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ON THE WEB



Local news, sports and more, only a click away.

Friday



Vernon ballot question sparks debate

Some say move to change form of government has been rushed

By **PHILLIP MOLNAR**
pmolnar@njherald.com

VERNON — In 1995, township residents voted to form a commission to study Vernon's current form of government, compare it with other New Jersey forms, and determine how the municipal government could be more efficient and effective.

After nine months of meeting nearly once a week — in which members interviewed residents, civic groups, organizations and municipal officials, and met with experts — the five-person Charter Study Commission determined by a 4-1 vote that the council-manager form of government was best for Vernon.

Fourteen years later, the debate has been reignited, and Thursday night's council meeting turned into a sounding board for those who approve of keeping the government the same and those who want it changed.

Former Councilman Gary Grey told the council the recent effort by another five-person group to change the form of government was a "rushed process."

"In my view we went through the correct process in 1996," Grey said.

Starting in early August, the Committee of Petitioners gathered 3,620 signatures in support of getting the question — changing the township's government from a

"In my view we went through the correct process in 1996."

Former Vernon Councilman Gary Grey

council-manager plan to a mayor-council plan — on the November ballot.

Grey, joined by Environmental Commission member Michael Furrey, alleged that he had spoken to township residents who had signed the petition but were "uninformed" about what the change would really mean. He also asked the council to hold information sessions about the change.

"I don't think it is the purview of this council to

educate," Mayor Sally Rinker said, adding that Grey was speaking "hearsay."

The change in government is not technically a question of the council. The committee sought the change on its own. Rinker and Township Attorney John Ursin both told Grey and Furrey they did not think it was appropriate for the council to get involved.

"How sad they make these accusations," petitioner Jessi Paladini said of Grey and

Furrey. Paladini told the council the committee had collected 3,700 signatures from informed voters and she was unsure which "two people Mr. Grey knows."

Tom McClachrie, of the Vernon Taxpayers Association, agreed the current council-manager plan was not working.

"This form of government has produced debt, debt, debt," he said.

Councilwoman Valerie Seufert said she could understand reasons why the council should not get involved, but that "education should be allowed to take place." Seufert suggested the

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Tribute to veterans in Newton



Photos by Bruce A. Scruton/New Jersey Herald

The centerpiece of the Veterans Memorial Park in Newton's Town Square is the county/veterans memorial seal. Around the outside of the seal are six individual gardens designed and planted by master gardeners in the colors of the six branches of the armed services — Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, Coast Guard and Merchant Marine. The gardens and memorial will be dedicated Saturday at 10 a.m.

Gardens honor service members

NEWTON — New gardens, color themed for each branch of the armed services, now surround the Sussex County Veterans Monument in the Newton Square.

Each garden contains the insignia of one of six branches of the armed forces. The memorial garden, planned by the Veterans Monument Committee, will be dedicated at a one-hour ceremony Saturday at 10 a.m.

The ceremony will feature four color guards, a soloist, a bagpiper and taps, plus brief presentations and certificates of appreciation to Rutgers Cooperative Extension; the Master Gardeners; Barbara Abita, who designed the gardens; and the Sussex County Division of Facilities.

The monument, a bell tower honoring all Sussex County veterans, was the object of an eight-month fundraising effort by the Veterans Monument Committee in 2006, which raised more than \$55,000 for the installation. Recent donations from Elizabethtown Gas, Intercar and the Valerie Fund, plus efforts by the Master Gardeners with plantings and maintenance, have made the gardens possible.



Flowers surround the plaque in Newton's Town Square honoring U.S. Coast Guard veterans.

Parties offer two divergent visions

By **JULIE HIRSCHFELD DAVIS**

Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON — These are two remarkably different visions for governing America.

Republicans are pledging to shrink the government, cut taxes and undo health care and stimulus laws. President Barack Obama and Democrats want tax cuts for the middle class, more stimulus spending and an end to the outsourcing of U.S. jobs.

With Thursday's release of the GOP's "Pledge to America" — a strongly worded manifesto promising to return government to the people, trim it through deep spending cuts, and refocus it on defense and tax cuts — the two parties have laid out deeply contrasting agendas for the next two years.

Less than six weeks before midterm congressional elections, it's promise-making time for both parties, and voters are getting some insight into how the two parties want to change the country.

Still, many of the vows on both sides are deliberately vague. The reality behind each party's stirring rhetoric is that little may change after Election Day.

Republicans are poised to add substantially to their ranks in the contests, perhaps enough to give them control of the House and to whittle Democrats' margin of control to almost nothing in the Senate.

If Democrats hang onto power, their majority is virtually certain to be weakened considerably, leaving them little room to maneuver on unfinished items on their agenda, including energy legislation to curb carbon emissions and creation of a path to legal status for millions of

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Wantage estimates lake's dam repair bill

By **CHRISTINA TATU**
tatu@njherald.com

WANTAGE — Lake Neepaulin residents got an idea of what it could cost them to repair the dam Thursday when township officials unanimously approved a loan repayment plan with the Friends of Lake Neepaulin and released speculative figures assessing residents between \$24 and \$437 annually for the repair.

Township officials stressed there is no way to know the exact cost until all the work is completed, but it has been estimated between \$750,000 and \$1 million.

According to the agreement, FOLN — the nonprofit group that owns the lake —

would be responsible for 10 percent, or about \$121,000, of the loan repayment. The rest would be the responsibility of the 720 residents living around the lake.

Should the Friends default on its payment, the township would pay \$1 and take ownership of the lake and beach property.

Thursday night's meeting at the municipal building was a full house, with several residents standing in the hallway and two State Police officers present, yet the meeting lasted only about 15 minutes.

Township officials quickly approved the agreement before opening the meeting to the public, during which time only several residents spoke out.

For those opposed to the special assessment, the issue is mostly a matter of principle.

"I can't see it and I never pass it," said Karen Merritt. "Why should I have to pay for it? I certainly don't want to become a member (of FOLN)."

Only those who pay an annual fee to join the FOLN are able to use the lake and beach.

"My roof was leaking, but I had to pay for that myself. Was anyone going to help me make the payments?" asked resident Ann Perry.

She also worries about being able to afford the additional tax.

Her husband, Ira Perry, lost his job two years ago,

making it impossible for the couple to even afford health insurance, she said.

According to the agreement between the township and FOLN, residents of the lake community would likely be assessed in three "tiers," with those living on the lake paying the most. The township has yet to finalize which residents would be included in which section, however, and how much each section would pay.

According to a handout released by township officials at Thursday's meeting, the cost is subject to many factors.

"It is highly likely that several years will go by before the dam is repaired, the total costs tallied and the actual

special assessment is certified," it said. "For the sake of presenting the high-end of estimates, scenarios have been presented over the past several years utilizing the cost of \$1 million. However, this is not an established cost, it is just a scenario."

The estimate for the community's 56 lakefront properties is \$437.54 per year, including 2 percent interest, over a 20-year period. Those 56 property owners would be responsible for repaying 45 percent of the total loan cost.

The number of residents falling into the middle and outer tiers has yet to be determined. That's because between now and the time

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PETERS VALLEY 40TH ANNIVERSARY CRAFT SHOW

SATURDAY, SEPT 25, 10AM - 6PM & SUNDAY, SEPT 26, 10AM - 5PM

Celebrate and shop for fine art created and made by talented American artisans. Over 185 exhibitors and vendors, music and food will be on hand. Adults-\$8.00, children under 12 Free!

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