Friends of the Jacobus Vanderveer House and the Township.

For over 25 years, friends, neighbors, and residents have dedicated and volunteered to restore and renew Bedminster's historic crown jewel. The Friends transformed a decrepit old flophouse into what I call the township's local history welcome center. However, what cannot be ignored is that the property is owned and maintained (exterior), providing the utilities and support needed to keep the Vanderveer House in good shape for events that benefit residents and historical connoisseurs across New Jersey.

Times have changed, and so have township administrations. While there have been many efforts to support a multitude of township initiatives in the past, many administrators are feeling the financial pinch and scrutiny necessary to simply operate the township, outsourcing efforts like the Vanderveer House to non-government organizations to do the heavy lifting. The terms "adaptive use" and "future use and direction" regarding future decision-making hold township interest. I've advised many nonprofits that having government and residential liaisons can serve as a positive and important voice to a collective board of trustees that, hopefully, the nonprofit will adopt through discussion and cooperative alignment. So yes, the NGO might have to give up some exclusivity on their future, but the township has the responsibility to look out for its residents in a fair and equitable manner.

But as they say, the "Devil is in the Details."

Brooks Betz

Mr. Local History Project