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# THE TIMES

## Scotch Plains - Fanwood

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CELEBRATING GRADUATION...Lewis Mingo, Jr., left, Chairman of the Union County Board of Chosen Freeholders, and County Sheriff Ralph Froehlich both spoke at Union County's Operation Recognition on Tuesday.

## Condominiums Considered Over Downtown Businesses

By FRED ROSSI  
Specially Written for The Times

Discussions are currently underway in Scotch Plains about altering some downtown zoning ordinances to allow building owners to construct second- and third-story condominiums above businesses on Park Avenue, East Second Street and East Front Street.

The goal would be to further bolster the central business district, which has become a point of focus among local officials and businesspeople in recent years as efforts to make the downtown area more competitive with neighboring towns and local shopping malls have become more of a priority.

The Township Planning Board is considering the proposal, which is currently being studied by local officials and other professionals. Once this study is completed, the Planning Board will be in a position to make some formal recommendations to the Township Council, which would have to approve any changes in the relevant zoning ordinances.

Councilman Guy Celentano, a

member of the Towne Center Task Force, an advisory group of local business owners and government officials, said the addition of second- and third-story condominiums would greatly bolster the downtown business district.

Currently, there are second-story apartments above a handful of stores in the area, but Councilman

Celentano said condominiums, as opposed to apartments, would be more beneficial.

"Apartments don't have the density restrictions that condominiums do," he told *The Times of Scotch Plains-Fanwood*. Therefore, allowing condominiums to be built would permit the construction of much larger

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## BOE Holds Annual Organization Meeting

By JENNIFER PINTO  
Specially Written for The Times

The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Board of Education held its annual organization meeting on April 25. New BOE members, Susan Dyckman, receiving 661 votes; Trip Whitehouse, receiving 1401 votes and veteran member Edward J. Saridaki, receiving 1372 votes; were sworn in by Board Secretary/Business Administrator Anthony DelSordi.

With the retirement of former board President Dr. Sheldon and former Vice President Jessica Simpson, members of the board elected a new President and Vice President. Nominated for President were Lance Porter, now approaching his second term and Edward J. Saridaki, now serving his third term. However, with more nominations, Porter was elected President. Linda Nelson, now serving her third year, was voted Vice President by all board members.

As part of the annual organization meeting the board approved *The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Press*, *The Times*, and *The Courier News* for publication of all legal/public notices.

The setting for regularly scheduled monthly meetings will continue to be at the administration building on Evergreen Avenue and Cedar Street in Scotch Plains. Agenda Setting Sessions of the board will be held on the second Thursday of each

month and regular public meetings will be held on the fourth Thursday of each month.

In other business, the board authorized an agreement with Barre & Company from Union, New Jersey, to conduct the 2002-2003 statutory audit for an annual fee of \$22,360, a four percent increase from last year.

For legal services the board contracted Casper P. Boehm Jr., Esq. for the 2002-2003 school year for a cost of \$103,464, a five percent increase from last year.

An agreement for negotiating services with Cassetta, Taylor and Whalen for 2002-2003 was approved for the amount of \$26,174, a four percent increase from last year.

The board also re-appointed Mrs. Lori Majeski as Treasurer of School Monies, for the 2002-2003 school year for an annual salary of \$7,500.

Designations of official depositories for investment purposes were approved by the board, these institutions are: United Trust Bank, First Union Bank, New Jersey Cash Management Fund, Summit Bank and MBIA-Class.

Monthly tax payments by the municipalities for the 2002-2003 school year were approved. The total tax payments for Scotch Plains equals \$39,184,200.37 and \$10,627,021.63 for Fanwood.

In other business, the board ap-

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## Financial Questions Loom Regarding County and State Incinerator Debt

By DEBORAH MADISON  
Specially Written for The Times

On April 1, the private company that leases and operates the Union County incinerator, located in Rahway, filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection.

Covanta Energy Corporation, the multi-national company based in Fairfield, and previously known as Ogdin-Martin Corporation, leases the incinerator from the Union County Utilities Authority (UCA), under a 25-year contract that began in 1997.

Spokesman for Covanta, Business Manager Howard Rothman, told *The*

*Westfield Leader* and *The Times of Scotch Plains-Fanwood* that the firm will not default on repayment of the project loan and that its solid waste management operation remains financially sound, despite the bankruptcy.

"Ogdin-Martin was engaged in several less-profitable business ventures, which the bankruptcy will allow Covanta to divest itself of," Mr. Rothman stated.

However, Kerry Blanchard, Past President of Concerned Citizens of Union County, a Rahway-based citizens' group opposed to incinerators, told *The Leader* and *The Times*,

"Covanta actually divested itself of Ogdin-Martin's other business interests back in March of 2001. This does not agree with their reasons for declaring bankruptcy last month."

Bob Carson, President of Concerned Citizens, said he has been trying to obtain the refinancing agreement between the Utilities Authority and Ogdin-Martin. However, Mr. Carson said that the Utilities Authority has repeatedly thwarted his attempts at obtaining the documents.

David Pringle, President of the Cranford-based New Jersey Environmental Federation, another citizens' watchdog group that is also opposed to incinerators, told *The Leader* and *The Times*, "The Utilities Authority and the county have been historically uncooperative and hostile in providing us with this information."

Mr. Pringle explained that there have been several bills passed in the last 10 years, which have channeled more than \$220 million in state funds into bailing out the financially failing solid waste facilities in New Jersey.

Some of that money has been received by Union County, although he could not verify how much.

Assemblywoman Linda d. Stender told *The Leader* and *The Times*, "When I was Chairman of the Freeholder Board, the Freeholders recognized

the garbage crisis was looming. Owners of the landfills in Pennsylvania, New Jersey and New York claimed that they were close to reaching capacity and landfill prices rose sharply. As a result of this garbage crisis in the 80s, the state ordered all of the counties to assess their current solid waste disposal methods and to devise a solid waste management plan.

"At that time, there were only three options for dealing with waste disposal: burn it, bury it or dump it in the ocean. All three presented risks and drawbacks. And all three options had

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## Fanwood Board Denies Subdivision Appeal For Pleasant Ave. Lot

By SUZETTE F. STALKER  
Specially Written for The Times

Concluding a three-part hearing that began in February, the Fanwood Planning Board last week voted 7-2 to deny an area company's appeal for permission to subdivide a piece of property at 76/80 Pleasant Avenue.

Toby Two Realty Co., L.L.C. had a contract to purchase the 100-foot wide lot from its current owners, pending board approval of its petition. The South Plainfield-based company, which required several bulk variances, planned to subdivide the parcel into two, 50-foot-wide lots.

A single-family Cape Cod house has existed on one section of the property for some 50 years, and the applicant hoped to build a two-story, four-bedroom Center Hall Colonial home on the second lot. The site is located in an R-75 zone.

Neighbors strongly opposed the application, arguing the proposed subdivision did not conform with either the surrounding area or the borough's current zoning ordinance. They also voiced concerns about such issues as storm water management.

During the extended hearing on the appeal, Toby Two's principals and several expert witnesses testified that the subdivision would be a plus for the area.

Principal Donald Sisto maintained at the initial hearing that the development would provide additional residential housing in the community.

He said his company intended to install drywells on each of the two proposed lots to maintain adequate drainage. The applicant's plan also called for the removal of an existing two-car garage and a section of as-

phalt to minimize overall increase in impervious surface coverage.

Peter Wolfson, the Morristown attorney for Toby Two Realty, additionally confirmed at the board's April 24 regular meeting that the applicant would abide by all Borough Engineer Richard Marsden's recommendations regarding storm water management on the site.

Neighbors, who were allowed to give testimony at last week's meeting, were not assuaged by the applicant's arguments.

Phyllis Mahoney of 70 Pleasant Avenue argued the subdivision would not conform with other lots in the neighborhood, most of which are 75-foot wide or larger. She added she and her family would be looking at "a huge monstrosity of a house."

She also expressed reservations about the long-term effectiveness of the drywells in maintaining drainage, noting these subterranean chambers would require diligent maintenance.

Helene Miale, who lives at 84 Pleasant Avenue, stated that construction of the proposed house on a new, 50-by-100 foot lot contradicted the goals of the borough's zoning ordinance, which prescribes a minimum lot size of 75 by 100 feet.

Saying this kind of development would create "a crowded, inconsistent effect in our neighborhood," where only 10 percent of the homes are situated on 50-by-100-foot lots, Ms. Miale warned the board that approving Toby Two's appeal could set a precedent for other such subdivisions.

Similar sentiments were expressed last week by Herbert Ribner, a re-

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## Freeholders Unveil 2002 Budget Containing Spending, Tax Hikes

By FRED ROSSI  
Specially Written for The Times

Last week, the Union County Freeholders introduced a 2002 budget that is higher than the proposal submitted in January by then-County Manager Michael Lapolla. This year's \$324.488 million spending plan is 2 percent higher than last year's budget, but the proportion that will be funded by local

property taxes will be higher than in the past several years.

None of the Freeholders commented publicly on the budget at last Thursday's regular meeting. The public hearing and vote is set for Thursday, May 23. Official property tax levies on the county's 21 municipalities, which are set by the Board of Taxation, were not available at last week's meeting.

More than half the budget, \$173.8 million, will be funded through property taxes. This represents 54 percent of the spending plan, a level last seen in 1997. Slightly more than one-fourth of the budget will be funded by county revenue, while 14 percent will come from state and federal revenues and just under 5 percent will come from the county's anticipated \$15 million surplus, which is one-third lower than last year.

The biggest portion of the county budget, about 28 percent, will be earmarked for health and welfare programs and services administered by, among others, the Department of Human Services and the Divisions of Youth Services, Aging, and Social Services. General government functions account for almost 20 percent of this year's budget, while regulatory functions such as the County Sheriff's Office, Public Safety and the Taxation and Election Boards make up about 17 percent.

In the three months between Mr. Lapolla's submission of his budget proposals and last week's formal introduction, several areas saw increases in their final appropriations levels, including judiciary, regulation, roads and bridges, health and welfare and recreation.

The county's capital budget will total just under \$60 million, of which about three-fourths will be derived from county funds, such as bonds and notes, with the bulk of the remaining \$15.5 million coming from grants and Open Space Trust Fund revenue.

In other business at its meeting, the Freeholder Board introduced a bond ordinance to authorize construction of a new \$14 million academic building at the Union County Vocational-Technical School in Scotch Plains.

The Freeholders also honored Victoria Fosdal and James Alfano, students at Terrill Middle School in Scotch Plains, by naming them to be among the first recipients of the county's Volunteer Recognition Program.

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HYPNOTIZED...An all-night fundraiser for S.M.A.C., or Student Movement Against Cancer, was held at Scotch Plains-Fanwood High School from April 26 to 27. Entertainer and internationally-known hypnotist, John Cerbone, performed for students. Pictured, above, are: Tracy Salmon, Barie Salmon, Angelica D'Annunzio, Rob Mattar, David Baumwoll, Jesse Rogowsky, Emily Caballero, Jackie Fiorino, Chrissy Perrotta, Ray DiNizo, Mr. Cerbone, Dan Zelikman and Josh Finkelstein.

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CYAN YELLOW MAGENTA BLACK

## Financial Questions Loom Regarding County and State Incinerator Debt

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opponents," Mrs. Stender explained. "The incinerator option seemed like the best alternative at that time, and we were assured of the best, state-of-the-art pollution control technology available," she added.

As a consulting engineer who worked on several "Trash to Cash" projects, some involving those of Ogden-Martin, along with others throughout the country, Horace Corbin, Publisher of *The Leader* and *The Times*, reflected on the 1980s garbage crisis in New Jersey.

"Solid waste disposal at that time was, and still is, a major challenge for our society. In the late 80s and early 90s, landfills in Pennsylvania, Ohio and elsewhere were without competition; with claims that landfills were filled up, rates were skyrocketing," Mr. Corbin related.

"The creation of incinerators had the beneficial result of creating competition for the landfills and rates fell dramatically — staying that way today," he said.

*The Leader* and *The Times* asked the Utilities Authority to confirm the amount of the outstanding bond obligation of Covanta, along with other terms of the lease agreement, and whether the Utilities Authority has verified the financial stability of Covanta.

Public Information spokesman for the county, Sebastian D'Elia, said it would take his office several weeks to provide *The Leader* and *The Times* with this information. No one from the Utilities Authority returned calls from the newspaper.

Mr. Carson told *The Leader* and *The Times* that none of New Jersey's five incinerators have been financially sound since a Supreme Court ruling in 1997 overturned existing flow control legislation. Flow control was a mandate that assured the incinerators a high volume and steady stream of garbage. The incinerators charged towns and private haulers fees high enough to meet their loan repayment obligations.

When flow control was ruled unconstitutional, towns and private haulers were permitted to contract with less costly landfills out of state. The five counties, including Union County, which built incinerators then were thrust into a position of economic disadvantage.

Because of this, the UCUA was required to refinance the bond for the Rahway incinerator. The county also entered into a lease agreement with Ogden-Martin, which incorporated a "put or pay" requirement that obligated the county to provide a minimum tonnage or pay the difference.

Currently, the State of New Jersey is developing legislation to bail out financially troubled county incinerators. Mrs. Stender said that current legislation would not benefit Union County, because it was designed to bail out only those incinerators that are financially failing,

which is no longer the case in Union County, since the refinance agreement was made.

"This bill punishes Union County for having done the right thing two years ago," Mrs. Stender commented. She said attorneys are reviewing the details to see if Union County can somehow be reimbursed for the refinancing agreement.

The financing and operation of waste disposal in New Jersey has had a long history marked by federal probes and indictments of public officials on charges of fraud, bribery and corruption.

A grand jury investigation, launched in 1994, into the funding of the bonds that financed the construction of New Jersey's five incinerators, resulted in subpoenas, arrests and plea bargains for several public officials, who were cabinet members of then Governor Jim Florio.

Securities firms that financed the projects were accused of making bribes. The federal probes also charged that public officials improperly used their influence to initiate construction of each of the \$250 million incinerators and that they then hired firms that they owned to provide legal and financial services to the utility authorities in several counties, reaping millions of dollars in profits.

Environmental groups, such as the Green Party and Concerned Citizens, claim that recycling could eliminate 70 to 90 percent of New Jersey's incineration needs, but doesn't get supported as long as the incinerators need to be fed.

Concerned Citizens' chief opposition to the incinerators involves environmental and health concerns.

Mr. Corbin commented that the viability and performance of any such system depends on several factors. "Financial soundness, political stability, technical excellence and efficiency of management are required on a long-term basis," he said. "Of course, generating less trash would help the country greatly. Looking at a box of Cheerios, anyone can see that the amount of wrapping versus actual cereal represents a significant part of the garbage problem."

"Even though New Jersey now has some of the best recycling laws, at that time, it was not an option for dealing with the majority of New Jersey's garbage," Mrs. Stender remarked.

"In order for recycling to become a viable alternative, consumers as well as packaging producers would have to drastically change their methods of packaging and discarding of waste," she stated.

"That alternative, although gaining impetus, will take many years before it can be a replacement for burning or burying the millions of tons of garbage produced by New Jersey every year," Mrs. Stender added.

"Now that the Staten Island Landfill is closed and New York City

trash is entering the picture, this adds tremendous pressure to New Jersey's system of solid waste disposal — we're the largest garbage crossroad in the world," Mr. Corbin noted.

Westfield resident and former Mayor Garland "Bud" Boothe was Vice Chairman of the UCUA during the 1980s. He worked with the Freeholders and other legislators in planning and implementing the incinerator for Union County.

Mr. Boothe also served on the Union County Solid Waste Authority Commission (UCSWAC) for eight years. He was intrinsically involved in all aspects of planning not only the Rahway incinerator, but also Union County's recycling programs for hazardous waste and computers, before he became Mayor of Westfield.

Mr. Boothe explained that in the 1980s, the garbage crisis was critical. Landfills in Pennsylvania and New Jersey were suddenly all being shut down.

"Pennsylvania didn't want our garbage trucked into their state and our trucks were being harassed," Mr. Boothe recalled. "The crisis got so bad that we held discussions about how we could stockpile garbage in Westfield if it came to that," he said.

After extensive research, with input from engineering experts, and after visiting many different facilities, Mr. Boothe said it was concluded that building the incinerator was the best, most economical and sound decision.

The incinerator was well run and very financially viable before flow control was stopped, Mr. Boothe said. The profits made from selling the electricity offset the cost of running the facility and defrayed the tipping fee charges considerably.

It was only after flow control was stopped that the tipping fees had to become more competitive, Mr. Boothe said.

"You can always find some hole in the ground in another state that may be cheaper, but is that really the best solution, to depend on another state for our waste problem?" he asked.

"We tried very hard to work with the environmentalists from the Concerned Citizens group, but they were intractable," Mr. Boothe remarked.

"We asked them for another solution, but they had none. And I don't agree with them that incineration discourages recycling. Just look outside on recycling days. Everyone's recycling whatever they can, but that doesn't solve the whole problem," he said.

Mr. Boothe added, "I think that we made the right decision, and 30 years from now, people will say that we did the right thing, unlike New York City, which has had their head in the sand and are now unprepared to handle their own garbage problems."

Pollution control regulations, along with environmental studies cited by the opposition groups and supported by the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, will be explored in the next installment of this series.



**MEMORIAL TREE...**In memory of the victims of September 11, The Professional Landscape Alliance (PLA) of Central New Jersey donated a tree to McKinley Elementary School in Westfield. Pictured, left to right, for the Arbor Day tree planting, are: PLA members Joe Morrison and Manny Carlino with McKinley's Acting Principal Earl Tankard, center. The officials are pictured with Nick Polack, Kevin Coulson, Tian Xu, Soffie Fetter and Theresa Carlino.

## Fanwood Bd. Denies Subdivision Appeal

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tired Merck & Co. chemical engineer who has lived at 208 Forest Road for the past 36 years.

In his remarks, he cited a section of Fanwood's zoning ordinance that seeks "to restrict further residential development, given the densities already existing in the borough."

In response to questions from Lewis Markowitz, the Westfield attorney for another neighbor opposed to the appeal, Mr. Ribner said he did not feel previous testimony by William Hamilton, the applicant's planner, had adequately addressed the density issue or the advantage to the neighborhood of subdividing the lot.

Deciding it was not relevant to the current application, the board subsequently denied, by a 7-2 vote, a motion by Mr. Markowitz that a resolution of a similar application in 1994 be entered into evidence.

In the earlier petition, the Planning Board denied a subdivision request involving a 125-foot-wide lot on the opposite side of Pleasant Avenue. "Each case stands on its own merit," remarked board member John Celardo.

Mr. Markowitz's client, Michael Giambalvo, an architect and longtime resident of 79 Pleasant Avenue, said he believed the subdivision would provide "no benefit to the neighborhood whatsoever."

He confirmed that of the 28 lots located within 200 feet of 76/80 Pleasant Avenue, only seven are 50 feet wide, and of 20 lots on Pleasant Avenue between Estelle Lane and Forest Road, 85 percent measure greater than 50 feet.

Realtor Patricia Plante, an Oakwood Court resident and the listing agent for the property, described herself as a "lone wolf" in supporting the subdivision bid, which she believed would benefit the community by providing additional residential housing at an affordable price.

She said "it would be a shame" if the existing Cape Cod were to be demolished to pave the way for construction of a larger house on the single lot — a possible outcome if the subdivision were denied.

Mr. Wolfson argued that the current owners of the property, Lawrence and Stella Sondergaard, were entitled to relief since they had purchased the property as two

separate lots prior to the enactment of zoning regulations in Fanwood in 1954.

Per the New Jersey Supreme Court's 1967 "Lochner versus Campoli" ruling, adjacent lots under the same ownership, where at least one of the lots was of substantial size, would automatically be merged.

In rendering their decision, the majority of board members felt the applicant had not, in the words of board member John Deitch, "met the burden of proof" that the proposed subdivision would be beneficial to the neighborhood.

Mr. Deitch said there were no characteristics about the property, such as shape or size, that would prevent it from being sold for residential development.

Council President Joel Whitaker, the governing body's Liaison to the Planning Board, said he did not feel Toby Two Realty's petition reflected the goals of either the local zoning ordinance or the New Jersey Land Use Ordinance, and that the current trend in Fanwood is toward larger homes.

Both Mayor Louis Jung, who also sits on the Planning Board, and board member John Gurley cited residents' passionate opposition to the subdivision as strongly influencing their decision to deny the appeal.

Board Chairman Gregory Cummings and Vice Chairman Eric Hess both voted in favor of the application. Noting that "something will be built on the property," Mr. Cummings said he would rather see a second, smaller home there than a large structure on a single lot.

Referencing the section of the zoning ordinance concerning a restriction on further residential development, Mr. Hess said "restrict" does not mean "eliminate."

He listed what he considered positive aspects of the plan, such as additional housing at an affordable price and storm water management provisions.

The board Vice Chairman added that while the current owners may face a "self-imposed" hardship by not being able to sell the property as independent lots, the current situation was created by the implementation of the 1954 zoning regulations.

## Freeholders

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The two students spearheaded a fundraiser for a Scotch Plains family that lost a parent in the September 11 attacks. In addition to raising more than \$10,000, the two students also organized follow-up assistance for the family, including babysitting and the establishment of a scholarship for the family's children.

In other business, Holly E. Wetscher of Westfield was among three individuals reappointed to three-year terms on the county's Advisory Board on the Disabled. The county will also donate \$2,500 to Project Graduation at the Scotch Plains-Fanwood High School next month.

## Condominiums

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

units and also force "a change in the exterior facades" of all the buildings, something, he said, that "would really change the look of the downtown."

Mr. Celentano also maintained that parking would not be greatly affected by the addition of new condominiums. Given the density restrictions imposed, having all condominiums above the downtown stores would reduce the parking requirements, he said, while having all apartments would increase the parking needs.

In addition, having residential owners — people who may tend to be more financially secure — rather than renters living above the businesses should also give a boost to the retail outlets and restaurants at the street level.

The business owners are "doing cartwheels over this idea," Mr. Celentano said. "They love it." And he said the handful of downtown property owners he has spoken with about the proposal have expressed their support as well.

The Councilman said he could not predict the timetable for any Planning Board action, but expressed his belief that if the ordinance changes were to ultimately be approved, it would be one of the final pieces in the rejuvenation of the downtown business district.

In recent years, new thematic lighting has been put into place. In addition, new benches, planters and trash receptacles have been placed in the area. Last month, work was begun on red brick-appearing walkways at crosswalks in the downtown area.

Discussions are also underway with business owners on the addition of new sidewalk pavers in front of their establishments.

## SP-F School Bd.

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proved Killam Associates to prepare plans and specifications for field improvements at the SP-F High School. According to the proposal made by Killam Associates on April 12, the cost of the project should not exceed \$55,000. The project begins at the end of June and is due to be completed by the following softball/baseball season.

John Paterson, a high school English teacher for over 30 years at the SP-F High School, spoke as a member of the public. Mr. Paterson expressed his views regarding appreciation for good teachers and the importance of contract negotiations. He mentioned how the high school has lost a few wonderful teachers due to poor negotiations. In reply, board member, Thomas Russo replied by stating that teachers choose to leave the high school to go to higher paying districts and that is something out of the board's control.

In curriculum news, summer assignments were discussed using a PowerPoint presentation that can be viewed on [www.spfk12.org](http://www.spfk12.org). According to Dr. Kathleen Regan, Superintendent for Instruction, many students will be able to choose from a list of authors, instead of being limited to specific books. This option will give the student more liberty in deciding what to read over the summer. Also, the public library will work together with the school system by holding discussion sessions on books for interested students.

The next public meeting will be at 8 p.m. on Thursday, May 9.

## COUNCIL DECIDES TO CHECK CONSTITUTION REGARDING RELIGIOUS SYMBOLS, GIFTS

# Westfield Mayor Appoints Committee To Work With The Atlantic Group

By LAUREN S. PASS  
Specially Written for The Times

**WESTFIELD** -- On Tuesday night, the Westfield Town Council held a special public meeting in order to have a second reading and pass an ordinance changing the price of the permit fee for junk week from \$50 to \$65.

The council then held their regular conference session where they spent over an hour in closed conference to discuss labor relations with the Policemen's Benevolent Association (PBA) of the Westfield Police Department, whose contract is up for renewal.

During the conference session, Mayor Gregory McDermott announced that he would be signing the agreement with The Atlantic Group after the meeting. He said he has also selected the group to meet regularly with Patrick Henry from Atlantic.

The group will consist of Democratic Fourth Ward Councilman and Public Works Chairman Lawrence Goldman, Republican Second Ward Councilman and Chairman of the Transportation, Parking and Traffic Committee (TPT) Rafael Betancourt, Democratic Third Ward Councilwoman and Chairwoman of the Public Safety Committee Claire Lazarowitz, Mayor McDermott for the First Ward; Executive Director of the Downtown Westfield Corporation Sherry Cronin and Charlie Weidman, who was the Chairman of the Parking Commission.

Meetings will also include Town Administrator James Gildea and Town Engineer Kenneth Marsh as needed.

Council members continued a conversation on religious symbols being placed on town property.

"We'll all have a difference of opinion because it's personal," Mayor McDermott

said. He suggested that the council allow things to continue as they were before and approve those individuals and organizations that want to put up holiday items.

Democratic Fourth Ward Councilwoman Susan Jacobson said that if this was going to come to a council vote, she felt that council members should hear the suggestion from the Mayor's Blue Ribbon Committee, which included members of the clergy.

Councilwoman Lazarowitz stated that she had spoken to many people regarding the committee recommendation and had received positive responses.

Democratic First Ward Councilman Carl Salisbury said he believes decisions regarding what symbols have been placed on town property in the past, and what would be placed in the future, must be examined to see if they comply with the Constitution.

"As a governing body we have a sacred obligation to comply with Constitutional requirements," he stated.

Councilman Goldman agreed with Councilman Salisbury, as Town Attorney Robert Cockren stated that he will look into these Constitutional statutes.

The council will also have the first reading of three ordinances next week, which will all be for 2002 projects. These new ordinances change the language to allow the town to better control debt service.

According to Mr. Gildea, this new language will allow all projects to be lumped into one, so that the monies will be available and projects can begin right away, rather than waiting on separate ordinances for each.

Mr. Marsh commented that an advantage to this ordinance would be that when some projects go under budget and others go over budget, the monies are now in the same fund and can be interchanged more easily.

Mayor McDermott commented that all the projects currently in the hopper could begin once the money is available, allowing road projects to be done in the summer when the town is quiet.

Councilman Betancourt gave his TPT report. He stated that the Rahway Avenue project is due to be completed at the end of May. He went on to say that residents voiced their concerns about the difficulty negotiating a left hand turn onto Clifton Street with the bump outs; and a resident's complaint regarding not being informed of the project.

Mr. Marsh stated that the bump outs seemed wider right now because the cones are there and construction is in progress. He added that on South Avenue in Plainfield the road is 22 feet wide, and the narrowest point on Rahway Avenue will be 28 feet wide.

Mayor McDermott and the council concurred that the project was discussed in public meetings and was in the newspapers.

Councilman Betancourt also reported the possibility of closing South Chestnut Street for 30 days in order to study the traffic patterns.

Mayor McDermott had previously contacted the Mayor of Garwood, because with Garwood's permission, the Department of Transportation (DOT) would allow the town to close the street, but Garwood denied the request due to a change in traffic flow near the schools.

The council will be passing a resolution to close South Chestnut Street during baseball season, now through October, from 5 to 8 p.m. daily, as well as the current closures that take place on Saturday and Sunday.

Mr. Gildea will also contact the DOT so that they may investigate the possibility of a 30-day closure. The investigation by the DOT is anticipated to take up to three months.

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