

# CROSS ROADS

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## OCC Continues As The Voice Of Oakland Residents

It has been quite a year for the Oakland Communications Commission.

The list of events brought to the residents of Oakland in the past 12 months is a chronicle of the special times in our town — Town Picnic and Fireworks ... Baseball/Softball Opening Day Parade ... Halloween Parade ... Santa Coming To Town ... Candidate's Forum and Debate ... Live Borough Election Results ... Senior Citizen Center Open House ... Exit 58 Live! ... School Referendum Forum ... not to mention the regular Mayor and Council meetings.

All of this was achieved through the volunteer efforts of the OCC and its three committees:

### 1. Cable Television Committee ...

This is the most visible of the OCC's committees because it is responsible for televising all of the events mentioned above. Headed by co-chairmen Fred Birks and Seth Stansfield, the TV Committee welcomes anyone interested in working behind-the-scenes or in front of the camera to bring Oakland events to Oakland residents.

**2. Web Committee ...** Headed by chairman Pete Foley and kept up-to-date by web master Dmitri Kozlovski, this committee makes borough information available online at [www.oakland-nj.org](http://www.oakland-nj.org). Meeting minutes, bulletin board announcements, special notices and recreation schedules are all part of the online community.

**3. Newsletter Committee ...** Run by co-chairpersons Karen Marcalus and Mike Jacobsen, this committee writes, edits, publishes and distributes the Crossroads newsletter twice a year.

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## THE MAYOR'S MESSAGE ... A GOOD YEAR

For months now I have been pressing the Army Corps of Engineers to work towards providing some workable solution to relieving the flood issues affecting the Pleasureland Area. Efforts to bring relief from the increased flooding to the area caused by the coffer dams during the construction phase of the flood control project have been frustrated by bureaucratic red tape.

As your mayor I have engaged all of our elected representatives, and federal and state officials to address this issue. I will continue to work hard towards helping our residents in the Pleasureland area.

It appears that the best course of action is to accelerate the completion of the project and especially to expedite the removal of the coffer dams. I will be pressing the Army Corps to move the project quickly so that the spillway is restored and the flood gates are operational as soon as is physically possible.



Mayor John Szabo

Regrettably, the Borough suffered back-to-back flood events in October. Where September will be remembered as the driest month on record, this past October will be recorded as the wettest. As a result, a total of 113 homes were seriously affected by the flood, with an estimated damage assessment of \$4 million dollars.

We are still waiting on a federal decision on the state's petition for disaster relief, which will provide financial assistance to our residents. We will notify affected residents as soon as a decision is made.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of our emergency services personnel, our fire department volunteers, ambulance corps volunteers, police officers and DPW staff who worked so hard to keep our residents safe and to restore the affected areas as quickly as they did. Everything was well coordinated and executed according to plan and I am very proud of everyone who participated.

The library construction project continues and last month the new library wing opened. I understand the frustration felt by many over the delays in the construction of the library. I am frustrated as well. I ask for everyone's patience and understanding.

As I have explained at numerous Mayor and Council meetings, the delays in opening the library were necessary in order to protect the community's interests in making sure that the library was constructed to our standards and, more importantly, within the budget the taxpayers approved. It was therefore, necessary to take legal

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## Open Space Initiatives Include Less Development, More Recreation Space • By Betsy Stagg, Council President

**A**s most residents know, Oakland's Open Space initiative for 2004, Camp Todd, was accomplished, with the governor's visit here in April to tell the state that they, in conjunction with Bergen County, had in fact closed on the purchase of this property.

Oakland had asked both the county and Green Acres Program for money to accomplish the purchase, but stepped aside when the county asked to partner solely with state. Since this meant the county would take over maintenance and responsibility, the Borough agreed that this was the best way to handle. It also brought the \$8 million purchase to Oakland at no Oakland expense.

The county has begun a Master Plan for the Camp Todd/Camp Tamarack area, which they hope to accomplish this year.

For the 2005 Grant Year, the Borough, with the blessing of the Environmental Commission, has applied for a matching grant from the Bergen County Open Space Program

to purchase the old Mueller's Park and Pleasureland Pool area, which consists of some 40 acres along the river. The developer has pulled back from purchase and the owner is willing to sell the land to the Borough.

The Borough wants no more building in the flood plain and believes that this would be an excellent area to combine both passive and active recreation. The potential to redevelop the Pleasureland pool area appears viable, but more study will be done. The plans include a walking/jogging path around the entire site and in the future connect it to the Recreation Complex.

We are also thinking about a soccer/football field, a baseball/softball field and a skate park. A restroom/concession stand would also be included. The passive area might also include fishing areas and a boat launch.

The Environmental Commission has also recommended an application to the Bergen County Municipal Parks Program for the development of the Raymond property on Ramapo Valley

Road. The preliminary plans for this seven-acre park include a walking/jogging path, a picnic area, an educational program area and perhaps seating, just to enjoy the quiet of the area.

Dottie Stewart, a long-time Oakland resident, pushed very hard for the protection of this area. She has just recently passed away, but her dream of a tranquil area in the heart of town will be fulfilled.

### OCC Update (Continued from page 1) Some Changes at Channel 77

Residents have noticed the updated look of the borough's Public Access Channel 77. We are now utilizing the state-of-the-art TelVue technology to not only air Bulletin Board notices, but also to offer weather and traffic reports, public service announcements and, perhaps most importantly, emergency notifications when various problems – flooding, school closings, etc. – arise.

You will begin seeing sponsorship messages from local organizations as well ... and this service is being offered at absolutely no cost to the residents of Oakland.

### Volunteers Wanted ... and Needed

The OCC's mandate is to provide open, non-partisan communications to the residents of Oakland. There is more we are being asked to do – air more public meetings, tape more events, produce original shows – that we are always welcoming new volunteers to bring their ideas and energy to one of our committees.

Open communication is the key to an open government, and the independent Oakland Communications Commission takes a lot of pride in providing access to the town and its leaders for our residents. Plus, we have a lot of fun.

Come and be a part of it.

Email us at  
**com72@optonline.net**  
Call us at 201-405-7590  
**www.oakland-nj.org**

### Mayor's Message

(Continued from page 1)

action against the contractor in order to enforce our contractual rights. I will always stand up to protect our community's interests and in the end I am confident we will have a library we will all be proud of.

I am pleased to announce that the downtown improvement plan is ready for public presentation and input. A special public meeting will be the first of a series of meetings to get your thoughts on the downtown improvement program so we can bring the plan to completion this year and begin the all-important task of finally redeveloping our downtown.

I am also pleased to announce that the Borough, in partnership with the Passaic River Coalition, has filed an open space grant application with the County of Bergen seeking funding to purchase the old Pleasureland property. This site was

originally approved for senior housing. However, the site is subject to flooding and for that reason is not the best location for our seniors to live. The good news is that if we are successful in preserving the property we can discourage development that will make flooding conditions worse in the area while also providing us an opportunity to possibly develop a community pool. Council President Betsy Stagg has taken the lead on this important project and I personally thank her for her efforts.

It is hard to believe that yet another year has passed. I would like to take this opportunity to wish everyone a very joyous and happy holiday season. It is a time for family, community spirit and a time to reflect on those blessings that have been bestowed upon us. Oakland is a wonderful community and I look forward to a new year filled with accomplishment.

— Mayor John Szabo

## Oakland Fire Department Excels In Competition

The North West Bergen Mutual Aid Association held its annual Field Day Competition at Crestwood Lake in Allendale last spring. The Mutual Aid Association is an organization comprised of 17 Fire Departments and Rescue Squads from 14 towns who mutually assist each other in the handling of larger scale emergencies.

The purpose of Field Day was to demonstrate and practice the skills of the firefighters in an environment of friendly competition. Events included games of skill and accuracy using fire hose and nozzles and ground ladders were used in a timed, bucket brigade contest.

When it was all done, the Oakland Fire Department had not only won first place in the event, but had completed the relay in six minutes and six seconds. The sec-

ond place team was one minute and 40 seconds slower and other teams ranged up to well over 10 minutes.

Oakland also took first place in the Chief's Bucket Brigade event and Ho-Ho-Kus took first place in the "nozzle battle" Barrel Event. The evening ended with the Oakland Fire Department winning First Place overall, for the first time in over 20 years competing. Second Place overall went to the Ho-Ho-Kus Fire Department.

The Oakland firefighters who participated were Chief Steven Milano, Asst. Chief Peter Sondervan, and firefighters Jack Longa, Don Harvey, Doug Coningswood, Charlie Kelly, Mike Schwaner, John Madden and George Kelly.

Chief Milano attributed the win to increased training and a new sense of enthusiasm that younger members of the



Oakland Fire Department are demonstrating. "They are serious about the firefighting," said Milano, "and they are working together as a team and enjoying the experience."

The First Place trophy is on display at the Oakland Fire House for one year and then it will move on to next year's winning team ... hopefully, Oakland again.

## The Revaluation Explained • By Don Burns, Councilman

Before discussing the revaluation and its effect on property taxes, it's important to understand that the primary factor in determining individual property taxes is the total taxes to be raised. The total taxes to be raised each year consist of the apportionment for the Municipal, County, District School, and Regional School tax levies combined with the Municipal and County Open Space tax levies. In both 2004 and 2005, the municipal portion of the taxes levies accounted for approximately 22%.

Once the total taxes to be raised is determined, this amount is divided by the total valuation of all the properties in the Borough to determine the tax rate per \$100 of assessed value for that year and for that year only. You then multiply each individual property's valuation by that tax rate to determine the property taxes for each property for that year. This fact is important because some people had and still have the impression that, just because the total valuation of all the property in the Borough went up, that in and of itself would mean an increase in the amount of money the Borough would collect. That is NOT the case.

The basic purpose and intent of revaluation is tax equalization. As the Borough Tax Assessor previously stated, "Revaluation is a periodic program undertaken to appraise all real estate in terms

of its full and fair market value." This means it tries to ensure that all property tax payers pay their "fair share" of property taxes based on the "real" property values for all properties in the Borough.

Someone, who purchased a "brand new" house in the Borough is paying property taxes based on approximately 100% of the true market value of that property. On the other hand, someone, who purchased a used home will continue to pay the taxes based on the previous assessment, which may be quite out of line with not only the current market value of the property, but also the actual purchase price of the property. Similarly, someone who has lived in a house for an extended period of time is probably paying taxes based on an assessment that is way out of line with the current market value of the property.

Each year, the County develops an equalized value, which is based on the sale of properties in the Borough, for the real property in the Borough relative to the total current assessment of the real property in the Borough. This equalized value determines the average ratio of assessed value to equalized value. In 1998, the average ratio of the assessed value of real property in the Borough was just under 94.2%. In 2001, this ratio had dropped to slightly less than 81.7%, and in 2002 and 2003, the ratio had

again dropped to under 75.3% and 69.6%, respectively. By 2004, the average ratio had dropped again and was then 62.9%.

Based on the revaluation and the amount of taxes to be raised for 2004, the property taxes for approximately 14.6% would have gone down. Likewise, the property taxes for 16.2% would have increased \$500 or less and for 36.5% the increase would have been between \$501 to \$1000. For 28.2% the increase would have ranged from \$1001-2000 and for approximately 4.5% the increase would have been over \$2000. Which category an individual property fell into is strictly a matter of how close or how far from 100% valuation the property was.

Now for the question of the actual increase in property taxes from 2004 to 2005. The total taxes to be raised for 2005 was \$42,093,367, as compared to the total taxes to be raised for 2004, which was \$39,404,170. This was an increase of approximately 6.8% in the total amount of taxes to be raised. So, this increase accounted for the same percentage increase in the portion of the property taxes, which resulted from the increase in the amount to be raised by taxes. Any other increase or decrease in property taxes is the result of the revaluation rather than the increase in the taxes to be raised.



## A Community Working Together To Strengthen Education



*Dear Members of the Oakland Community:*

Recently, we were informed that Oakland's students, upon completing eighth grade, would be able to choose which of the two regional high schools they prefer to attend for high school study. We are pleased and thankful that the Ramapo-Indian Hills Regional Board of Education has changed its Attendance Policy to allow this change.

High school choice has been available to all eighth grade students in Wyckoff and Franklin Lakes for some time. For Oakland students, the option to attend Ramapo High School was reserved for those students who were participating in a University Program housed in that school. Beginning with the Valley Middle School Class of 2006, all of Oakland's eighth graders will be able to choose between Indian Hills High School and Ramapo.

We are also pleased that Indian Hills High

School is planning to introduce a marching band program for students – after an absence of more than 20 years. This opportunity will permit Valley Middle School's music students to continue their band study at the high school level. We thank Mr. Saxton and Indian Hills Principal Mr. Evangelista for recognizing this need and for addressing it.

Last spring, our Oakland Board of Education committed to upgrading the technology infrastructure of our four schools – Dogwood Hill, Heights, Manito and Valley Middle. This initiative included the upgrade of the network electronics and the installation of wireless capability in all schools. As a result, when the 2005-2006 school year began, schools were wireless, and mobile labs began to provide children with learning opportunities appropriate to 21st century education.

In addition, our parent and community educational partners joined with the Oakland Board of Education to address the District's hardware needs. Thus, the Dogwood Hill, Heights, Manito and Valley Middle PTO's and the Oakland

Education Foundation each made a gift of technology to the schools. Combined with Board funding, our schools opened in September with 60 new desktop computers, which were needed to replace obsolete machines, and 39 new laptops that became part of our new mobile labs. We thank the Board, the Foundation, and the PTOs, as well as all who support these organizations, for helping provide Oakland's students with technology hardware that will enhance children's education.

When all members of the community work together toward common goals, Oakland's young people benefit. The efforts of all who have contributed to these projects ensure that the quality of education provided to Oakland's students remains of high quality, and that Oakland truly is ... a learning community committed to excellence.

We wish all members of the community a very happy holiday season.

*Sincerely,*

*Dr. Richard G. Heflich  
Superintendent of Schools*

## VMS Devotes A Day To Health and Nutrition

On November 4, the Valley Middle School community celebrated aspects of health, fitness and nutrition in an effort to promote awareness of these critical concepts. Unlike last year's Celebration of the Arts, which represented the culmination of a year-long theme, this day was planned as the commencement of a celebration of healthier lifestyles.

A committee of teachers, which was chaired by Karen Purcella, was charged with planning the day's events. To help support the theme of the day, teachers and other staff members prepared dishes that were low in fat, sugar and calories, and shared them with each other.

In addition, several bulletin boards depicting teachers' fitness habits were created throughout the school in an effort to model healthy lifestyles for students. Teachers were also encouraged to incorporate health, fitness and nutrition into their lessons whenever possible throughout the day.

The centerpiece of the day, however, was the health fair. Thanks to the VMS P.T.O., students were able to sample healthy snacks after their lunch, which also included only healthy items that day. In addition to vegetable and fruit trays, students were able to sample all natural snacks that were low in sugar, had no trans fat or hydrogenated oils, and no artificial additives.

Students also had the opportunity to obtain pamphlets, brochures and fitness-related items

such as pedometers, which were donated by a private corporation. Given the recent attention that has been paid to childhood obesity, our hope is to raise student awareness to the point where each child has the capacity to make informed choices that promote long, healthy lives.

*—Adam I. Silverstein, VMS Vice Principal*

## Thanks To Our Residents

On behalf of Oakland's Board of Education, I would like to thank the residents of Oakland who took the time to vote on the District's Facilities Plan this past September 27th. Although we are disappointed with the results, it was still good to see so many of the voting public make their voices heard.

We, as a Board, understand that to add another expense to the Oakland taxpayer is a lot to ask at this time. We are all still feeling the added tax burden placed on us by the town's housing revaluation. However, the Board of Education still needs to come up with a plan that will address the inevitable overcrowding of our schools, together with the updates that are needed to the schools' infrastructure systems. These problems did

not disappear because the referendum was not approved.

At this time, the Board is reflecting, reevaluating and reassessing different solutions for the needs of our schools and school children. Rest assured, in the near future the Board will come up with a new plan that, hopefully, will unite our community in the common goal of giving our children the best possible education in the safest and most up-to-date schools, while keeping in line with the limitations of Oakland's taxpayers.

Thank you in advance for your support, and please always remember that education is an investment, not an expense.

*Sincerely,*

*James Gaffney  
Oakland School Board President*

# Survey

**Please return survey by December 15, 2005.** Once you have completed the survey, please fold and drop off at a collection box located in any of the District Schools, in the Board Offices located at 315 Ramapo Valley Road, or in the Public Library. You may also mail your response. Note that all responses are anonymous unless you choose to provide us with your name. Thank you.

**1. Please select the category(ies) that best describe(s) you:**

- ☐ I have children in preschool  
☐ I have children in K-5  
☐ I have middle school children  
☐ I have high school children  
☐ I have no school aged children  
☐ I am retired

**2. How long have you been a resident of Oakland?**

- ☐ 0-3 years      ☐ 4-10 years  
☐ 10-20 years      ☐ Over 20 years

**3. Do you have children attending the Oakland K-8 public schools?**

- ☐ Yes      ☐ No

**4. Where do you vote?**

- ☐ Dogwood Hill  
☐ Heights  
☐ Manito  
☐ Valley Middle

**5. Did you vote in the September referendum on school facilities expansion/renovation?**

- ☐ Yes      ☐ No

**Thank you very much for your participation in this survey.  
Check as many boxes as apply to you.**

**6. If you voted yes, what were your reasons for supporting the project?**

- ☐ The plan was sound  
☐ The proposed tax increase was reasonable  
☐ The availability of a State grant  
☐ The schools are overcrowded  
☐ The existing school buildings are in need of repair/renovations  
Other \_\_\_\_\_

**7. If you voted no or did not vote, what were your reasons?**

- ☐ Not registered to vote  
☐ The plan was sound, and I assumed passage  
☐ The cost of the project was too high  
☐ The need for the project was unclear  
☐ The district does not need another school  
☐ The district should not have an intermediate school  
☐ The voting ballot language was confusing  
☐ Concern about property taxes  
☐ I had no opinion

Other \_\_\_\_\_

**8. If there were a future referendum, how would you prefer to see it presented to voters?**

- ☐ As a single proposal  
☐ Multiple proposals

**9. Until we have an approved Long Term Plan to address the shortage of classrooms, I would support:**

- ☐ Increasing class size  
☐ Portable trailers  
☐ Leasing space  
☐ Redistricting  
☐ Changing school/grade configurations

Other \_\_\_\_\_

Your Feedback is Appreciated! Survey Enclosed

FOLD HERE 1ST

**We want to hear from you!**

**Survey Enclosed**

*Survey responses must be received by December 15, 2005!*

FOLD HERE 2ND

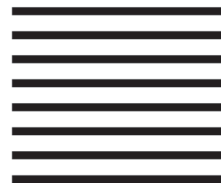
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## BOE Passes Property Tax Resolution • *By Trustee Marybeth Visconti*

**A**t the October 19 Board of Education meeting the Board unanimously passed a resolution in support of three bills that are currently pending in our state legislature. SCR-20 and ACR-99/ACR-218 are bills under consideration in the state senate and assembly. All of these bills call for our legislature to convene a special session that is dedicated to addressing property tax reform.

Convening a special session is the most expedient way to address New Jersey's property tax debacle. Our elected officials in Trenton have the power to conduct a special session immediately, and most importantly, the obligation to do so. A constitutional convention could take years to set up and would most likely end up including a number of other issues.

Quoting from our resolution, the Board of Education believes that: "New Jersey's property taxes are among the highest in the nation, and New Jersey ranks fourth among the 50 states in the percentage of school costs fund-

ed through local taxes; and remedying the problems associated with high property taxes is a legislative responsibility; and the quickest way for the Legislature to address the issue is to convene in a special session that is dedicated solely to property tax reform."

Funding public education through property taxes is not an equitable system because it is not based on an individual's ability to pay. The net result of this inequity is a loss of community support for public education and is slowly causing the degradation of our public school system. New Jersey taxpayers pay the highest property taxes per capita in the nation. New Jersey is also one of the few states that funds public education with more than 60% of the cost from local property taxes.

While those of us on boards of education don't know what the answer is to the problem of funding New Jersey's public schools, we do know that there has to be a better way and that our legislators have the responsibility to

find it. By passing this resolution and sending it to Oakland's state legislators, we are hoping that our voices will be heard.

We urge all residents to contact our legislators; Senator Henry McNamara and Assembly Representatives Kevin O'Toole and David Russo to voice support for this pending legislation and real property tax relief.

## Schools Set Health Education Goal

**W**e have all heard recently that an increasing number of children are overweight or are obese. These reports are alarming because, if these conditions were to persist, more children would grow to become adults suffering from high cholesterol, high blood pressure, diabetes, and heart disease. This also means that excess weight during childhood may threaten not only the affected individual's health, but also the future public health of our nation.

These hazards to children's health are resulting from diminished physical activities and less healthful eating habits. Still, we are reminded that overweight conditions can be addressed with education of children and families.

In response to the growing need to teach children the importance of informed decision-making to remain healthy, Oakland's four school communities have selected a health and wellness goal for the 2005/2006 school year. Our elementary schools are embarking on developing programs that will help students to understand the importance of proper exercise, fitness, and nutrition and their impact on good health. Through multi-disciplinary activities, middle school students will also gain an increased understanding of sound practices relative to exercise and nutrition and the role that each plays in maintaining a healthy lifestyle.

Throughout this school year, the schools' initiative will involve students, parents, community members, and staff. With all working together, we seek to make a difference in children's long term health. Additional information about the Alliance for a Healthier Generation's campaign is available [www.american-heart.org](http://www.american-heart.org).

## Oakland Nurses Sponsor Family Asthma Night

**T**he Oakland School District's nurses recently hosted a Family Asthma Night for children with asthma, as well as their parents and caregivers. The workshops were sponsored by the County of Bergen Asthma Initiative Department of Health Services. The presentations were highly educational and helpful, and assisted participants to learn more about this most common chronic childhood disease.

Family Asthma Night was an educational event for parents/caregivers, children with asthma, and the community-at-large. Adults attended a presentation by Michael R. Bye, M.D., Acting Director of Pediatric Pulmonary Medicine, at Morgan Stanley Children's Hospital of New York-Presbyterian, and by Ms. Ellen Keane, R.N. Their Powerpoint presentation contained information about:

- Asthma the disease
- The disease process
- Identification of asthma
- Treatment of asthma
- Medications commonly used
- Devices used in asthma management

- Asthma triggers
- Asthma/allergy-friendly school environment
- Relationship with school nurse and/or child care provider

While the adults participated in this workshop, the children attended an entertaining program. The goal of the children's workshop was the empowerment of, knowledge about, and control of their asthma.

The highlights of the program were a puppet show and a hands-on session with a respiratory therapist. The respiratory therapist engaged the children with age-appropriate dialogue that covered the same topics as the presentation for the adults.

The children joined the adults following the concurrent sessions. A "goody bag" was provided that included an interactive workbook. The presentation was well attended and enjoyed by all. Both the adults and the children left the sessions feeling more empowered with information that would help with asthma management and treatment.

Additional information: Bergen County Dept. of Health Services Asthma Program Coordinator at 201-634-2705.



## Water, Water Everywhere

### A report from Council President Betsy Stagg on The Borough's Surface/Groundwater Connection

The Oakland Water & Sewer Committee has worked diligently this year to accomplish its goals for 2005.

We are happy to report that the painting of the Andrew Avenue water tank is completed and that the Committee is well into its plans for the Spear Street tank. The latter is more complicated because it is the only storage tank in that zone. We hope to be out to bid on this in early spring.

The Committee has gone out to bid on the Long Hill water connection project, which connects the lower Long Hill main to the Thornton Road tank. The purpose of the connect is to eliminate the iron sediment in the pipes along lower Long Hill Road by allowing it to settle out in the tank.

We have also begun the bidding process for a new water main for lower Long Hill Road. The pipes under Long Hill Road and along Franklin Avenue are 70 years old and will be replaced bit by bit, as the Borough can afford it.

Recently, the Mayor and I met with NJDEP to discuss Water

Allocation. The Water Allocation has been restored in full and when we need additional water supply to meet our COAH obligations, NJDEP says it will have no problem granting the increase. The problem that caused the possible lowering of our allocation was a misunderstanding on an application filed last year by our engineers. The misunderstanding was cleared up.

Meanwhile, Oakland's water quality continues to be excellent. We would like our nitrates to be a bit lower, but with so many septic systems discharging to the groundwater, we really can't anticipate the level dropping much. They are, however, well within state limits.

We also approved the sale of the Ramapo River Reserve Sewage Treatment Plant to the company that has been managing it for its entire existence. They have consistently discharged excellent quality wastewater, so this sale will benefit the Borough.

Finally, the Commission urges everyone to become familiar with the new statewide storm water regulations and to comply with the Borough ordinances on these. Like it or not, storm water and all that flows into it ends up in the Ramapo River.

#### OAKLAND BOROUGH COUNCIL

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