

Town Council Defers Demolition Due to Health, Safety Concerns

By MICHAEL J. POLLACK
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD - Before the public session of Tuesday's meeting, the town council held a 35-minute discussion on whether to pass a resolution approving a demolition on 835 Highland Avenue.

Tom and Beth Mellina, who now live on Dartmoor, wish to demolish their house. However, Ed and Tracy

Dugan of 330 Hillside Avenue claim they would be negatively impacted if the council approved the measure.

Mrs. Mellina told *The Westfield Leader* that in 1935, the Cooper family, who owned the present-day Dugan house, legally sold the Highland Avenue property for \$1.

Mr. Dugan told *The Leader* that "several easements were established in 1935...to provide protection against

the wasteline being damaged or ever built upon."

Mrs. Mellina said the home to be demolished was erected in 1938. At that time, she said, many people had wells and hooked into the town's public water system via Highland Avenue. The Coopers' water and sewage lines run through the present Mellina property and onto Hillside Avenue.

The Dugans, whose home was built in 1925, said their lines still run under the home in question, and the family is concerned that when the demolition occurs, the lines may be crushed.

The Dugans, who have easements for sewer, water and drainage runoff lines, said they are not asking to stop the demolition, only to have the lines re-routed.

In the pre-conference meeting, Town Attorney Robert Cockren said while he has seen "nothing remotely like this," the issues are "between private property owners."

When First Ward Councilman Sal Caruana proposed deferring the demolition, Fourth Ward Councilman Jim Foerst told the council, "This body has no more than an oversight role. I don't see how the council can avoid issuing a permit." The councilman said the council could force itself into "unfortunate litigation" if it did not approve the resolution.

Once on the dais, First Ward Councilman Peter Echausse, in favor of deferring, said, "I'm tired of us kowtowing for fear of a legal repercussion." He added that it was "unfathomable" for a builder not to work towards a solution with the Dugans, saying, "All they are looking [at] is the safety of their family and their

CONTINUED ON PAGE 12



GAINING CITIZENSHIP...Viera Bigosinski, the wife of Westfield Councilman Tom Bigosinski, became a United States citizen on November 9. Mrs. Bigosinski was born and raised in Czechoslovakia (later the Slovak Republic) and came to the United States 12 years ago. Also pictured are her sons Luke and David.

Developer Opts Not to Rent St. Anne's School to UCESC

By PAUL J. PEYTON
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

GARWOOD - Developer James Ward has broken off negotiations to lease the former St. Anne's School on Second Avenue to the Union County Educational Services Commission (UCESC) for the new home of the Hillcrest Academy North. Mr. Ward is the owner by contract of the now-defunct St. Anne's School.

Hillcrest is currently located in the former Lincoln School in Westfield. Earlier this year, the Westfield Board of Education opted not to renew the UCESC lease after four students were arrested in the spring for vandalizing one vehicle and stealing another. The UCESC appealed its case in court, and an administrative law judge gave the UCESC until the end of the school year to find a new home for Hillcrest. The Westfield BOE wants to use the Lincoln School for an early-childhood development center.

"At this time, after having had the opportunity to talk to many residents of Garwood, it has become apparent to me that the people of Garwood do not want the facility to remain a school, but instead would prefer housing specifically tailored for the people of Garwood who wish to remain in the community as they grow older," Mr. Ward said in a letter dated No-

vember 20 that was mailed to 150 Garwood residents.

"I have now decided to continue with my original plans to construct age-restricted housing on this site for the people of Garwood, and I have withdrawn from negotiations with the Union County Educational Services Commission and I will not be leasing the school property to them," Mr. Ward stated in the letter.

Mr. Ward told *The Westfield Leader* Tuesday that he has submitted an application to construct a 47-unit, 55-and-up restricted-housing development to the borough's planning board and hopes the case will be heard in January. He said construction would take a year. The units, which will be open to Garwood residents first, would have a starting price of \$400,000. He said the 47 units would generate up to \$700,000 in local taxes.

The developer owns the James Ward Mansion in Westfield and is currently building a 35-unit age-restricted housing development called the Savannah on Prospect Street in Westfield.

"After talking to the people, we thought it was a better fit," Mr. Ward told *The Leader*, noting that 50 percent of Garwood homeowners are over the age of 55 and the borough has no age-restricted facility. "So, there is a huge demand for this (type of) housing."



SCHOOL'S OUT...The now-defunct St. Anne's facility will not house Hillcrest Academy, developer James Ward informed Garwood residents in a letter. He plans to move ahead with his proposal to construct age-restricted housing at the site.

Westfield Planning Board Approves Two Subdivisions

By SAMANTHA R. HERMANN
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD - In its final meeting for the year last Monday night, the planning board approved two residential subdivisions amid concerns voiced by multiple Westfield residents.

In a carried-over appeal from November's meeting, the board heard the request of Daunno Development Company, LCC to demolish the existing house at 35 Mohawk Trail and subdivide the lot into two equal-sized ones. The builder proposed the construction of two single-family homes on the divided lot.

The applicant requested variances to allow a lot depth of 105 feet. The land use ordinance requires a minimum lot depth of 120 feet.

Michael Lanzafama, an engineer, professional planner and surveyor with Casey & Keller of Millburn, presented the subdivision plans to the

board. He said the majority of lots in the Mohawk Trail area are not compliant with the ordinance in terms of lot depth. He said a depth of 105 feet would be "consistent with the area."

The existing property has a lot depth of 105 feet, as do 20 additional properties on Mohawk trail.

The proposed subdivision would create two lots with widths of 81 feet, which, Mr. Lanzafama said, essentially reverts to the original plans for the development from 1950. He said this area of Mohawk Trail was originally configured as 22, 81-by-105-foot lots. The existing house straddles two of these originally configured lots.

When the board opened the floor to public comments and questions, multiple neighbors of the proposed subdivision questioned the logic of reverting to the 1950 plan.

Frank Calvaruso of 28 Mohawk

CONTINUED ON PAGE 12



SANTA CLAUS IS COMING TO TOWN...Mountainside firefighters tell Santa Claus their Christmas wishes at the borough's annual Christmas tree lighting last Saturday. Pictured above with Santa are: on Santa's lap, Firefighter George Urbain, back row (left to right): Assistant Chief Neil Williams, Captain James Debbie and Sergeant Allan Attanasio.

RVSA Municipal Assessments to Double Over Next 4 Years

By WAYNE BAKER
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

GARWOOD - The Rahway Valley Sewerage Authority told local mayors last Thursday that municipal assessments would double by the year 2010.

Municipal assessments are expected to rise from \$1,990,000 in 2006 to \$3,846,000 in 2010 for Westfield. Scotch Plains' assessment will grow from \$965,000 to \$1,928,000. Mountainside's share will expand from \$546,000 to \$1,107,000; Garwood's obligation will rise from \$671,000 to \$1,302,000. Similar assessment increases affect other member municipalities, RVSA secretary/treasurer Robert Materna said.

Mr. Materna said the key factor in this cost rise is the expansion and improvement of the RVSA's facilities in response to a judicial consent order settling a lawsuit brought several years ago by the American Littoral Society and the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (DEP). He said the settlement resulted in the need to increase plant capacity from its current rated 40 million gallons per day to 105. The actual demand on the facility is about 30 million gallons per day. The load on the facility is not expected to change significantly.

The \$176-million court-mandated upgrade includes \$146 million for added sewerage capacity of the plant, a \$21-million cogeneration facility and \$9 million for plant improvements.



MAYOR-A-MAYOR...Scotch Plains Mayor Martin Marks talks with Westfield Mayor Andrew Skibitsky at the RVSA meeting.

Roselle Park Commissioner Attilio "Sonny" Venturo in a statement discussed how this situation developed. "In my opinion, this huge indebtedness was not necessary. We're doing this to handle storm water, and storm water should never be in a sanitary sewer, and if we kept it out, we'd have no problems," Mr. Venturo said during Thursday's forum at the Westwood in Garwood.

Part of the settlement required that the authority close two overflows that permit untreated sewage to flow into the Rahway River. Permitting overflow into waterways ceased to be acceptable several decades ago, Mr. Brinker said. The overflows were needed due to spikes in flow following storms, he said.

Mr. Brinker said the sanitary sewer system in two ways - through infiltration of groundwater into seams or cracks in pipes and by inflows such as sump pumps and downspouts emptying into the sanitary sewer system rather than storm sewers.

The need to process storm water, which can triple or quadruple demand on the system, has forced the authority to build a plant that is vastly oversize, Mr. Brinker said. This judicially mandated expansion forced the authority to spend \$176 million to add capacity in order to treat storm water, he said.

These expenditures caused the debt service portion of the RVSA's total

CONTINUED ON PAGE 12



HERE COMES SANTA CLAUS...Plenty of elves accompanied Santa Claus on Sunday evening as he came to Westfield to help with the Christmas tree lighting. Mayor Andy Skibitsky and Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Naomi McEllynn are thrilled to be in the presence of Santa and in front of the crowd, which numbered several hundreds.

Board of Ed. Approves Debt Service for Bond Referendum

By MEGHAN GILL
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD - The school district has received a letter from the state stating it is eligible to present the upcoming bond referendum, scheduled to take place on January 23, 2007.

The board of education voted in favor of a \$9.4-million bond referendum in September. The referendum proposes the creation of an early childhood center/central kindergarten

school at Lincoln School, the renovation and addition of space to the cafeteria and library at Roosevelt Intermediate School and the partial funding of new windows at Edison Intermediate School.

Business Administrator Robert Berman told *The Westfield Leader* Tuesday that the board will "look at" the referendum question at a special meeting on Tuesday, December 12, and "must adopt a ballot question."

Mr. Berman said that the Union County Board of Elections was "notified to prepare" 60 days before the referendum is presented to the public, and "at this point, it's okay for January 23, 2007."

The district has applied for state debt relief aid. About 40 percent of the total cost for each project may be eligible for such relief, Mr. Berman said.

The board heard from auditor Robert Morrison, of the firm Hodulik and Morrison, regarding the 2006-2007 academic year audit.

He said there were "no instances of non-compliance" in the district's accounting practices. Mr. Morrison made one corrective action plan recommendation, that an unexpected grant of \$18,000 of unused non-public school allocation money be returned to the state.

Finance Committee Chairwoman and Board Vice-President Ginny Leitz said the \$18,000 check was sent back to the state.

Mr. Morrison said the fund balance, \$1,665,000, down from last year, is "so razor thin. I would never suggest this if you were not required by statute" to have such a small amount

CONTINUED ON PAGE 12

Baseball League Seeks Additional Turf Fields

By MARIA WOHR
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD - The recreation commission Monday night reviewed the proposed pool budget for 2007. The proposed operating budget for the pool is \$772,552, an amount that does not include proposed renovations or replacement of the main and kiddie pools.

The budget also does not include capital projects; it is \$90,000 less than the proposed revenue. Some budget cuts will be for staff, others for supplies.

"The budget was cut down by \$10,000 for staff restructuring. We cut down one person per hour," Westfield Recreation Director Bruce Kauffman said.

Mr. Kauffman said Tuesday that the department wants to have the improvement plan completed by January 4 so the project can go out to bid. He said he hopes to have the bid awarded by late February or early March.

"That is a large number. Twelve hours a day. Is this safe?" one of the commission members asked.

"We did not change the number of guards at the pools on duty, but how the staff rotates," Mr. Kauffman replied. "It is a more efficient process that does not sacrifice safety."

The Westfield Baseball League (WBL) attended the meeting to propose that the commission consider turf fields for Gumbert Field and two other baseball fields in town. The cost would be between \$1 and \$2 million for the three fields, according to Leo White, WBL president.

Mr. White said because of safety reasons the turf could be required

CONTINUED ON PAGE 12

WF BOE Announces Public Hearing

WESTFIELD - There will be a public hearing on Tuesday, December 12, at 8 p.m. at the Westfield Board of Education (BOE) Board Room at 302 Elm Street. The BOE will vote on the ballot question for the public bond referendum scheduled for January 23, 2007.



ALWAYS REMEMBER...Sixty five years ago, on the morning of December 7, the United States was attacked by Japan at Pearl Harbor, bringing the U.S. into World War II. After two waves of attacks, 21 ships of the U.S. Pacific Fleet had been damaged, 347 planes were either destroyed or damaged, 2,403 people were dead and another 1,178 were injured.

PAGE INDEX

Regional	2-3	Education	9-11	Obituary	20
Editorial	4	Sports	13-17	Classifieds	21
Community	6-8	Real Estate	13-19	A&E	22-24