

UNION COUNTY WATCHDOG ASSOCIATION

Shining a light
on government

JOIN OUR MAILING LIST!
unioncountywatchdog.org
countywatchers.com

A nonpartisan nonprofit 501(c)3 organization

Issue 2 • June 2013

TAXES UP 5% AS PROPERTY VALUES DECREASE 4%

For 2013 we have a total tax burden in Union County of \$317.5 million with a dollar increase from 2012 of \$15 million and a percentage increase of 5%. Compare that to Morris County where their tax burden is \$217.9 million with NO increase from 2012.

Both counties serve about 500,000 people though Morris, with a larger land mass and a county library, seems to do it for a lot less. Here

is the 2013 update comparing the adopted budgets of Union and Morris counties:

Note that Morris County also uses their Open Space tax (which they routinely cut) to acquire Open Space and still manages to have a surplus of over \$70 million in that fund. Compare that to Union County which consistently raids their Open Space 'trust' fund for their regular budget and plans to continue as long as they can.

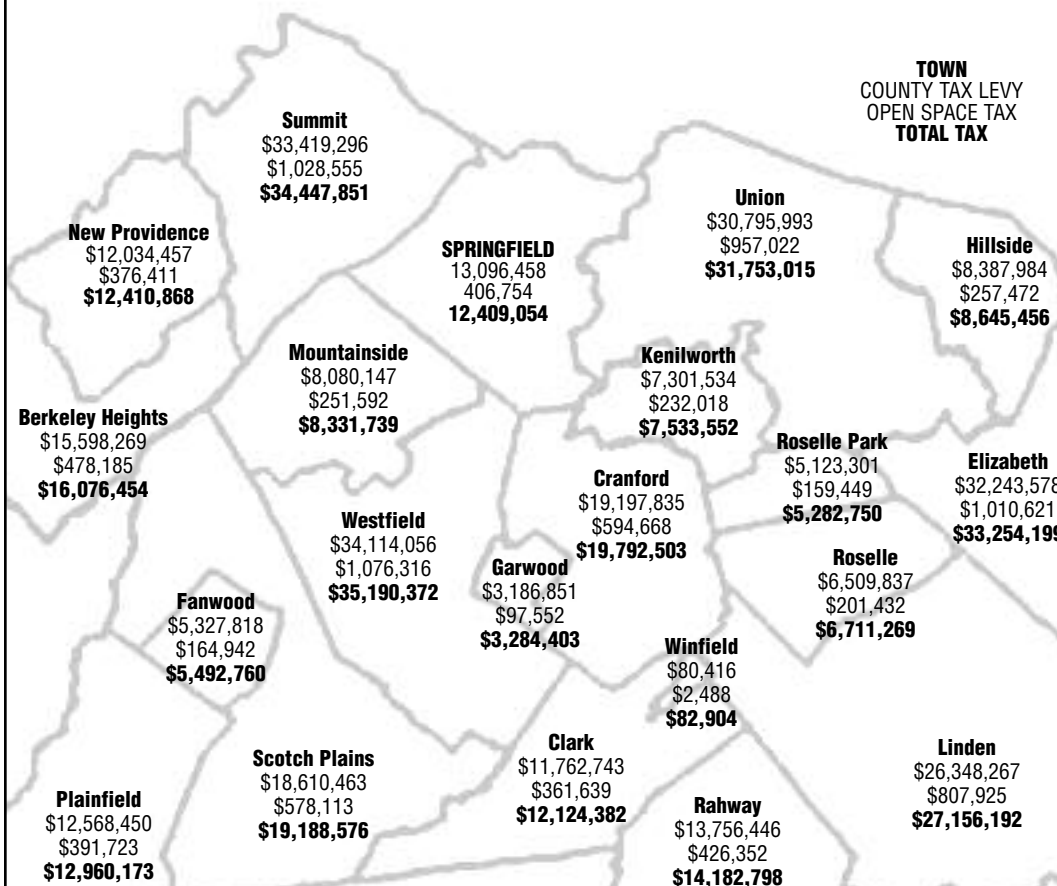
OPEN SPACE TRUST FUND BEING RAIDED

Assuming \$65.9 billion in taxable property, 1.5 cents per \$100 comes to \$9.9 million in Open Space taxes for 2013. Of that amount \$2.6 million will go to run the Parks Department (even to maintain properties not purchased through the Open Space Fund). Another \$5.6 million will go to pay phantom debt service. Add on an estimated (can only estimate since no timesheets) \$1 million in salaries being paid out of the Open Space Trust Fund to county employees. The Open Space Fund is projected to continue through 2019 with debt and salaries using up most of the funds.

OVERVIEW	UNION	.MORRIS
Total Appropriations	493,731,606	311,089,690
Amt. Raised by Taxation	317,544,198	217,903,030
APPROPRIATIONS	UNION	.MORRIS
Salaries	168,559,846	102,873,968
Debt Service	57,112,163	38,306,925
Insurance	71,077,898	37,464,000
Social Security	10,842,000	6,700,000
Pensions	28,726,886	14,773,481
Other Expenses	157,412,813	110,971,316
TOTAL	493,731,606	311,089,690

PENSION COST DETAIL	UNION	MORRIS
PERS	15,374,379	8,894,882
Police & Fire	13,290,007	5,779,599
Sheriff/Detective	27,500	39,000
Defined Contribution	35,000	60,000
TOTAL	28,726,886	14,773,481
Total Payroll (incl OT)	168,559,846	102,873,968
Pension as % of payroll	17.04%	14.36%

2013 UNION COUNTY TAXES PER TOWN



The amount to be raised by taxation in 2013 for county purposes is (\$317,544,199) plus the estimated Open Space tax (\$9,858,802) equals (\$327,403,001)

City	2013 County tax	Open Space Est. Tax	Total 2013 Tax Levy	2006-13 Change	2012-13 Change
Berkeley Heights	\$15,598,269	\$478,185	\$16,076,454	41.21%	7.66%
Clark	\$11,762,743	\$361,639	\$12,124,382	49.06%	3.52%
Cranford	\$19,197,835	\$594,668	\$19,792,503	48.60%	6.74%
Elizabeth	\$32,243,578	\$1,010,621	\$33,254,199	36.65%	3.89%
Fanwood	\$5,327,818	\$164,942	\$5,492,760	46.19%	4.98%
Garwood	\$3,186,851	\$97,552	\$3,284,403	48.81%	4.79%
Hillside	\$8,387,984	\$257,472	\$8,645,456	42.26%	0.94%
Kenilworth	\$7,301,534	\$232,018	\$7,533,552	23.52%	3.82%
Linden	\$26,348,267	\$807,925	\$27,156,192	39.84%	6.02%
Mountainside	\$8,080,147	\$251,592	\$8,331,739	31.00%	5.74%
New Providence	\$12,034,457	\$376,411	\$12,410,868	52.51%	6.41%
Plainfield	\$12,568,450	\$391,723	\$12,960,173	44.13%	1.61%
Rahway	\$13,756,446	\$426,352	\$14,182,798	49.16%	-0.56%
Roselle	\$6,509,837	\$201,432	\$6,711,269	32.44%	-1.19%
Roselle Park	\$5,123,301	\$159,449	\$5,282,750	31.83%	-0.09%
Scotch Plains	\$18,610,463	\$578,113	\$19,188,576	42.13%	5.06%
Springfield	\$13,096,458	\$404,327	\$13,500,785	40.21%	3.52%
Summit	\$33,419,296	\$1,028,555	\$34,447,851	47.11%	8.52%
Union Twp.	\$30,795,993	\$957,022	\$31,753,015	27.27%	2.39%
Westfield	\$34,114,056	\$1,076,316	\$35,190,372	50.42%	6.62%
Winfield	\$80,416	\$2,488	\$82,904	30.72%	8.50%
Total	\$317,544,199	\$9,858,802	\$327,403,001	41.27%	4.67%

RENNA IS A JOURNALIST – PROSECUTOR ROMANKOW’S POLITICAL VENDETTA FAILS

By Tina Renna | April 12, 2013

Since 2005 I’ve been reporting on Union County government on the County Watchers blog. I rely heavily on sources who trust me to protect their identities. One way Union County government could shut this blog down would be to force our bloggers to reveal their sources. The Union County Prosecutor tried recently, and failed. Judge Karen Cassidy released her opinion today. I am the first blooger in New Jersey history to be deemed protected by the New Jersey Newspersons Shield Law and an important precedent has been set which may protect and inspire other citizen journalists to watchdog their government in place of traditional journalism which hasn’t been able to keep up their government coverage in New Jersey which has 21 county’s, 566 municipalities, over 600 School districts and countless independent authorities.

In the case of my coverage of Generatorgate, which this challenge arose out of, it’s unfortunate that my sources fear Union County law enforcement, therefore they came to me with information as is often the case. The issue wasn’t that I had 16 names of county employees who took home generators during the Superstorm Sandy emergency. The issue was the prosecutor was protecting favored employees, and he still is. Just as he did with missing cash from Musicfest and stolen chainsaws.

It isn’t my job to be an arm of law enforcement. I did my job as a journalist and reported what I knew, the prosecutor has known of at least 4 employees who took home generators during Superstorm Sandy, and has done nothing to date to charge these offenders with a crime or to even reprimand them. While he spent countless resources harassing me.

It has been a privilege to expose our justice system for being an extension of the Union County Democratic committee, which I have done



time and again on this blog. And the Prosecutor’s office proved me right again in the way they handled this case. They even went so far to say in their closing comments that the County Watchers doesn’t have much original content. Is it any wonder no one familiar with Union County government could ever trust Prosecutor Theodore Romankow’s integrity and independence from political bosses? This case has also exposed the failure of our justice system as a whole. Romankow answers to know one.

I am a strong individual. And the Union County Watchdog Association is blessed with many supporters. It wasn’t easy to stand up to the top law enforcement official in Union County with all the resources the taxpayers afford them. At one point

there were 9 prosecutor investigators in the courtroom. There were no less than 4 present at all times during the 4-day court proceeding in which I was on the stand for 2 days being questioned by the prosecutor’s attorney’s. Were there no murders, rapists or thieves to attend to? Their line of questioning amounted to not much more than personal attacks. They went out of their way to punish me for critical writings, such as my coverage of Charlotte DeFilippo working from home – they defended her stating that she has a respiratory problem and why didn’t I report that? They also took exception to my referring to Freeholder Daniel Sullivan as a bastard when I wrote about his using Homeland Security money on his political campaign. My attorney, Bruce Rosen, reminded them to read the New York Post and Daily News for acceptable language in media. I will write about their line of questioning at length.

Today let’s celebrate the victory this is for all citizen bloggers, and the sources who trust us, even above the people who are sworn to uphold the law.

TREASURY DEPARTMENT INVESTIGATES THE UNION COUNTY WATCHDOG ASSOCIATION, AND SENDS INVESTIGATORS TO RENNA’S HOME

By Tina Renna | April 11, 2012

In January 2012 two criminal investigation agents from the State Treasury Department appeared unannounced on my door step inquiring over UCWA 501(c) 3, non-profit paperwork which was on file in their office all along. In response I wrote to my state representatives who in turn wrote the Treasury Department asking for an explanation.

Acting Director Michael Bryan responded via letter to me on March 16, 2012.

He thanks me for providing his office with an account of my experience. He informs me that because of my input, he conducted an extensive review of their investigative protocols. And as a result, they have ordered changes that will result in greater due diligence in the early stages of many investigations.

He writes that I should be “rest assured” if these rules were in place at the time of the inquiry into our group’s non-profit status, my experience with the Division of Taxation would have been much different.

He closes: Thank you again for helping me to improve the procedures of the NJ Division of Taxation. I wish you and your organization well in your continued efforts in Union County.

My response on behalf of the UCWA: A pier is a disappointing bridge. Specifically, my request asked for explanations for the following: the appearance of the office of criminal investigation agents at my home; whether the visit was politically motivated; and was the Department of Taxation involved in political intimidation. Does the department routinely send agents out on these matters or was I and/or

the Union County Watchdog Association a special case. None of these issues are addressed in your letter, and I renew my request for a more complete explanation of the procedures followed that resulted in the disturbing visit to my home.

A reporter for the Star-Ledger’s Auditor column managed to get a quote regarding the investigation from a Treasury spokesman. Andy Pratt, said he didn’t have any details, but acknowledged agents work off tips – usually high-profile stuff, “What that unit normally handles is some very sensitive stuff,” Pratt said, adding that “sometimes they deal with terrorists.... They’re a serious group.”

Who sent a serious group of government agents to a government watchdog’s home? We may never know.

UCWA BLOG SITE COUNTYWATCHERS.COM

County Watchers Tina Renna and John Bury regular blog about issues concerning Union County. The blog posts news and the latest public records the UCWA are able to acquire. More importantly the site reveals what those records mean and how they affect the taxpayer. Visitors are welcomed to comment on the blog. The blog has many helpful links and archived entries and you can sign up to receive updates. Visit: www.countywatchers.com



Union County Watchdog Association, Inc.
 P: 908-709-0530 - F: 908-709-9209
 Email: info@unioncountywatchdog.org

Mission Statement

The Union County Watchdog Association is a nonpartisan nonprofit 501(c)3 organization working on behalf of the residents and taxpayers of Union County monitoring the activity of county government and advocating change to eliminate waste, corruption and incompetence.

MEET YOUR FRIENDLY GOVERNMENT WATCHDOGS AT YOUR LOCAL STREET FAIR

The UCWA meeting the public at street fairs is something new we tried in 2012, and it was a huge success and we look forward to continuing this effort.

Thanks to all the volunteers who gave up their precious free time to perform this civic duty. Everyone was encouraged and energized by meeting so many people who appreciate our work and share our concern for county government taxdollars and shenanigans.

We appreciated everyone who took the time to meet us for the first time, read our newspaper, joined our email list, purchased a T-Shirt, made a donation and especially to all of you who just gave us some words of encouragement. So many people were happy to know that someone was watching out for their county taxdollars and we

were all blown away by how many people already knew of our work.

Thanks for watching Union County government with us!



UC WATCHDOG ASSOCIATION

With most households in the Union County area owning a computer, there is no better time in the history of man for citizens to be informed and engaged with the governmental process.

The UCWA routinely requests public records pertaining to the expenditure of tax dollars by Union County government and the independent county authorities through the Open Public Records Act (OPRA) and posts them on our website for easy public access. Many of these documents are not posted on government websites.

SHINING A LIGHT ON GOVERNMENT

The UCWA maintains a presence at freeholder meetings and monitors county documents for red flags which would lead to further investigation. We are a public resource for citizens who do not know how to go about obtaining public records.

The Union County Board of Chosen Freeholders has been controlled by the Union County Regular Democratic Committee for over a decade now. All 9 freeholders are elected at-large. The voter registration demographics of the county suggest that it will be next to impossible to elect a freeholder who isn't appointed by the dominant party's power-brokers. A rival political party could only garner support from like minded people. An independent citizen watchdog group made up of people with different political affiliations is more appealing to citizens who want to be involved, yet not join a particular political party.

We hope to succeed in seeing more citizen participation in the electoral process by educating the public as to how county government affects their property taxes as well as their public safety. Holding the County of Union accountable to the people, will lead to greater government transparency and accountability.

LIKE US ON  FOLLOW US ON 

JOIN OUR MAILING LIST!

Fill out form below and send it to:
 UCWA, 1155 West Chestnut St., Suite 2B
 Union, NJ 07083
 or fax to: 908-709-9209
 or submit by email to:
info@UnionCountyWatchdog.org



Make a donation of \$20 or more and receive a T-shirt.
 (While supplied last. With this coupon.)

YES! Please keep me informed about Union County Government

Name _____

Address _____

Phone _____

Email _____

YES! I'd like to make a donation of:

\$ _____

and receive a T-shirt

Size: M : ___ L: ___

XL: ___ XXL: ___

Make Checks payable to UCWA.

COUNTYWATCHERS.COM: CITIZEN WATCHDOGS OF UNION COUNTY GOVERNMENT

A County Watchers Year in Review "2012"

The County Watchers have been publishing their blog since June 2005 in response to the cut backs of local media coverage.

Although the freeholders have a half a billion dollar budget and commands approximately 1/4 of our property tax bills most of what you read in the printed media are positive stories which come directly from the county's extensive office of public information. Union County is spending more on Public Information salaries than any other county in the state.

Since its formation the Union County Watchdog Association has been investigating county shenanigans and posting our findings to the internet for free public access.

The following are excerpts from our last year in review. To keep up to date please visit countywatchers.com daily or better yet, join our email list via request to info@unioncountywatchdog.org.

We do not share our contact list with anyone.

JANUARY

January 12, 2012

The Star-Ledger reports Spurned Union County official sues after being given \$120K do-nothing job.



Pictured is Rick Lapolla's former office is a storage closet with cinder block walls inside the county's juvenile detention center.

January 19, 2012

The Westfield Leader published an interview with Michael Murray, president of the Union County Alliance, which reveals that he quit last month. Excerpt: The Westfield Leader reached Mr. Murray on his cell phone on Monday. He declined to say how much money the Alliance receives from the freeholders in contracts, and when asked how many employees the Alliance has, he said "none of your business."

January 28, 2012

The County Watchers reported a former Union County employee lost his discrimination lawsuit. Robert Travisano alleged in a civil action that he was discriminated and retaliated against based on his age, disability, and political affiliation, asserting violations of the New Jersey Law Against Discrimination (LAD), and he very well may have been, however because of the way his suit was filed, he did not name the County of Union as his employer, his case was rejected.

FEBRUARY

February 17, 2012

County Watchers reports the UCWA has won another OPRA battle. The New Jersey Appellate Court upheld a decision by Union County Superior Court Judge Katherine Brock declaring the mailing list used for the Senior Newsletter, one of the taxpayer funded campaign mailers the county issues at election time, is a public record.

February 19 2012

County Watchers reports Hiring new corrections officers to save on over time, cost more in salaries and benefits.

February 24, 2012

County Watchers report the county is building a \$45 million courthouse, although the County is under no obligation to do so.



New Union County Courthouse rendition

February 29, 2012

County Watchers report Union County is not in the state health plan. The County denies the State Comptroller's audit finding government bodies and taxpayers could save millions by opting into the state health plan.

MARCH

March 4, 2012

The Star-Ledger reports the UCWA was being investigated by the State Treasury Department.

March 10, 2012

A County Watchers report that Musifest is canceled is followed-up with a Kane in Your Corner report. The county states that the cuts will save approximately \$1.2 million, despite former County Manager George Devanney's statement that that number is "grossly, grossly exaggerated".



Musicfest Cancelled

March 18, 2012

The County Watchers report on the Prosecutor's new Crime Lab leadership.

March 20, 2012

The County Watchers ask readers "Ever wonder where county EZ Pass transponders spend the weekend? Well, based on 8 weeks of EZ Pass statements supplied by the county (Oct-Nov 2011), it appears that at least two transponders made frequent weekend trips to New York. One even spent Thanksgiving day there!"

March 22, 2012

The Westfield Leader reported on the proposed skating center at Oak Ridge Park in Clark.

March 28, 2012

The County Watchers reports on a \$6,325 8-page study released by Rutgers on Musifest study which was quietly received by the county.

APRIL

April 11, 2012

The County Watchers report the Treasury Department thanked the UCWA for helping them improve their procedures, whatever they were.

April 13, 2012

The County Watchers first report the UCWA has filed a law suit in Union County Superior Court seeking access to investigatory records involving a former Union County employee, Patrick Scanlon, Jr., who is the son of freeholder Deborah Scanlon who resigned on March 1, 2012.



Freeholder Deborah Scanlon resigned in 2012. She was then hired as an employee - salary: \$74,900

April 18, 2012

A Union County Superior Court Judge ruled that the three Democratic freeholder primary challengers have been barred from running in the Union County Primary.

April 20, 2012

The Train is Stopped. Termination of Operating Agreement between the County of Union and M & E Railway is memorialized through correspondence. April 11, 2012 the Star-Ledger reported that the former head of M&E Railway and another former employee had been indicted for defrauding the state of more than \$800,000 in grants, the state Attorney General's Office said.

April 24, 2012

The UCWA presents a free seminar on understanding your property tax bill “Taxes and Debt in Union County”.

MAY

May 4, 2012

The County Watchers report on the Open Space Trust Fund raid details.

May 25, 2012

The County Watchers report that to get the 2012 budget passed the Local Finance Board grudgingly approves a One Shot borrowing gimmick that ‘kicks the can down the road’ yet still requires 160 layoffs in 2012. Read more.

JULY

July 2012

No one knows if the Union County Prosecutor’s term expired and why he might still be on the job.



*Prosecutor
Theodore Romankow*

July 3, 2012

The County Watchers report the freeholders cut spending on propoganda – thanks to the UCWA.

July 13, 2012

The County Watchers report on employee lawsuits filed in the aftermath of recent layoffs.

July 27, 2012

The County Watchers report Oakwood Plaza residents complain about the conditions at the Oakwood Plaza complex and Police brutality.

AUGUST

August 23, 2012

The County Watchers report that the County purchased portable Surveillance Platforms with Homeland Security funds and Senator Ray Lesniak’s girlfriend.



Surveillance Platforms

SEPTEMBER

September 9, 2012

The County Watchers report that one laid off employee managed to get hired back.

September 19, 2012

The Independent Press reported that Berkeley Heights will take up a study of leaving Union County for Morris or Somerset.

September 26, 2012

The County Watchers report on the Solar Panel Scam.

September 28, 2012

The Star-Ledger reports State Senator Ray Lesniak’s ex-chief of staff pleads guilty to failing to file tax returns.



*State Senator
Raymond Lesniak*

OCTOBER

October 3, 2012

The County Watchers report that freeholders are paid upwards of \$867.64 to attend each freeholder meeting.

October 8, 2012

The County Wachers report that the Galloping Hill Banquet Hall will be run out of the Union County Democratic Chairman’s Dining Room.

October 14, 2012

The County Watchers report that a prosecutor employee lawsuit was settled, details were heavily redacted.

October 14, 2012

The UCWA was at the Cranford Street Fair and that completed the season. Meeting the public at street fairs is something new they tried this year, and it was a huge success.

October 29, 2012

The County Watchers report that politics are most dangerous at the Jail.

NOVEMBER

November 4, 2012

The County Watchers report that Prosecutor Romankow is asked to do some explaining about his Musicfest 2012 investigation. At the writing of this year end review, no response from the Prosecutor has been received.

November 8, 2012

The Westfield Leader reported that the Democrat Freeholders extended their winning streak to 17 years at the county level by winning three seats on the Board of Chosen Freeholders. Incumbents Al Mirabella of Fanwood, 96,069, Mohamed Jalloh of Roselle, 89,704, and newcomer Bruce Bergen of Springfield, 91,209,

defeated Republicans Stephen Kozlovich of Union, 55,281, Diane Barabas of Westfield, 54,572, and Krzysztof Nowak of Cranford, 53,233. Democrats have had a 9-0 majority since 1998.

November 14, 2012

The County Watchers break the story on Generatorgate. 15-20 Union County employees are thought to have taken home generators and equipment in the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy. The County denies that the abuse was so widespread. At this writing of the Year in Review, no official report on the outcome of the prosecutor’s inquiry has been made.

November 24, 2012

The UCWA ask officials “Who are the Directors of the Union County Alliance that are responsible for our tax dollars?”

DECEMBER



Generatorgate

December 11, 2012

A Jury returned a guilty verdict against the Union County Improvement Authority (UCIA), which was found to have breached their contract with Verge Properties Urban Renewal LLC. Verge was awarded a re-imbursement of their out-of-pocket expenses in the amount of \$236,016.42.

December 13, 2012

The Local Source reports that Union County is still rewarding contracts to Birdsall despite ongoing investigation and a guilty plea, county gives contracts to consulting firm.

December 13, 2012

The Westfield Leader reports the freeholders authorized raises to department directors and non-contractual employees.

December 23, 2012

The Star-Ledger reports on cost overruns building the Galloping Hill Golf Banquet Facility.

FREEHOLDER SCANLON'S NEW POSITION WAS A BACK ROOM DEAL

By Tina Renna - February 25, 2013

In March 2012 Freeholder Scanlon announced she would be stepping down at the end of the year to make more time for her family, however she returned to the county payroll just one month after leaving office. She completed her term on December 31, 2012 and on February 1, 2013 she returned to the county payroll as a manager for a newly opened office within the county Department of Human Services at a salary of \$74,900. Her position is funded by grant monies set aside to help the needy with services such as food stamps, child support, refuges, home energy assistance, medical assistance, etc.

There was no public discussion about needing to create a new office within Human Services – hence needing a new office manager; and there was no official announcement about Scanlon's re-joining the county payroll. This was brought to the public's attention by the County Watchers after being tipped off by a source that Scanlon showed up for work seemingly out of the blue. Open Public Records Act requests to get more



Freeholder Deborah Scanlon as lady liberty details revealed proof that this was a back room deal.

The county stated there were no documents to provide for the following records requests: job postings; internal correspondence regarding the decision to make a new office within the county department of Human Services; ordinance creating the new office.

Employee position controls show that the county used a vacated position from County Counsel's office. However, there was no grant

funding that supported that position.

Scanlon's resume was the only one provided. The county is only allowed to release the resume of the applicant that was chosen for the position; however, they did not state that other resumes won't be released, which implies none were on file. The resume made no mention of her 15 years of freeholder work/accomplishments. Scanlon has 15 years vested in the state pension system. Her part-time annual freeholder salary was approximately \$30,000.

January 31, 2013 was the one-year anniversary of the County formerly opening an investigation into the matter involving Parks Department employees, including Freeholder Scanlon's stepson, Patrick Scanlon, Jr., and county owned chainsaws allegedly gone missing. This investigation is closed and Prosecutor Romankow decided that no criminal charges would be filed. The property was never recovered. Patrick Scanlon, Jr. resigned his county job just days after the county police began their investigation. He then was hired by Union Township.

GENERATORGATE – SHINING A LIGHT ON OUR CORRUPTED SYSTEM OF LAW AND ORDER

The County Watchers blog post titled: Generorgate – shining a light on our corrupted system of law and order, was posted by Tina Renna on December 12, 2012. Since then, Generorgate sure did go on to shine a light on our corrupted system of law and order. It culminated with the long-overdue replacement of Prosecutor Theodore Romankow, a proven political hack who protected the Democrat machine and used his office to protect the politically connected, while punishing the machine's detractors. Romankow has been replaced by Grace Park who once worked under Christopher Christie at the U.S. Attorney's Office.

To date no county employee has been disciplined for taking home public generators. The county has not apologized, nor have they ensured the public that this won't happen again. Here's an update:

At the June 13, 2013 freeholder meeting the Prosecutor's office announced that they completed their generator investigation, and no criminal charges will be filed. First Assistant Prosecutor Albert Cernadas, Jr., a holdover from the Romankow administration, stated that no law was broken because the employees didn't mean to permanently deprive county residents of the property – in other words the generators were only borrowed. County Counsel went on to state that the State Attorney General is



Pictured is a county generator on the front lawn of a county employee's home.

overseeing all misuse of generators by public officials/employees during Hurricane Sandy to ensure that it is handled in a consistent manner statewide. The prosecutor submitted their findings to the County Manager who is reviewing the report and will then discipline the employees – or not. There was no mention of Official Misconduct to date.

Who this involves: State Attorney General Jeff Chiesa has since been appointed by the governor to fill the US Senator seat left vacant by Senator Lautenberg's death. The new Acting Attorney General John Jay Hoffman worked under Chiesa. Hoffman previously served as Director of the Division of Investigations for the State Comptroller's Office under Matt Boxer.

The county hasn't officially confirmed the number of employees involved to date, it is alleged that 16 Union County employees took home generators during Sandy. The only person held accountable to date has been Tina Renna for bringing this to public's attention. The prosecutor used the full-force of his office in

what he was quoted as stating many times – Renna is “hindering a criminal investigation” by not revealing the names of employees who allegedly took home generators, and other equipment, for personal use. During a hearing in Union County Superior Court, which took 4 days, and many attorney hours, to determine if Renna was protected by NJ Newspersons Shield Law, there were nine (9) county prosecutor employees in the courtroom at one point. Two presenting the case, the other's just sitting in front of Renna staring her down while she was on the witness stand.

The fact all along was that the prosecutor knew no criminal charges would be filed. Romankow retiring with a fat pension, designed by legislation just for him, isn't enough. A new prosecutor who keeps on all of Romankow's staff – who he promoted just before leaving, sends an ominous message, and it sullies the reputation of Governor Christie. Christie is allowing this. The public deserves an explanation if the state would like us to have confidence in the Union County Prosecutor's office ever again.

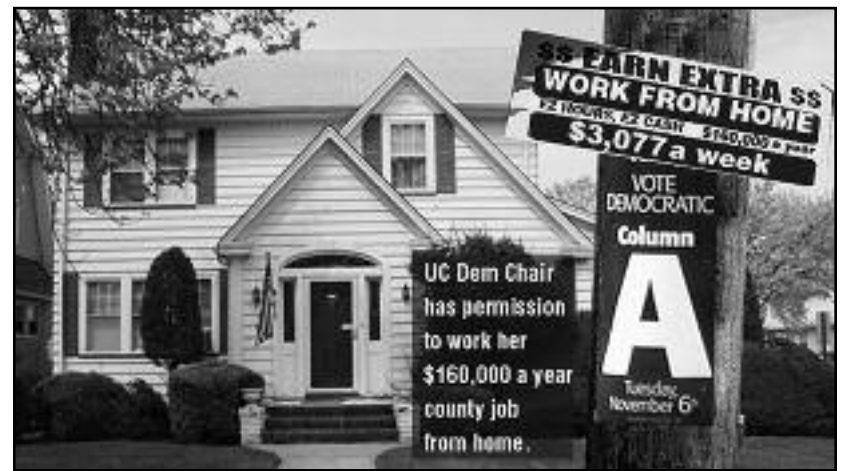
Union County used over \$40,000 in federal Sandy relief money to purchase 24 new generators, and rent 3 more immediately after Sandy – while county employees took home the generators on hand.

POWERBROKER DEFILIPPO QUILTS HER \$160,000 STAY AT HOME JOB

Charlotte DeFilippo, the stay at home Executive Director of the Union County Improvement Authority, resigned her position during an emergency meeting held on May 3, 2013. During the meeting DeFilippo also announced her resignation as the Chairman of the Union County Regular Democratic Committee.

DeFilippo had come under fire in recent weeks when the head of the state's Local Finance Board, Tom Neff, questioned her stay at home job and benefits. The UCIA was seeking the finance board's approval of approximately \$20 million in bonds. It was wildly reported that Neff took exception to her \$160,000 salary to supervise a staff of two people and other benefits including 35 vacation days. Neff also said when DeFilippo sat on the finance board in the mid 2000s, she frequently missed monthly meetings but was still paid a \$12,000 salary. Neff provided records saying she attended one regular meeting over a 10-month stretch in 2005. During her stint on the board from early 2004 to May 2006, she attended 25 percent of regular finance board meetings and just 7 percent of regular ethics meetings, according to the records. "She collected and cashed 100 percent of her paychecks for 25 percent of the work," Neff said. "That's the only thing the board members do — the meetings."

"It's taxpayer money — might as well just be flushed down the toilet," Neff was reported to



Protesters gathered outside of Charlotte DeFilippo's home office chanting \$600 a day we won't pay!

have said. "I'm not supporting this. I won't support anything that comes from the Union County Improvement Authority going forward until that situation isn't taken care of."

The story of DeFilippo's stay-at-home job, along with other alarming circumstances involving the UCIA day-to-day business operations, was first reported by the County Watchers in 2011. DeFilippo had permission to work from home since 2004. In 2000 she took over the position from the first executive director whose annual part-time salary was \$40,000 at the time. Her full-time salary was set at \$104,000.

DeFilippo did not report to the freeholders directly. Rather she was supposed to be supervised by the UCIA board which consisted of ten members. Seven of the ten members are county employees (one is retired), one works for the Plainfield Municipal Utilities Authority and they have a combined annual salary of over \$600,000. Two members have 24-hour use of county vehicles. The other 2 members are retired public employees, one is a former freeholder.

Although DeFilippo had permission to work from home, the county continued to pay \$2,500 a month rent for office space. The office had no working computers.

GOVERNOR REPLACES PROSECUTOR ROMANKOW WITH PARK

On May 16, 2013, The County Watchers broke the story that Union County Prosecutor Theodore Romankow's last day in office would be June 17th, 2013 and that he would be replaced by Grace Park who would serve as the Acting Prosecutor. The State Attorney General made the official announcement on May 23, 2013. Grace Park is a Westfield resident and former Assistant U.S. Attorney who worked closely with then U.S. Attorney Chris Christie.

Although the Prosecutor was of retirement age, it was expected that he would continue on until at least January 2014. However his office had come under fire in the weeks leading up to his replacement for his partisan approach in attempting to force County Watcher blogger Tina Renna to turn over confidential news sources and trample her First Amendment rights. Despite Romankow's heavy handed use of the full-force of his office, a Superior Court judge ruled that Renna was a journalist and protected by the New Jersey Newsperson's Shield Law.

Renna maintained that her sources were afraid of the Prosecutor and the



Theodore Romankow



Grace Park

retailiation they would face if they were revealed. It is widely believed that under Romankow's leadership, his close personal ties to the all-Democrat Union County freeholder board and the Union County Democrat Committee political machine required questioning his commitment to protecting the public interest. Romankow is a former mayor of Berkeley Heights and he was heavily involved in politics before become named Prosecutor by Governor James McGreevey. Examples of his recent work are his failure to properly investigate which

county employees took home county-owned generators during Hurricane Sandy, and his failure to prosecute anyone for stolen county chainsaws and substantial financial misdealings, including missing cash, related to the Union County Musicfest and State Senator Raymond Lesniak's nephew, who is the former Union County Manager. He also stood silent while the Union County Democratic Chairwoman worked her \$160,000 county job from home.

THE DEMISE OF RUNNELLS HOSPITAL

By Bruce Paterson | February 24, 2013

I attended a 2/7/2013 union county freeholder meeting where they had a presentation on the Runnells Hospital issue. Runnel's hospital is part of union county govt and is not actually a hospital but a nursing care and psychiatric facility. The presentation was given by CHR, a hospital consultant group that was hired to analyze the situation as follows: The Runnel's Hospital is running a deficit to the Union county taxpayers of \$12 million last year, \$17 million this year and next year is forecast to lose \$19 million. As recent as 2007, Runnells was near break-even with a "small" loss of \$500,000. First, CHR discussed 3 options presented to the Freeholders. One was to address enhancements or inefficiencies which they said could reduce the loss to \$10 mill. Second was to lease out the geriatric care beds to a private firm but this savings would be around \$4 mill. Third was the privatization of the nursing care facility while keeping the county psychiatric license. They suggested #3 may be the best direction. CHR noted that in the recent past 2-3 counties have already privatized their health services due to these counties were now losing "several" million dollars a year, unlike Union County which is losing 10's of millions of dollars. If sold, Union County could receive \$22 million for their facilities based on recent metrics. CHR stated doing nothing is not an option.

In discussion CHR noted the present main drivers were staff costs such as the census of staff, workers comp claims, hi-wages, increasing fringe and pension costs. He also noted the Medicaid reimbursable per bed has

been declining somewhat going from \$231/ per bed in 2009 to \$222 now. However, in 2006 to 2008 it had been at a lower average of \$210 when Runnells had lost only \$500,000. CHR considered this rate as "relatively flat" these many years. They did note that the rate per bed may go down to \$190 in the near future to match what the private sector receives, and thus creates the additional \$2 mill loss. The present breakeven cost of the Runnel's is \$275-300 per bed. Freeholder Sullivan near the end of this presentation noted to the public that it is the fault of low reimbursable not a failure to run the hospital nor mismanagement. But if reimbursables were "relatively flat" how could they be the blame for the loss going from \$500k to \$17 mill?

Plus a question begs to be asked: In privatizing county hospitals what motivates private health providers to buy hospitals such as Runnells and pay \$20 million dollars and yet think they can remain solvent at reimbursable rates of \$200/bed. Maybe it is NOT the reimbursable rate to the county but the Runnells break-even rate of \$300/bed. Was freeholder Sullivan wrong? Is he deflecting the blame away from him and his cronies?

The Union County Watchdog Association has noted on their website that Runnel's has been a "patronage pit" for many years with high paid friends, cronies and relatives being dumped on the payroll. The present staff count is around 450 employees. This concern was proven true when last year during the Runnel's dietary and housekeeping layoffs workers came to the freeholder meetings and stated there is much

waste with too many mid-level non-productive management jobs and not enough workers. One employee stated that a politician's relative has a manager's job overseeing one person. In last week's 2/21/2013 freeholder meeting nurses publicly noted that huge amounts of unused prescription drugs are being thrown away. Runnell's director Wheeler stated that this is all due to government mandates. But one simple solution would be to use a local pharmacy like CVS for on demand. And at this same meeting freeholder Sullivan again was regurgitating his talking point that Medicaid reimbursables are the culprit, wrongly deflecting blame. It is simply county mismanagement.

But sadly we do see an end point. If someone can jettison \$19 million in yearly losses and deposit \$20 million into their coffers, this becomes a no brainer. The irony here is that the ones who screwed up Runnells Hospital are the same ones to determine the fate of the hospital and all the staff.

PATRONAGE JOBS ARE BEING MOVED FROM RUNNELLS HOSPITAL

By Tina Renna | February 21, 2013

At tonight's freeholder meeting an ordinance will be introduced which in effect will allow the County to move many of their Runnells patronage positions into other departments thereby saving these employees from layoff when Runnells is privatized, as well as giving these well connected employees bumping rights over other long-standing employees. A list of these Runnells employees will be made available as soon as the county hands it over.

UNION COUNTY GOLF OPERATIONS LOST OVER \$11.25 MILLION IN 2012

By John Bury

January 27, 2013

Officially Union County claimed to have made a profit of \$680,853 in 2012 but the check registries tell a different story.

Kemper Sports Management (KSM), a private company, manages county golf operations primarily so most golf workers (though not the head of golf operations) no longer get the gold-plated pension and health insurance benefits that come with public employment. The county kindly posts their check registries on www.ucnj.org so it's a simple matter to check how much KSM and the other golf vendors got paid in 2012. As for income figures, we must believe the county since there is no revenue registry.

For KSM that number came to \$4,224,630.76



that they got from the county in 2012 for all services, including construction management.

Even though KSM manages the courses the county still picks up a lot of expenses. For 2012 that came to \$609,884.75 including \$300,000 paid to the Union County Improvement Authority for something called "Start Up Funds for Golf".

Then there's that building going on around Exit 138 of the Parkway. Since the county is not listing any amortization figure for 2012 we have to assume that the full cost of the new clubhouse applies to the year in which Claremont Construction, campaign donor to UC Democratic candidates, is being paid – \$10,461,698.28 in 2012 alone.

Interestingly enough the county says the cost of utilities were \$159,036 for both courses in 2012 though when they wanted to close down Oak Ridge in 2009 they estimated (i.e. lied about) the cost of utilities for Oak Ridge alone as being \$200,000. Is it the solar panels?

Put it all together and it comes to a net loss of \$11,249,362.79 for 2012 with many, many more red numbers coming, especially with the UCIA's involvement – right Linden taxpayers?