

Westfield PBA, Town Reach Tentative Pact

By PAUL J. PEYTON
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD – The town and the Policemen's Benevolent Association (PBA) Local 90 have reached a tentative agreement on a new contract, thus avoiding binding arbitration, Town Administrator Jim Gildea said Friday.

The agreement, which must be ratified by the PBA membership and approved by the town council, was reached following an eight-hour negotiation session that ended at 9 p.m. on December 20.

BOE to Feature Update on Legislation

WESTFIELD – At the regularly scheduled public meeting of the Westfield Board of Education on January 9, Superintendent of Schools William Foley will present an update on school-funding issues, including his recent testimony before the State Department of Education.

Assemblyman Jon Bramnick (LD-21, Westfield) will provide his latest information on pending legislation affecting the Westfield public schools. The board will also address the upcoming bond referendum scheduled for Tuesday, January 23. Also included on the agenda will be the final vote on the 2007-2008 school calendar.

The complete agenda will be available on the BOE website at westfieldnj12.org. The public is welcome to attend the meeting, which will begin at 8 p.m. at 302 Elm Street. All board meetings are taped and televised on Blue Devils TV36 on Tuesdays and Thursdays at 8 a.m. and 7:15 p.m., and Saturdays and Sundays at 10 a.m.

Mr. Gildea would not discuss details of the contract.

The previous PBA contract expired December 31, 2005. Under that agreement, the starting salary for Westfield police officers was \$33,277. Police officers in their seventh year earn \$72,524.

Detectives are currently paid \$75,187 at the second grade of the salary guide and \$80,659 at the next level. Sergeants make \$80,559, with detective sergeants earning \$84,240. Lieutenants earn \$87,747, and detective lieutenants make \$90,789. The two captains in the department are paid \$94,824.

The PBA membership held multiple demonstrations in their effort to gain a new pact. They had protested over the town's push to change health care coverage to a Preferred Provider plan instead of the current traditional indemnity plan. Union leaders had also sought a higher starting wage for officers.

"I am real happy we were able to come up with something (to present to the union membership) before the holidays," said Leo Lugo, PBA president. He said the union's membership would be presented the proposed settlement and vote on it Wednesday, January 3. Officials will present the proposal to the town council in executive session at the governing body's Tuesday, January 9, meeting.

"It was a huge road to get here," Mr. Lugo said.

Westfield recently finalized a five-year contract with the Westfield Firefighters Mutual Benevolent Association (FMBA) and is in negotiations with the local Teamsters union, which represents public works employees.



Kathy Marques for The Westfield Leader

WORK IN PROGRESS...The Mews stands on North Avenue in Garwood, across the street from Shop Rite. Garwood North, LLC, the company handling The Mews, addressed the borough planning board this month about multiple changes that have deviated from the original site plans presented to the board.

GW Planning Bd. Questions Mews Development Changes

By KATHY MARQUES
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

GARWOOD – At the December 13 planning board meeting, representatives with Garwood North, LLC, the company handling The Mews on North Avenue, addressed board members about multiple changes that have been made on the building, including the facade, balcony cut-backs, vinyl siding, the roof and brick work. The representatives asked board members for their opinion and provided an update on the situation. The panel expressed concern that "substantial" changes were made without asking the planning board in advance.

Garwood North project manager Seth Cohen passed around pictures of the building under construction and a color display of the original proposed building plan. Multiple board members said the "current building doesn't look like the one you had sketched out originally."

The original six-foot balcony decks (72 inches) have been scaled back unilaterally to 1.5 feet (18 inches). "In lieu of safety concerns, we scaled back the decks to prevent people from placing furniture or plants that may be blown over due to winds and injure pedestrians below. It's a safety issue and cosmetic change," Mr. Cohen said. Since the roof over the deck was cut back, more vinyl siding had to be used to compensate for the lack of roof.

"I'm sure if you left the balcony at 6 feet, you can get the condominium association to install fixed furniture, all the same color to maintain a sense of uniformity," said board member William Nierstedt. "If it's held down, there would be no worries of it going

over. Why didn't you think of this before making the plans and getting the go-ahead? You originally advertised the building with the balconies and now you cut it to almost two feet. It's barely any room for a balcony."

Planning board member William Severage said, "There seem to be a lot of changes that have not been built according to plan."

Board members raised concerns about the look of the brick facade being used, "When you come out of the Shoprite, alongside Chestnut Street and Maple Avenue, it looks like different color brick is being used. It has no consistency and looks terrible," one board member said. "For the amount of money that is being spent on this building, the vinyl siding and ugly brick should not be there. It takes the beauty away from the building."

Mr. Cohen said he was not aware of the brickwork and would look into it.

Board member Donald Frasier said, "To me, these seem like major changes. I don't understand what you're even doing here. You're not asking for anything, you just want to show us what has been done, but what has been done is different than what was originally proposed and agreed upon."

Mr. Nierstedt said, "Compared to the building in the proposed drawing, this building looks like a different building. You really should've approached us first with these changes."

After board members deemed there were "substantial changes" to the Mews, such as the elimination of the roof, the cutback on the decks and the vinyl and brick siding, they told Garwood North to return to the planning board with a formal application for a final site plan approval.

Town Mum on Decision In Kasko 'Lying' Case

By PAUL J. PEYTON
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD – The Westfield Leader has learned that a disciplinary hearing officer has recommended that Westfield suspended police officer Greg Kasko be terminated.

Sources would not comment on a pending whistleblower lawsuit in federal court in Newark. The lawsuit was filed by Mr. Kasko in 2005 and alleges police officials harassed him after he looked into allegations over misuse of police computers to conduct background checks on Westfield residents.

Town Administrator Jim Gildea said the 32-page decision by Robert Luce, who serves as Summit's police chief, was received in office on December 15. He declined to discuss the report, saying as of last Thursday he

had not read the document. "I'd rather not comment" on the report, he told The Leader.

Mr. Gildea said he would review the recommendation and present his findings to Mayor Andy Skibitsky and the Town Council in executive session at the governing body's January 9 meeting.

A 16-year veteran of the department, Mr. Kasko was charged with making false statements of material facts to superior officers during a May 25 hearing conducted regarding charges that the officer failed to back up another patrol car during a motor vehicle stop, while allegedly sleeping in his patrol car at 1:24 a.m. at Fairview Cemetery on January 29.

Anthony Pope, Mr. Kasko's attorney, was unavailable for comment on Tuesday.



Greg Ryan for The Westfield Leader

DISASTER DOES NOT TAKE A HOLIDAY...The Westfield Recreation Department held a disaster drill on December 9 involving senior citizens in the midst of a disaster. The Red Cross set up a shelter in the municipal building community room. After the drill there was a brief seminar for the participants to learn how to react and be prepared for disaster.

POLICE BLOTTER

Westfield

Saturday, December 16, after police were called to investigate a motor vehicle accident, Sarah E. Woods, 23, of Venice, Fla. was arrested at East Broad and Elm Streets and charged with DWI. There were no injuries. Woods was released to a responsible individual.

Sunday, December 17, after being stopped for motor vehicle violations, Juan Carlos Chumpitaz, 24, of Westfield was arrested on North Avenue by Clark Street and charged with DWI. He was released to a responsible individual.

Sunday, December 17, Erika M. Pelaez, 22, of North Plainfield was arrested and charged with driving under the influence after she was stopped for careless driving on West South Avenue near the intersection of Crossway Place. Pelaez was released to a responsible individual.

Sunday, December 17, Barbara L. Pozo, 23, of Elizabeth was arrested at Westfield police headquarters pursuant to a contempt of court traffic warrant issued by the North Plainfield Municipal Court. Pozo was released after posting \$250 bail.

Monday, December 18, Katie Donnelly, 25, of Long Beach Township was arrested at East Broad Street and Gallows Hill Road and charged with driving while intoxicated and possession of less than 50 grams of marijuana. She was released to a responsible individual.

Monday, December 18, a resident of the 900 block of Boulevard reported an act of criminal mischief occurred at his residence during the early morning hours of December 17. Two large planters and a lamp post were damaged.

Monday, December 18, a resident of the 900 block of Boulevard reported that an act of criminal mischief took place at her residence during the early morning hours of December 17. Two mechanical reindeer situated on the victim's front lawn were damaged.

Monday, December 18, the manager of the Westfield Motor Vehicle Inspection Station on the 400 block of East South Avenue reported two storage sheds on the property were damaged. The damage consisted of graffiti and broken siding.

Wednesday, December 20, Luis Torres, 18, of Chatham was arrested during a motor vehicle stop at Gallows Hill Road and Fairacres Avenue and charged with possession of less than 50 grams of marijuana and underage possession of alcohol. He was released on his own recognizance.

Mountainside

Thursday, December 21, Rodney W. Johnson, 38, of Piscataway was transported to police headquarters from the Union County Police Department and arrested on an outstanding Mountainside warrant in the amount of \$300.

Fanwood

Wednesday, December 20, Yves G. Luc, 56, of Roselle was arrested on an outstanding warrant out of Piscataway after a motor vehicle stop on Terrill Road.

Thursday, December 21, Christopher D. Lechy, 23, of Plainfield was arrested following a motor vehicle stop on LaGrande Avenue, which revealed an outstanding warrant out of Scotch Plains.

Thursday, December 21, Juan C. Salcedo, 26, of Elizabeth was arrested on an outstanding Woodbridge warrant after a field investigation.

Thursday, December 21, Abdel Landro, 51, of Elizabeth was arrested on Martine Avenue on an outstanding Plainfield warrant following a field investigation.

Friday, December 22, a patron of a South Avenue business reported that while his car was parked in the lot, all four tires of his vehicle were slashed.

Friday, December 22, Shakira Hollis, 25, of Newark was arrested on outstanding warrants out of Newark and Irvington after a field investigation on Martine Avenue.

Saturday, December 23, Rodney W. Szeszowski, 60, of Fanwood was arrested on charges of resisting arrest and aggravated assault against a police officer after officers responded to a report of an altercation outside a liquor store on South Avenue.

Monday, December 25, Burnell Williams, Jr., 28, of West Orange was arrested on outstanding warrants after a motor vehicle stop on Martine Avenue.

Police Investigate Alleged Assault

WESTFIELD – The Westfield Police Department is investigating an alleged criminal sexual contact that was reported to have occurred at Westfield High School (WHS) sometime in late September during regular school hours at approximately 11 a.m.

The police department was made aware of this incident this past weekend, when the victim related to his parents of what had occurred, police said. The victim, police said, is a male ninth grader at WHS. The incident was reported to have occurred in the boy's room that is located next to the main parking lot.

Police described the suspect as a male between 30 and 40 years-old with olive-toned skin, possibly Hispanic. He had black straight short hair and a black goatee with some gray hair in it and was wearing dirty blue jeans and a dark green pocket tee shirt and may have had a college or high school ring on his hand. He was described as skinny but physically fit and spoke clear English.

Police said the suspect was armed with a small knife described as a switchblade.

The police department has been in contact with the WHS's administration about this report and it is being "actively and thoroughly investigated."

Anyone with any information should contact the police department at (908) 789-4000, extension 0.



PASSING THE GAVEL...Freeholder Chairman Al Mirabella of Fanwood is congratulated by Vice-Chairwoman Bette Jane Kowalski of Cranford as he sworn in his last meeting as chairman on December 21. Freeholder Kowalski will be sworn in the chairman for next year at the board's re-organizational meeting on Sunday, January 7.



REMEMBERING HAPPY BIRTHDAY AMERICA (July 6)...At Constitution Hall in Washington D.C. on June 28, Bill Sanders of Mountainside poses with the USO Liberty Girls after their '40's show. Mr. Sanders received the Medal of Honor for his George Washington Portrait Project from the National Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution.

Westfield Burglaries 2006

(Date; Address; Point of Entry)

Residential:
2/5/06; Carleton Road; Rear basement window
2/20/06; N. Euclid Avenue; Rear basement window
2/27/06; Elizabeth Avenue; Rear door
3/3/06; Clark Street; Basement window
3/18/06; Rahway Avenue; Rear door
5/3/06; Prospect Street; Front door
5/5/06; Columbus Avenue; Front door
6/11/06; S. Elmer Street; Front door
6/24/06; Brightwood Avenue; Unknown point of entry
7/14/06; Stevens Avenue; Rear window
7/17/06; Nomahegan Drive; Rear door
7/20/06; E. South Avenue; Rear basement door
8/1/06; Pennsylvania Avenue; Rear sliding door
8/6/06; S. Chestnut Street; Rear sliding door
8/8/06; Fourth Avenue; Rear garage door
8/11/06; Woodland Avenue; Rear porch door
8/12/06; Clifton Street; Rear kitchen window
8/14/06; Carol Road; Front and rear doors
8/19/06; Golf Edge; Rear door
8/22/06; Central Avenue; Rear window
8/23/06; E. Broad Street; Rear basement window
8/23/06; W. North Avenue; Front window
8/30/06; Central Avenue; Unknown point of entry
9/21/06; Village Green; Rear window
11/13/06; Hillside Avenue; Side garage door
11/24/06; Scotch Plains Avenue; Front door

Non-Residential:
3/8/06; E. Broad Street (business); Rear door
3/22/06; Central Avenue (business); Side window
4/10/06; Roosevelt School; Rear door
5/4/06; St. Paul's Church; Open door
6/5/06; Edison Intermediate School; Rear window
8/11/06; Central Avenue (business); Side window

Attempted Burglaries
Residential:
3/3/06; Lenape Trail; Rear window (not confirmed)
3/15/06; Union Street; Rear door (unfounded)
5/3/06; Windsor Avenue; Unfounded

6/19/06; Tuttle Parkway; Front screen
8/12/06; Cottage Place; Rear bathroom window
8/23/06; E. Broad Street; Front screen
8/26/06; Summit Avenue; Rear door
Non-Residential:
1/4/06; Cardinal Drive; Door jam
11/22/06; Central Avenue; Unfounded; Storage shed
Cleared Cases:
Clark Street; Complaint warrant burglary/theft; Bail \$1,500.
Central Avenue; Complaint summons burglary/theft
Brightwood Avenue; No complaint; Property in common
Scotch Plains Avenue; Complaint; Warrant burglary/theft; Bail \$5,000.
By Month, All
January - 0; February - 4; March - 4; April - 1; May - 3; June - 2; July - 3; August - 13; September - 1; October - 0; November - 2; December - na;

We experienced a spike from mid July through late August in residential burglaries. The detective bureau initiated a rolling stakeout throughout the town. This involved all available personnel, a total of 310 man hours were expended in this endeavor with negative results.

Late in August the Linden Police arrested a gypsy team for burglary and possession of a large amount of stolen property. The MO was very similar to our burglaries. The suspects refused to discuss anything with either Linden Police or our detectives. These individuals later posted \$50,000 bail each and later failed to appear in court and are presently listed as fugitives. Please note that since their arrests, our reported burglaries have dropped significantly.

During the week of September 18, 2006, West Orange Police Department arrested a two man burglary team responsible for approx. 75 residential burglaries in the Essex, Union, Morris and Somerset County areas. A search warrant was executed at one of the defendant's residences and an enormous amount of stolen items were recovered. One suspect was taken from the Essex County Jail by Westfield Detectives and agreed to identify possible residences in Westfield in which they burglarized. The defendant was unable to positively identify any houses he and his co-defendant did burglarize, due to the high volume of residences they entered. Victims of Westfield are still in the process of viewing pictures of the stolen jewelry to determine if any property belongs to them.

Freeholders Extend Lease At Fire Academy in Linden

By PAUL J. PEYTON
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

ELIZABETH – The Union County freeholders took action last Thursday to extend the lease with the City of Linden for the Union County Fire Training Academy until the year 2030. The lease would have expired in 2010, county officials announced.

Freeholder Chairman Al Mirabella said during the last two years, county officials searched for another site for the academy, which serves as a training facility for firefighters from around the county, but those efforts were unsuccessful.

Mr. Mirabella said the county wants to refurbish the 20-year-old facility, which is located at 700 Lower Road in the Tremley Point section of the city. The academy is used to conduct real-life fires for training purposes for academy cadets, full-time paid firemen and volunteer firemen. Trailers are currently used as portable classrooms at the facility.

According to the fire academy's web page, the facility consists of a three-story burn building "used to simulate fires in a wide range of structures," two classrooms, a flash-over trailer to simulate fire flash-overs and confined space equipment for rescue training.

The freeholder chairman said that after efforts to find a new facility were unsuccessful, the county reopened discussions with Linden. The city had wanted to end the lease in order to extend the recycling center located next to the academy's property, said Mr. Mirabella, the son of a former Elizabeth police chief.

He said the county's plans are "to renovate that facility to improve it and give our firefighters the tools they need." He said the county leases the facility for "a small stipend in lieu of taxes."

"It's a nice partnership with the City of Linden," he said.

Freeholder Dan Sullivan called the new fire academy lease "a great deal" for the county.

In other business, the board approved a registered-sexual-offender-

Wychwood Hearing Postponed by Board

WESTFIELD – The planning board has postponed a hearing on an application for subdivision of one of the Wychwood South Gate gatehouses on Canterbury Lane. The present owner intends to subdivide the property, creating a new home between the current gatehouse and East Broad Street.

The planning board was to have heard the application on Thursday, January 4. Officials determined more variances were needed and required the applicant to re-notify area residents of the amended application.

prohibited map, identifying areas in the county where such offenders are not permitted. Officials said county parks and other facilities utilized by children are included on the map.

During the public portion of the meeting, Mayor Allen Morgan of New Providence thanked the county for their assistance in providing assistance and funding during his eight years as mayor to the borough. The mayor, who leaves office in January, said the county assisted New Providence in road improvements, flooding issues and the borough's recycling program.

"I do want to thank you," Mayor Morgan said.

Mr. Mirabella said the county "will miss you as a partner on the local government level."

Tina Renna of Cranford, president of the Union County Watchdog Association, questioned why the board was still involved in the lawsuit brought against the Union County Sheriff's Department by the Hillside Auto Center.

The lawsuit followed a sheriff's auction in which the stepson of County Sheriff Ralph Froehlich, Christopher Coon, was awarded three luxury cars worth more than \$100,000 for \$300. A legal agreement later reversed that decision and accepted Hillside's bid of \$100,600. The cars were auctioned to satisfy a judge's \$142,628 judgment against the dealership for violating the New Jersey Consumer Fraud Act for not disclosing a defective radio in a Mercedes Benz E500 sold to Mr. Coon.

The board approved a resolution to increase funding for legal expenses by \$25,000 for a total of \$35,000.

"We are still appropriating for that?" Mrs. Renna asked.

Mrs. Renna said, "You don't hold anyone accountable" for how the auction initially turned out.

In freeholder remarks at the conclusion of the meeting, board members thanked Mr. Mirabella for his efforts as chairman this year.

"I'm very happy to be following in your shoes, but I don't think I'm going to be able to fill them," said Freeholder Vice Chairwoman Bette Jane Kowalski of Cranford, who will assume the chairmanship in January.

Mr. Mirabella thanked the board and county employees. "We can't do anything without the (work) of Union County employees that are out there every day. Those are the folks that get it done."

The freeholders re-organizational meeting will be held Sunday, January 7, at 1 p.m. in the courtroom of State Superior Court Assignment Judge Walter Barisonek in the Union County Courthouse at 2 Broad Street in Elizabeth.