

WF BOE Awaits State Response, Financial Aid Numbers

By CHRISTINA M. HINKE
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD — The Westfield Board of Education, two weeks ago, proposed an \$87-million budget, including debt service, for next year, an increase of \$4.3 million over the current year's budget of \$82.7 million.

Tuesday night, the board discussed removing \$500,000 from its spending plan of two weeks ago in the areas of transportation, technology, personnel and supplies.

By the Monday afternoon deadline, no new applications were received from the public from individuals seeking election to the board of education in the upcoming April vote. Incumbent board members Alice Hunnicutt, Gary McCready and Ann Cary reapplied to maintain their ex-

piring terms and will run unopposed for new terms of three years.

According to board member Anne Riegel, intermediate-school staff members will not receive new computers, as part of the adjusted proposal, in an effort to control spending in ways that are not directly related to the students.

She also said this strategy relates to staff cuts. Last Thursday, the finance committee discussed eliminating some institutional and non-institutional staff, administration and support-staff positions.

"We're not ready to discuss that yet [with the public]," Ms. Riegel said, as the board would need to first notify the staff affected by such a decision. "We don't have a lot to pare down," Ms. Riegel said, in regards to cutting

the expenditures for new textbooks, teacher training and other items. "The biggest is salary. It's people. That's where the dollars are." Two weeks ago, the board said about 70 percent of the budget is from salaries.

She also questioned if the schools could manage with fewer support staff.

According to discussion from board members that night, the Westfield Board of Education's goal is to focus budget priorities on curriculum, student needs and maintaining class sizes.

The budget, including debt service and special education, proposed two weeks ago, was \$87.4 million. The current adjustments would bring the budget request to just under \$87 million.

The board is waiting for a response from county and state officials on the Westfield BOE budget, which was submitted for review.

Currently, state aid for debt service remains an unknown. According to the board, Governor Jon Corzine said in his state budget address on Tuesday that state aid numbers should be announced today, Thursday.

According to an Associated Press transcription of his speech, Governor Corzine also said, "We should be cutting debt service."

Board secretary Bob Berman said, "We are hopeful it [state aid] stays the same [as last year] and is not reduced."

The board will meet weekly, until the public hearing on March 19, to discuss other possible budget reductions.

The board also approved personnel appointments Tuesday night for replacement of a high school special-education teacher at a salary of \$53,633, substitute teachers and additional workforce for the 2007-2008 school year (salaries were not disclosed), a full-time lunch aide at the hourly rate of \$13.50, and 29, spring coaching assignments with salaries totaling \$195,000.

Officials continued to discuss the possible introduction of a driver-education course. The board said that it was discovered that only one teacher had undergone the training necessary to teach the 30-hour classroom program, which also includes some lab time. They noted that one teacher could not handle the intensive course in addition to teaching other classes.

Ms. Hunnicutt, board member, said that many members of the community favored driver's education, and officials will continue to investigate the necessities to offer this class.

The next public meeting is March 4 at 8 p.m.

'Historic Preserv.' Referred; Land Use Recs. Offered

By MICHAEL J. POLLACK
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD — The town council referred amendments to the town's historic preservation ordinance to the planning board, Tuesday, and heard a WE CARE review of the land use taskforce's report on over development.

The historic preservation commission and former town planner Judith Thornton had sought to bring the ordinance, dating back to 1984, "up to code" and align it with current state statutes.

The proposed amendments address the process by which homes are designated as historic and specify how the historic preservation commission should be comprised.

In cases of designating single properties as historic, "consent" of the individual property owner would be needed to advance the process. An owner has "veto power" in cases of individual homes.

In matters of potentially historic zones (districts), there would need to be an initial 75-percent affirmative response from district households before the process could continue.

The ordinance would also provide a protest mechanism as recourse for those in a district who are not in favor of the historic designation.

If 20 percent of homes in a given zone protest, in order for the zone to be designated as historic, the area would then need the approval of a supermajority (6-3), not the usual majority (5-4).

The amendments also pertain to the makeup of the historic preservation commission.



BIG SPORTS WEEKEND...The Westfield High School boys swimming team returns home victorious on Sunday after winning another state championship. Fire trucks, rescue squad ambulance and police cars led the parade escorting the team into town as they returned from the meet. Earlier in that day, the WHS girls swim team also won the state championship, and the WHS girls basketball team won their first ever county championship. See the sports section for stories.

Westfield Boy, Fitzhenry, Returns Home After Serious Accident

By MICHAEL J. POLLACK
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD — Michael Fitzhenry, who sustained a skull fracture and serious concussion as a result of a car accident on Westfield's Mountain Avenue last week, has returned home.

Discharged last Friday from Goryeb Children's Hospital at Morristown Memorial Hospital, Michael, 13, is beginning the next stage of his recovery and continues to receive medical attention, according to his father, Paul Fitzhenry.

"The good news is that we have him back with us, and he's feeling a lot better," Mr. Fitzhenry told *The Westfield Leader* on Tuesday morning.

The Fitzhenry family has rallied around Michael. This past weekend his grandparents visited from Canada.

"He's been surrounded by family this weekend. We had some great moments just being together again," Mr. Fitzhenry said.

"One of the first things he said when he became more alert, around late Wednesday, was, 'Dad, I just want to go home,'" Mr. Fitzhenry added.

This past Saturday, Michael reunited with his friend, also 13, who dove away from the oncoming car. Mr. Fitzhenry called the reunion

"heartwarming."

With Michael remaining "very tired" and "sleeping a lot," the family has permitted only limited visitation during this time period.

While there haven't been any steps towards returning to school, Michael is "anxious for life to return to normal," his father said.

For Mr. Fitzhenry and the family, "the impact is starting to settle in. Our thoughts remain focused on the tremendous response that came to Michael's aide."

Without mentioning their names, Mr. Fitzhenry said the family is indebted to two doctors — Thomas Streko, a dentist, and Malcolm Schwartz, a urologist — who tended to Michael and cleared his airway when he was unconscious.

"If this accident had to occur, it

couldn't have happened in a better place...The fact that he was at the trauma center within the hour...we're tremendously lucky," Mr. Fitzhenry said.

Dr. Streko, whose office sustained damage from the car that smacked into the brick building, spoke to the newspaper last week.

He said when the car first hit, "I thought a bomb went off...I was ready to start my hours, so I know exactly what time it was — 2:02 [p.m.]. I was just going out of my office, when everything shook, pictures fell off the wall."

"When I realized it wasn't a bomb and that it was a car, I ran and saw the car sticking out. But I saw the child on the Belgian block, and I said 'Forget the car; we need to go to the kid!'"

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Three Candidates File for Two MS Borough BOE Seats

By MARIA WOHR
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

MOUNTAINSIDE — The Mountainside Board of Education said Tuesday night at their public meeting that three candidates have filed for two open seats on the board.

Chief School Administrator (CSA) Richard O'Malley told *The Westfield Leader* that PTA President Carolyn Williams, Lauren Emblad and Cathy Jakositz had submitted nominating petitions by Monday's 4 p.m. deadline. Ms. Emblad is the daughter of board member Carmen Venes.

Incumbents John Perrin and Scot Worswick did not file for reelection, Mr. O'Malley said.

Mr. O'Malley said the candidates would be formally presented to the public at a candidates' forum at Beechwood School on Wednesday, March 26, at 6:30 p.m.

The board also said at the meeting that they would discuss the process of hiring a new CSA to replace Mr. O'Malley who will be leaving at the

end of the school year in June. Mr. O'Malley's resignation was approved at the meeting.

He is leaving to become superintendent of the Matawan-Aberdeen Board of Education.

"We cannot discuss this [the process of replacing Mr. O'Malley] for legal reasons at the moment," Mr. Perrin said.

The board said Mountainside schools passed the government requirements of the federal governments "No Child Left Behind" [Act].

The board also said, according to state records, Mountainside schools ranked in the top 10 in state achievement.

"Our ranking in the state is an incredible accomplishment," Mr. Perrin said. "Our kids are doing an amazing job, learning."

Also at the meeting, the board passed the Mountainside Professional Development Plan for the 2008-2009 school year.

Two students were recognized at

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FUN IN THE SNOW...Joey DeRosa, Joseph Mandel, Brian Mandel, and Matthew Binkowitz (pictured from left to right) enjoy Friday's snow day by building a snowman behind Tamaques School in Westfield.

Clark Reservoir Ownership Transferred to Union County

By RAYNOR DENITZIO
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

CLARK — Ownership of the Clark Reservoir was passed from Clark Township to Union County on February 20, during a ceremony at the Clark Municipal Building. Union County purchased the land from the township for \$1, through the Union County Open Space, Recreation and Historic Preservation Trust Fund.

At the ceremony, Clark Mayor Sal Bonaccorso formally handed the deed for the 150-acre property to Union County Freeholder Chairman Angel Estrada. Mayor Bonaccorso praised the township council and the freeholders for their cooperation in completing the transfer.

"This is government at its finest," Mayor Bonaccorso said. "Two entities working together for the right reason to help a township and the county."

The Clark Reservoir was built in 1907, along the Robinson's Branch of the Rahway River. It fell into disuse in the 1990s. Mayor Bonaccorso said that the township acquired the land in 1997, from the Middlesex Water Company for \$10, to prevent it from being sold and developed.

Clark first approached the county about taking over ownership of the property in 2004.

According to Mayor Bonaccorso, the freeholders were in favor of the idea initially, but the logistics of the sale resulted in the delay between the plan's proposal and the actual

transfer of the deed. "The due diligence of surveys and all of that took the bulk of the time," Mayor Bonaccorso said.

Presently, the land is off limits to the public. Mayor Bonaccorso said this was primarily due to safety concerns.

"There's no real way to walk through it other than traipsing through wooded areas, which isn't safe," Mayor Bonaccorso said.

He said the township did not study the possibility of putting "passive recreation" facilities at the site, such as walking trails and docks. Mayor Bonaccorso said that although the township could have paid for the recreation facilities through capital bonds, the township felt that the county had the resources to better maintain the site.

Freeholder Nancy Ward, chairman of the Union County Open Space, Recreation and Historic Preservation Trust Fund, said that the county would explore the possibility of opening the site for public use.

"It definitely may be open to the public in the future," Freeholder Ward said. "That's a definite possibility."

The county had also previously acquired land behind St. Agnes Roman Catholic Church on Madison Hill Road, the Schwarz Farm property on Old Raritan Road, the Esposito Farm and Hazelwood Cemetery on Madison Hill Road in other land acquisitions. Milton Lake on Rahway/Clark border is also owned by the county.



PASSING THE BUCK...Clark Mayor Sal Bonaccorso (sixth from left) and Union County Freeholder Chairman Angel Estrada (seventh from left) hold a symbolic dollar bill to mark the transfer of the Clark Reservoir to the county on February 20. Also pictured are members of the Clark Township Council and the Union County Board of Chosen Freeholders.



A LIGHTER MOMENT...State Senator Tom Kean, Jr. (LD-21, Westfield) greets Michael and Donna Panagos of Westfield at last Thursday's Union County Republican Committee Lincoln Day fundraiser at Solar do Minho restaurant in Roselle Park. At left is Westfield Councilman Jim Foerst.

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