

Lower Township MUA approves \$4.8 million budget

By **BETTY WUND**
Special to the Star and Wave

VILLAS — The Lower Township Municipal Utilities Authority (MUA) Commission adopted its 2016 budget Nov. 4.

The MUA fiscal year starts Dec. 1. The \$4.7 million budget was presented at the October meeting and had to be approved by the state Division of Local Government Services before it could be adopted by the MUA.

The budget reflects higher revenues for the current year and cost savings for the operation of the facility in the coming year. There is an overall 5.7 percent decrease in the new budget.

The authority's operating revenues are projected to decrease \$393,822 (4.5 percent) from the prior year as a result of decreases in connection fees and antenna lease revenues. Connection fees are projected to drop from \$484,800 to \$20,000, a decrease of 95 percent. In 2014-15, a number of homeowners in Town Bank connected to newly available water service.

Administration costs are projected to decrease 3.9 percent while the cost of providing services is projected to increase 3.4 percent.

A reduction in nonoperating appropriations primarily reflects the fact there is no provision for a payment to Lower Township, while in the prior year, the authority amended its budget to appropriate \$205,000 to the township to pay the salaries of four new police officers expected to be hired during the year.

The MUA has 32 employees with salary and wages totaling \$1.8 million, according to its budget information.

Assembly seats

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from 2011 to 2013, when he was elected to the Assembly.

Sauro, 61, of Vineland, owns A.R. Sauro Plumbing and Heating and A.R. Sauro Watercare. He previously served on the Cumberland County Board of Chosen Freeholders from 2000 to 2002 and was re-elected to that board in 2014.

Fiocchi and Sauro championed gutting regulations onerous to small-business growth as a way to reinvigorate the economy, and reasoned they were the two to execute such a plan since they were small businessmen.

But the voters saw things differently and instead chose two military veterans.

Andrzejczak and Land touted their military service on the campaign trail.

Democrats were largely up-beat at their campaign event at Menz Restaurant in Middle Township. An hour after polls closed, Andrzejczak dropped by to briefly socialize with supporters before traveling to another Democratic event in Vineland, where he met with Land to await the election results.

"We did work our tails off the entire time, so I'm proud of the effort and work we put in," Andrzejczak said.

Andrzejczak said he was excited to see Land elected with him.

"It's going to be another asset for South Jersey to be able to work together to be able to work in unison, to be able to get a lot more done for South Jersey. I'm really happy to have a complete team," Andrzejczak said. "Bruce is a great guy. He's very active with the community... He really fits in well and he really will represent the people."

Beginning in January, the First Legislative District's representation will comprise three Democrats: state Sen. Jeff Van Drew, Andrzejczak and Land.

"I'm just happy to be able to represent the people. I'm happy to have that opportunity," Andrzejczak said. "I will do everything in my power to be able to represent everybody equally and do what's right for South Jersey."

Andrzejczak said winning his home county, which is overwhelmingly Republican, as a Democrat shows the voters were receptive to his campaign.

"It shows people are in favor of us and received our message and support our plan for making changes for South Jersey," Andrzejczak said. "I appreciate the support from across the entire district."

Health care costs for current and retired employees total \$818,818.

The capital spending plan includes the continued refurbishing and replacement of wastewater pump stations, which is estimated at \$2.8 million. Planning for the future includes expansion of water mains and water service to East Villas Phase 1 at an estimated cost of \$2.9 million. Expansion of sewer service to Erma phases 1-5 is also part of the future plans at an estimated cost of \$12.3 million.

The budget is available on line at lcmua.org.

By resolution, the commission will permit South State Inc. to install pipes at 8th Avenue and Route 9 within the Garden State Parkway/Route 9 improvement. The pipes are for the Schellengers Landing sewer pipe replacement project, which is delayed because of changes and is yet to be bid. MUA Executive Director Mike Chapman has been authorized to enter into agreements and spend as much as \$60,000 to get this done.

Marc DiBlasio, of Remington Vernick and Walberg engineers, reported plans for the East Villas Phase 1 project will be ready for bid in January. The Schellengers Landing project has been re-advertised. There are nine contractors interested. A bid opening is scheduled for Nov. 17.

"The Master Water Permit initiative, I have been told by the DEP, in the next two to three weeks will be issued. Once that happens we will be able to self-issue permits," DeBlasio said.

Commission solicitor William Kaufman stated that at the request of Chapman, he researched the issue of

whether an improvement may be financed by a customer or future customer and applied to future connection fees. A resolution was presented and approved allowing a customer to do so.

"The customer is essentially underwriting the construction costs. Not everybody is willing to do such a thing but you avoid having to utilize your capital improvement funds you have on hand," Kaufman said.

Commissioner reports included a statement by Thomas Frisoli, vice chairman of the commission. He complimented Chapman on the good working relationship he has established with the crew. The workers have a positive attitude which is something

new to them in the organization, he said.

In response to concern about a rate payer's complaint about hydrant flushing, Chapman said that any complaint about hydrant flushing has been addressed. The flushing is done according to regulations and there is no on-going investigation of any complaints, he continued. Commissioner Jacqueline Henderson suggested that one more sign, besides the one at the MUA facility, be placed somewhere in the township announcing the dates flushing will be done.

Handouts at the meeting included details about the spending plan and the operations budget. The spending plan includes expansion of water mains and water service

to the East Villas (Phase 1); inspection, maintenance and painting of the water tanks; systematic replacement of utility vehicles and maintenance equipment; continued upgrade of the Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition (SCADA) system; replacement and refurbishing of Wissahickon Avenue and Schellengers Landing sewer lines; and developing a long term capital spending plan for the upgrade and efficiency of the water treatment plant.

Within the operations budget for 2016, the MUA will

continue to change manual meters to automatic read meters; use the existing workforce to expand water service; maintain a larger inventory of water and sewer parts and supplies; install isolation valves within the existing water system; upgrade the in-house data network; add detailed infrastructure information to the data base of the Geographical Information System (GIS); and electronically scan and catalogue blue prints that date back to the origin of the water and sewer system.

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The atmosphere in the Bellevue Tavern, where Republicans also awaited the election results, was mostly somber. Although Republicans captured a seat in Dennis Township Committee with Julie Fry DeRose edging out Albert DiCicco 693 to 683 — a difference of 10 votes — the party lost a seat on Middle Township Committee, with Democrat Jeffrey DeVico defeating Republican Daniel Lockwood 1,837 to 1,743.

Cape May County Clerk Rita Marie Fulginiti was re-elected in an uncontested race, receiving 13,292 votes, while Freeholder Leonard Desiderio, also running unopposed, was re-elected with 12,657 votes.

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