



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

Freeholders Extend Lease At Fire Academy in Linden

By PAUL J. PEYTON
Specially Written for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times

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 webpage, the facility consists of a three-story burn building "used to simulate fires in a wide range of structures," two classrooms, a flashover trailer to simulate fire flashovers and confined space equipment for rescue training.

"What I really want to do is give the tools they (firefighters) need for training," Mr. Mirabella said.

The freeholder chairman said after efforts to find a new facility were unsuccessful, the county re-opened 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-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 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 \$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.

A county spokesman said the increased legal fees were likely due to "ongoing litigation" in the matter.

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.

SP Council Pays Tribute To Departing Rossi, Sorge

By FRED T. ROSSI
Specially Written for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times

SCOTCH PLAINS —The township council, the administrative staff, residents and several former mayors spent an hour at the council's final meeting of the year, on December 21, paying tribute to outgoing members Frank Rossi and Carolyn Sorge.

Councilman Rossi, who was elected in 1999 to fill the remaining three years of an unexpired term and re-elected in 2002, chose not to seek another term this year. Councilwoman Sorge, who was elected in 2002, was defeated in last month's municipal election that saw two Democrats elected to the council.

"This is a bittersweet moment," Mayor Martin Marks acknowledged as the tributes got underway Tuesday night after the council's regular business had been completed in about 15 minutes. Mr. Rossi's three daughters, Erin, Kelsey and Mia, led off by congratulating their father "for a job well done" and expressing their happiness that he would be home on Tuesday evenings. Four former mayors — William McClintock, Joan Papen, Bob Johnston and Gabe Spera — also spoke and thanked both Mr. Rossi and Ms. Sorge for their service. Township Democratic Chairman Ken Lipstein offered a similar expression of gratitude.

Ed Zazzali, chairman of the township recreation commission, said the half dozen years Mr. Rossi was council liaison to the commission were "six of the most dynamic years this town has seen in terms of recreation."

Mr. Zazzali said the recreation community will "sorely miss" Mr. Rossi. Township Recreation Director Ray Poerio said, "Without his leadership and without his guidance, many of the numerous accomplishments would not have happened."

Township Attorney Brian Levine said of Mr. Rossi and Ms. Sorge that, "There are no two people who care more about the citizens of Scotch Plains and have done more for the citizens of Scotch Plains."

Township Manager Thomas Atkins — noting that in his more than 26 years in his position, he has seen many council members leave the governing body — said the departure of Mr. Rossi and Ms. Sorge "might be tougher for me" than others for a number of reasons. He pointed out that Mr. Rossi and Ms. Sorge "were raised in Scotch Plains, they knew the township inside out, they're home-grown Scotch Plains people, their love for the community is so strong."



WORK IN PROGRESS...The Mews stands on North Avenue in Garwood, across the street from Shoprite. 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 Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times

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 façade, 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."

And Mr. Atkins noted he knew both of their late fathers — Ed Sorge, former president of the rescue squad, and former Police Chief Michael Rossi — and recalled how helpful both were to Mr. Atkins when he became township manager in 1980. "I appreciated you greatly," Mr. Atkins told Mr. Rossi and Ms. Sorge, "As 23,000 people should also."

Their council colleagues also paid tribute, with Councilwoman Paulette Coronato praising Ms. Sorge for "the very good rapport" she has with township residents and lauding Mr. Rossi for providing the council with "a clear vision of what we needed to do."

Councilwoman Nancy Malool, who ran successfully with Mr. Rossi and Ms. Sorge in 2002, said she enjoyed serving with them the past four years while noting that the five members were "more like a family than like council colleagues."

Mayor Marks characterized Ms. Sorge as the "quiet" member of the council, but told her that, "because of your background [as a member of the fire department and rescue squad and her years working in Mr. Atkins' office], you had more knowledge than any of us." He said he had relied on Mr. Rossi for his "expertise in the law, his calming influence and for being on point in just about every matter." Mayor Marks presented both outgoing council members with plaques of appreciation for their service.

In remarks that were at times emotional, Ms. Sorge said she was "honored to make a contribution to the community where I was born and raised." She also singled out her mother and late father for praise. Ms. Sorge issued a challenge to incoming council members Kevin Glover and Jeffrey Strauss, asking them to "give their best effort" and to "make positive contributions" to the town.

Mr. Rossi thanked his family "for their support, love and encouragement," and also praised the township staff, calling Mr. Atkins "the finest manager in the state." He told his council colleagues he was proud to have served with them, and said township residents are "very fortunate" to have Mayor Marks, who he called "a part-time mayor with a full-time commitment."

The council's reorganization meeting will be held on Tuesday January 2 at 7:30 p.m., at which time Mr. Glover and Mr. Strauss will take their seats and Councilwoman Nancy Malool, who was re-elected in November, will begin her second term.



HERE COMES ST. NICHOLAS...Santa visited Fanwood last weekend, distributing presents to the children. Above, Santa walks up Burns Way in Fanwood, as he waves to the children.



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 Chumtaz, 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 lamppost 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, Abdiel 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. Szeszowicki, 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 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.

Westfield Mum on Decision In Kasko 'Lying' Case

By PAUL J. PEYTON
Specially Written for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times

WESTFIELD — The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times has learned that a disciplinary hearing officer has recommended that suspended Westfield 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 that 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 his office on December 15. He declined to discuss the report, saying as of last

Thursday he had not received the document.

"I'd rather not comment" on the report, he told *The Times*.

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 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.

FW Planning Board Okays Goddard School Site Plan

By MARIA WOEHRL
Specially Written for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times

FANWOOD — The borough's planning board approved the preliminary site plan for the Goddard School on South Avenue. Renovations will include improving the appearance of the fire door at the front of the school and the entrance door at the back of the school.

"There has been an issue with the entry door. It is in the rear of the building. When you follow the hall to the front of the building you see the fire door, which is a different size," said Robert Freud of EKA Associates in Scotch Plains, speaking for the applicant.

Fanwood Plaza Partners was granted preliminary site plan approval in September for a Town Bank branch and the Goddard School, a child day care center at 295, 313, 314, 324 and 328 South Avenue.

Also at the meeting, Nicholas Gumble of North Avenue received permission from the board to extend his kitchen with a deck. "The house was built in 1910 and the back left quarter is not functional or insulated," Mr. Gumble said.

James Watson, a surveyor with EKA Associates, presented a plan for Maldonado/Lyons, a subdivision on St. John's Place. The plan proposed to knock down one empty home and

remove 11 trees to enable the rebuilding of two homes.

Due to its concerns regarding execution of the plan, board members approved the resolution as long as the home on St. John's was demolished. A plan to replant trees was presented and the plan allowed for the re-curb-ing of the street to enable car doors to be opened.

The architect for Maldonado/Lyons stated that he was willing to comply with the board's recommendations and said his plans for the rebuilding of the homes were not final. He stated that he would rather see the home stand instead of see a "hole in the ground."

"There is something that is not clean about this," said Bruce Walsh, borough council representative on the board.

"There has to be a condition attached to variance and conferring the lot before the subdivision is built," said planning board member William Lee.

"I think we need to have some control over this. The house has to come down and we need to see a grading plan with tree removal, and an attempt to save the tree on Woodruff and St. John. We need to retain the wall on St. John's, too, for parking," said John Deitch, a planning board member.

The board approved the final guidelines for an oversized home recommendation to the Mayor Colleen Mahr and the borough council.



PRESENTING PLANS...James Watson, a surveyor with EKA Associates, presents a plan for the Maldonado/Lyons subdivision on St. John's Place to the Fanwood planning board last week.

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