

# HISTORIC FLEMINGTON

## NEWS

SEPTEMBER 2013

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE BOROUGH OF FLEMINGTON



### A Message from the Mayor

Dear Neighbor:

Welcome to the September issue of the Borough newsletter. Well, it's that time again - fall, that is - when the air becomes crisp, the leaves turn beautiful colors, porches are adorned with pumpkins and the grocery stores are loaded with bags of "fun size" chocolates of every kind (a full eight weeks before it's time to give them out for Halloween!). I don't know about you, but I have to consciously steer myself away from the candy displays at this time of year. The truth is, though I'm devoted to health and fitness, I truly love chocolate, particularly those little fun size bars! They really are so much . . . well . . . fun. Great tasting treats in miniature, wrapped in pretty packages of every color imaginable - they're fun, right?

Seriously, though, fun size candy bars really are great, not just because they taste so good, but because they allow you to eat a treat (so that you don't feel deprived), but in moderation, one small piece at a time, so that you're less inclined to over-indulge. Deprivation makes you feel . . . lousy, and thereby less apt to maintain a healthy eating plan. Allowing yourself a tiny treat once in a while, or even once a day at this time of year, is more realistic and more likely to lead to long-term healthy eating success. By the way, this is a great time of year to begin an exercise program if you've been considering it. Walking, running, biking and just about any other form of exercise performed outside in this cool, crisp fall air is a true pleasure.

Speaking of getting in shape, have you been to Borough Hall lately? Well, if you haven't, please make plans to stop by to see our new, updated look both inside and out. From our new exterior signage, to our very attractive interior color palette, to our beautiful wall hangings, we're getting ourselves in shape . . . and we'd love to share it with you. So please stop by to see us (how about during the Open House on October 2nd?), to check out our updated look, to visit with our super-friendly staff and, oh yes, to have a piece of chocolate (you guessed it - fun size!).

We'll it's time for me to sign off for this month's issue. Until next month, enjoy this beautiful weather. I'll be watching for you when I'm out walking so don't forget to wave! And please don't forget to stop by Borough Hall to say hello and to check out our new look. We look forward to seeing you!

Sincerely,

ERICA EDWARDS, MAYOR

### UNDERSTANDING YOUR PROPERTY TAX ASSESSMENT

A WORKSHOP BY BOROUGH TAX ASSESSOR ED KERWIN

**Wednesday, September 25th, 7:00 pm at Borough Hall**

FREE REFRESHMENTS

### BOROUGH OPEN HOUSE

AT BOROUGH HALL

WEDNESDAY,  
OCTOBER 2<sup>ND</sup>

10:00 AM - 3:00 PM

MEET WITH THE MAYOR

NO APPOINTMENT NECESSARY

~ FREE REFRESHMENTS!

### VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

The Borough organizations  
listed below need  
volunteers.

Can you spare a few hours  
of your time to give back to  
your community?

If so, call Borough Hall at  
908 782-8840

Ext. 220, 222 or 223  
to let us know. Thanks!

~ Fire Department

~ Historic Preservation  
Commission  
(see article on page 7)

~ Samuel Fleming House  
(see article on page 7)



## UNION HOTEL UPDATE

The Union Hotel redevelopers are about to begin work on the roof of the building, so with that we're pleased to say that the project is officially underway! Plans for additional work are expected to be before the Planning board for review

very soon. Meanwhile, the governing body is contemplating the need to add a number of other buildings south of and adjacent to the Hotel to the initial designated area in need of redevelopment, to further jump-start redevelopment of the properties in that block. These properties share common characteristics with each other and the Hotel, namely that they are all to an extent dependent on the parking located behind the Borough's 90-100 Main Street property. At the Council's request the Planning Board is currently reviewing these issues

and the prospect of an expanded "area in need" and will be making a recommendation soon. By the way, in case you're concerned that an expanded redevelopment area means financial incentives to redevelopers that would diminish the Borough's current level of revenue, please note that you needn't worry. In the context of an expanded "area in need" the governing body is neither required nor inclined to offer such incentives. More on the Union Hotel redevelopment project in an upcoming issue of the newsletter . . .

## BOROUGH ESTABLISHES POLICE BIKE PATROL UNIT – ONLY ACTIVE BIKE UNIT IN HUNTERDON COUNTY

In an effort to enhance its community policing efforts and overall efficiency the Borough recently launched a bike patrol unit within the Borough Police Department. The purchase of four police bikes along with related equipment and training was a joint effort of the Borough and the Flemington Business Improvement District's Board of Trustees. "We thank the BID for its generosity in contributing to the cost of our new bike patrol unit," said the Mayor. "Police bikes are an optimal community policing tool in a compact, close-knit community such as ours where we place a great emphasis on getting to know our residents and business owners. "Bike patrol, like foot patrol,



*Patrolmen Louis Hribik and Brian McNally display two of the Borough's new police bikes.*

allows our officers to get out of the patrol cars and interact more effectively with the community" said Police Commissioner Brian Swingle. In addition, "bike patrol can be a very effective tool for enhancing response time to certain calls to which a patrol car would be slower to respond," said Commissioner Swingle "A bike can travel through alleys and parking lots and over lawns, and arrive at certain calls before a patrol car. It's just one more way we're working to enhance the efficiency of our Police Department."

Look for our new bike patrol unit at upcoming community events, and on the street on a daily basis through November.

# BOROUGH EXPENSES AND REVENUE

## (and How They Affect Your Property Taxes). . . *In a Nutshell*

**We explained in last month's issue of the newsletter that the Borough's portion of your 2013 property tax bill is approximately 27%, with school and County taxes comprising the remaining 73%. In this article we provide an overview of Borough expenses and revenue (otherwise known as the general budget) and explain how the cost to run the town is offset first with forms of revenue including State aid, and then ultimately with funds raised by taxation (known as the tax levy).**

**EXPENSES:** It currently costs approximately \$5,000,000 per year to run the town – that is, to provide all of the services of local government including Police, Public Works and administrative services, trash and recycling collection, emergency management services, professional services from attorneys, engineers and other consultants as needed, utilities, and debt service (relating generally to large projects and purchases that we've financed, such as a road reconstruction), among other expenses.

In the 2013 budget the Borough's expenses for these and other categories of services are as follows:

<u>Category</u>	<u>Budget</u>	<u>Pct</u>
Employee Benefits	\$1,179,220	23.6%
Police	\$1,103,300	22.1%
Debt Service	\$541,376	10.9%
Uncollected Tax Reserve	\$326,500	6.5%
Trash & Recycling Collection	\$259,250	5.2%
Administration	\$252,019	5.1%
Library	\$239,000	4.8%
Roads	\$240,300	4.8%
Municipal Court & Prosecutor	\$185,000	3.7%
Utilities	\$162,500	3.3%
Professional Services	\$118,400	2.4%
Code Enforcement	\$116,201	2.3%
Emergency Management	\$15,702	0.3%
All Other	\$249,513	5.0%
Total:	\$4,988,281	100%

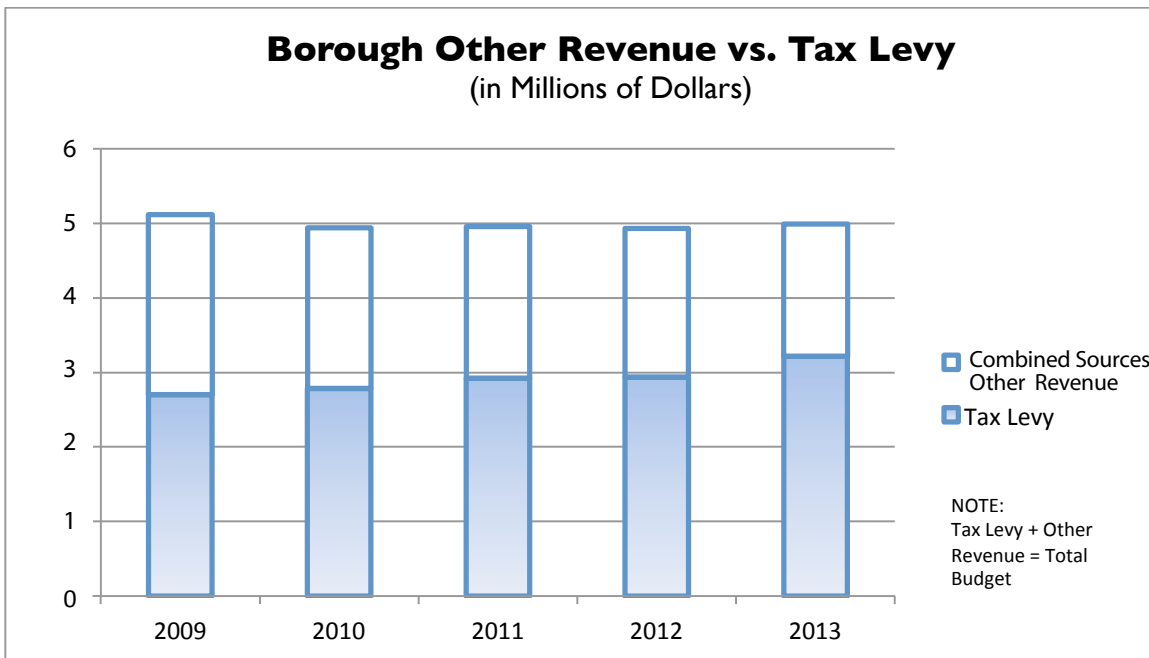
Note that the Borough budget was just over \$5,000,000 in 2009 and just under \$5,000,000 in 2013, even though during this 4-year period we experienced a 43% increase in employee benefit costs, namely health insurance (applicable only to full-time employees whose numbers decreased slightly during the period). To offset this increase we instituted a number of cost-cutting measures which have allowed us to keep expenses relatively stable. Importantly, our debt service has remained stable since 2009 as well, at about \$540,000 per year. At approximately 10% of our general budget, our level of debt service is well within State guidelines and in line with other Hunterdon municipalities.

At this point you may be asking yourself why your taxes have increased in recent years if the Borough's expenses are no higher than in 2009. To answer that question we must look at the Borough's sources of revenue – and how the tax levy works vis-a-vis residential and commercial properties.

# BOROUGH EXPENSES AND REVENUE

. . . *In a Nutshell* (Continued)

**REVENUE:** In the chart below you can see how the Borough's revenue from sources other than taxation has been on the decline since 2009. The sources of revenue include State aid, revenue from permits, fees and fines and general surplus. In particular, as the combined level of State aid and surplus funds have shrunk over the past four (4) years, from \$1,422,569 to \$642,974, the amount of money required to be raised through taxation, in order to balance the Borough's budget, has risen. Note that the rising trend in the tax levy should level out after 2014 assuming no dramatic drop in other revenue and the stabilization of commercial property assessments.



**PROPERTY TAX ASSESSMENTS AND THE TAX LEVY:** The state of commercial property tax assessments, along with your individual residential property tax assessment, also affect the extent to which you experience an increase in property taxes from year to year. When commercial property tax assessments as a whole shift downward (driven by lower rents and vacancies), as they have in the wake of the deep Recession that began in 2008, the portion of the property taxes borne by commercial properties diminishes accordingly, and then the residential community through its combined assessments must absorb the difference in order to balance the Borough's budget. This is the primary reason your property taxes may have recently increased.

Note that comparing 2012 to 2013, residential property assessments declined by 3% on average over the course of the year while commercial assessments declined by 11%. Redoubling our efforts to provide a supportive environment for the business community that improves business opportunities, along with efforts to redevelop key commercial properties in the Borough, as well as an eventual upswing in the economy, will reverse the downward trend in commercial assessments accordingly and, ultimately, will increase the percentage of the tax levy that commercial properties pay. That will lower the portion of the tax levy paid by the residential community.

Lastly, your individual property tax assessment may rise or fall as a result of periodic adjustments by the tax assessor based on general real estate trends, real estate sales in your neighborhood and changes in the condition of your home. The assessor's goal is to keep your assessment as close as possible to the true value of your home, to maintain the integrity of the tax base and also to support as high a sales price as possible for you in case you decide to sell.

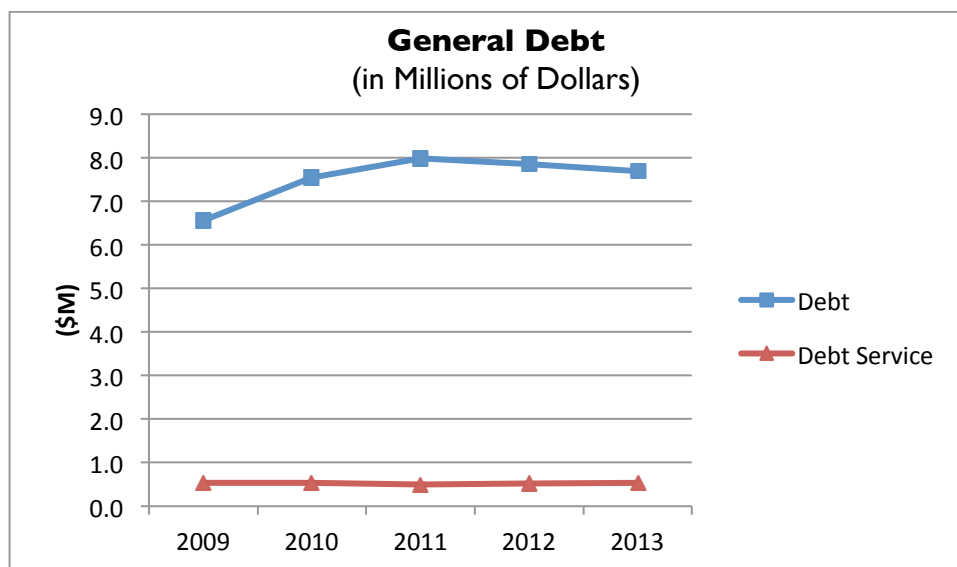
# THE FINANCING OF MAJOR BOROUGH PROJECTS AND PURCHASES

(And Our Associated Debt Level). . . *In a Nutshell*

**The Borough schedules and monitors the financing of major construction projects and equipment purchases using what's called "the capital budget". Here's how these major projects and purchases are reflected in the Borough's general budget (its expenses and revenues that affect your property taxes, as outlined in the previous article) and how the Borough's cumulative debt breaks down into categories.**

Each year, as part of the budget process, department heads provide the governing body with a three-year capital plan to allow the Mayor and Council to foresee respective departments' upcoming requests to undertake major projects (such as road construction) and equipment purchases. The list of projects and purchases approved for any given annual budget cycle is referred to as that year's capital budget (which is not really a budget at all because there are no off-setting revenues). In any case, projects and purchases that are approved in a given year's budget cycle are financed, much like you would finance a home and/or a car, by borrowing the money up front, generally at a very low interest rate, and paying it back over time. The resulting payments, known as debt service, are reflected on an annual basis as an expense line in the Borough's general budget.

The cumulative value of all major projects and purchases currently being financed (exclusive of water and sewer utility projects and purchases which are reflected in those individual utility budgets) is referred to as the Borough's debt level. As noted in the chart below, the Borough's debt level increased in 2010, primarily due to the need to fund the completion of the Park Avenue realignment project. Since 2011 we have paid off more debt than we've taken on as reflected in the declining debt level since that time. Our annual debt service payments are virtually unchanged over the period due to declining interest rates. Overall, the Borough's debt service represents approximately 10% of its general budget, well within State guidelines and in line with other Hunterdon County municipalities.



# THE FINANCING OF MAJOR BOROUGH PROJECTS AND PURCHASES

. . . *In a Nutshell* (Continued)

As documented in the table below, roads, sidewalks and Borough-owned property and associated improvements account for approximately 89% of our current debt, with the remaining 11% representing major equipment purchases including Police and Fire Department vehicles, an ambulance for the Rescue Squad and Public Works vehicles.

<u>Category</u>	<u>Budget</u>	<u>Pct</u>
Roads & storm sewers	\$4,019,600	54.0%
Property & improvements	\$2,249,300	30.2%
Vehicles & equipment	\$823,900	11.1%
Sidewalks & curbs	\$341,100	4.6%
Other (various)	\$6,000	0.1%
Total:	\$7,439,900	100%

If you would like more information, or have questions, please don't hesitate to call the Borough Clerk at 782-8840 Ext. 223. Rebecca will be happy to assist you.

## **TAX ASSESSOR ED KERWIN'S NEW OFFICE HOURS**

WHEN: SECOND AND FOURTH TUESDAY OF EACH MONTH  
12:00 PM TO 3:00 PM  
WHERE: BOROUGH HALL, 38 PARK AVENUE

**PLEASE STOP IN, OR GIVE ED A CALL AT 782-8840 EXT. 232**



HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION  
SEEKS HOMES AND VOLUNTEERS  
FOR ITS FIRST-EVER  
FLEMINGTON HOUSE TOUR



In recognition of Hunterdon County's 300th Anniversary celebration in 2014, the Flemington Historic Preservation Commission is setting the stage for its first ever Historic Homes of Flemington Tour scheduled for Saturday, October 25, 2014. The Tour will be self-guided, with volunteer

tour guides welcoming guests at each home. The Commission is currently seeking homeowners interested in opening their homes for the tour, as well as volunteers to serve as tour guides. Interested homeowners and volunteers are encouraged to call Borough Hall at 782-8840 Ext. 220, 222 or 223. Facebook users may send a message to the Flemington Historic Preservation Commission via facebook/message.



Hear Ye!  
Hear Ye!  
Hear Ye!

**VOLUNTEERS NEEDED**

Ye olde Samuel Fleming House Museum and Gardens is seeking volunteers to serve as docents (guides) to lead visitors and interested folks through the historic property and gardens during various events – also volunteers to serve on the Board. If you're interested please call Borough Hall at 782-8840 Ext. 220, 222 or 223 to let us know. Thank you!

## How About a Free Tree for Your Yard?



The Shade Tree Commission would love to provide you with a beautiful, free tree for your yard, courtesy of its 2013 Adopt-A-Tree program. All sizes of trees are available, to suit virtually any available yard space.

**LARGE TREES**

Shumard Oak  
Red Oak  
October Glory Maple  
Red Sunset Maple  
Ruby Red Horsechestnut  
Black Gum  
Pagoda Tree

**MEDIUM TREES**

Golden Rain  
Accolade Cherry  
Ivory Silk Lilac  
Yellowwood  
Zelkova  
Silverbell  
Trident Maple

**SMALL TREES**

Redbud  
Kousa Dogwood  
Paperbark Maple  
Yoshino Cherry

If you're interested in acquiring a beautiful, new tree for your yard (and did we mention that the tree is free?!), simply call or e-mail Commission Chairman Mike Deluca (908 806-7628; deluca@marine.rutgers.edu) to let him know. He'll arrange for a Commission member to stop by to see you, to offer advice on tree selection, take your order and schedule delivery and planting of your tree. All you have to do is commit to consistently watering the new tree until it is established. It's that simple. So do something nice for yourself (c'mon - you deserve it!) and for the environment as well, by adopting a tree. Mother Nature will love you for it!

# Kimberly Goetz of Flemington Pursues Her Olympic Dream

Calling all members of the Flemington community . . . did you know that one of our own is an Olympic speed skating hopeful? That's right, one of our very own Flemington residents, recently transplanted to Salt Lake City, Utah for training, is competing this fall and early winter for a spot on the U.S. women's Olympic speed skating team. Kimberly Goetz, 19 and a recent graduate of Hunterdon Central High School, is training hard (and working virtually full-time to boot!) to earn a spot on the U.S. Olympic team that will travel in February to Russia . . . *and she needs some hometown support to help her get there.*

The costs of Kim's training and travel are high and so in an effort to assist her and her family (who live right here in the Borough!) with fundraising, we're helping to get the word out about a special fundraising dinner for Kim scheduled for Friday, October 4th from 5:00 PM to 8:00 PM at Perkins Restaurant on Royal Road in Flemington (where Kim works when she comes home on breaks). Please clip the ticket on this

page and bring it to Perkins that night for some good food and to help get one of our own, Kim Goetz, to the Olympics! For more information about Kim and/or the dinner please call her mom, Linda, at 908 797-6109. Thanks for your support!



*For The Cause*

**Come to Support  
Kimberly Goetz  
Short Track Speed Skating Olympic Hopeful**

**October 4, 2013 ~ 5:00 to 8:00 PM**

Dine In or Take-Out

Present this ticket to your server and 20% of your bill, less taxes and gratuities, will go to this great cause!

*Ticket valid only on above-listed date and time and MUST be presented at time of visit.*

**Valid only at the following**



**Perkins:  
14A Royal Road  
Flemington, NJ 08822**

Taxes and gratuities are not included and are payable by the customer.  
Not valid with any other discounts or promotions.



**BOROUGH OF FLEMINGTON**  
38 PARK AVENUE +FLEMINGTON, NJ 08822  
TEL: (908) 782-8840 FAX: (908) 782-0142  
[WWW.HISTORICFLEMINGTON.COM](http://WWW.HISTORICFLEMINGTON.COM)

FIND US ON



HISTORIC FLEMINGTON

PRSR STD  
ECRWSS  
U.S. Postage  
**PAID**  
EDDM RETAIL

Local  
Postal Customer