

## Gatehouse Plan Moves Slowly; Thornton Resigns

By CHRISTINA M. HINKE  
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD—The Westfield Planning Board continued to consider the "Little Gatehouse" subdivision application, and the town planner resigned during Wednesday's meeting. (See related story on Pg. 1.)

Julie Marsella seeks to subdivide her property at 200 Canterbury Lane into two single-family lots with a home on each lot.

At Wednesday's meeting, Dennis Hudacsko, a planner hired by opponents of the proposal, restated his previous testimony to the board about his interpretation of frontage lines.

He also testified that Westfield's Master Plan considers this house as potentially "historic property." He said zoning was created to protect historic properties, and if some harm to a historic characteristic occurs, a variance cannot be granted.

Any changes to a historic property must enhance, improve and promote the character, according to his statement. Mr. Hudacsko said the plans presented by Ms. Marsella did not promote the character of the neighborhood.

Judith Thornton, Westfield's planning consultant, said the lot is oversized and, therefore, could be subdivided without losing its integrity.

Mr. Hudacsko did not refute her but said that the proposal submitted does not enhance the characteristics of the property.

Mr. Hudacsko will come before the board again at the next meeting on Monday, February 4. Meetings will now begin at 7:30 p.m., instead of the previous 8 p.m. commencement.

The board also heard from Always Home Drop In Day Care Center at 509 Central Avenue. Cynthia Jablonski, co-owner and director, hired an artist to paint a mural and advertising copy on the three front windows of the business, which is not allowed under the signage law, officials said.

The applicant told the board she did not know that it was forbidden. The town's ordinance only allows hours on the front door and a sign above the door.

She testified that other businesses in the area have painted their windows, and it is a hardship for her to be prohibited to advertise in the same manner.

She said 32 percent of registrations at the pay-by-the-hour day care were from people driving by the center.

Town Councilman James Forest, a planning-board member, said he did not want to add to the "growing problem of illegal signage" and did not agree to the painted-window signage for the center.

However, the board ruled that while Ms. Jablonski must remove the verbiage — such as advertising hours and services, as well as erase all the paint from the two smaller windows — she is allowed to retain the mural, including business name, on the main, larger window.

Mr. Forest said the town council is reviewing the current signage law, and changes to it could be possible in the future.

In addition, the planning board held its yearly reorganization meeting. Ms. Thornton resigned as town planner but will continue as a consultant to the board.

Vince Wilt will remain as chairman, with Robert Newell continuing serving as vice chairman. He conceded his position as a member of the town's historic-preservation commission to Frank Smith. The board named Ken Marsh, town engineer, board secretary.

Board member Lori Duffy will remain as liaison to the tree-preservation committee, with board member William Cariste stepping down as liaison to the architectural review committee in favor of Anthony Attanasio.

## Centuolo

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of state-aid, "looks terrific on paper." As opposed to Westfield's 2 percent, Scotch Plains will see a 10 percent bump, or roughly \$400,000." However, Mr. Whitehouse cautioned, "Things always look better on paper." He said approximately \$300,000 would be returned in the form of property-tax relief but noted, "we'll take any increase we can get."

He said the meeting focused on "collaboration" and districts "bonding together" to save money. When asked if Scotch Plains was prepared to assume students from other districts, such as Elizabeth, he said, "Facility-wise, no."

He termed the middle schools to be "at capacity" and said "we don't have the facilities for our own students," a problem he sees as "fairly widespread throughout the county."

The Union County School Boards Association sponsored this program.

## Full Chamber Lauds Commended MS Teams

By EBONY McQUEEN  
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

MOUNTAINSIDE — "This is the fullest this room has been in my 30 years," said Mayor Robert Vigilanti.

Parents, community members and children filled the Borough Council chambers Tuesday night in support of resolutions of commendation the council issued.

The council read aloud resolutions of commendation to the Berkeley Heights PAL sixth-grade boys' football team and the Mountainside Recreation Department youth soccer teams, which include the boys U12 Blue's Clues, Girls U12 Thunder and Girls U14 Cosmos for their championship victories in the Inter-County Youth Soccer League.

Four recipients of the 2007 Keep It Positive (KIP) Award, Kevin McCarthy, Jackie Valenzuela, Jackie Wells, Nicholas Cahill and Max Sichel, all Mountainside residents, also received resolutions of commendation.

Coaches from the Mountainside Recreation Department nominated the players for their display of good sportsmanship.

In other council business, the council appointed Councilman Robert Messler

as representative and Michael Disko, Jr. as an alternative representative to the Union County Transportation Advisory Board for one-year terms.

The borough will enter a contract with Irvin Contractor for 2008 janitorial services.

The council received three sealed bids for the sale of the borough's surplus vehicle, a 2000 International truck. Due to a tie amongst two bidders, the borough decided to reject all bids.

Council members approved the hourly rate increase for part-time community van drivers with Commercial Drivers License (CDL). The council increased the rate from \$11.60 to \$15 an hour.

The mayor has signed the agreement between the borough and Atlantic Health Corporation, a non-profit medical-dispatch service that provides medical help for 911 callers until the Emergency Medical Service (EMS) vehicles arrive on the scene.

The borough heard on first reading an ordinance to amend the borough code as it relates to building-permit fees and residential alterations.

The meeting concluded with the council going into executive session to discuss an on-going litigation.

## St. Anne's Condos Hearing

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heard the lawyer; by law, we can't sit on this appeal."

New Jersey State Senator Raymond Lesniak of Elizabeth (LD-20), a Democrat, serves as a senior partner with Weiner Lesniak.

Mr. Ward needs approval first from the planning board to construct the condos. He said if the board doesn't approve the project, "I'll eventually do something with the property. I do have an interest in this project, but don't have a 'Plan B' at this time."

Planning-board member Robert Scherer questioned Mr. Ward as to why he hasn't purchased the building yet. "Why no closing date?" he asked. "Is it so you can avoid paying taxes?"

Mr. Ward replied, "No reason. It's in limbo right now. No one wants to pay taxes on something they're not constructing on yet."

Mr. Nierstedt asked why the Newark Archdiocese has not given its consent to the project, to which Mr. Kienz said, "There is no corporate disclosure for a church. It goes to Rome. They're bigger than us." Mr. Kienz said he had a copy of a consent agreement and would submit it to the board.

According to the applicant, the units would be sold to Garwood residents at \$350,000 — or what the market value is at the time of sale — and sold to "non-residents at \$100,000 over cost."

"Non-residents will pay a higher price, that I will guarantee," Mr. Ward said.

Mr. Ward's representatives said a deed restriction would be placed on buyers to prevent a breach of condominium-association rules should units

be sold or leased to anyone below 55.

The building proposed would be 35 feet in height — higher than the current school building. There would be underground parking for 94 cars.

Residents who attended the meeting said traffic congestion in the area was a concern.

Elizabeth Dolan, a traffic engineer hired by the developer, conducted a one-day traffic survey during a weekday in November. She said, "We found during the peak hours of 7 to 9 a.m. and 4:45 to 5:45 p.m., there were 200 cars traveling on Cedar Street and 600 on Walnut Street, due to two-way traffic."

She also said her findings fell "below significant traffic areas such as North Avenue. This is not a level that would deteriorate the trip area."

Mr. Scherer asked how the garbage removal would be handled. "The residents of Garwood are frugal and already pay enough in taxes. We want no surprises," he said.

The developer said the \$198-per-month, per-unit maintenance fee would cover the garbage-removal cost. The water bill would go to the management company, which Mr. Ward also operates.

"I can put it in writing; the [borough] of Garwood will not pay for garbage removal. I am a man of my word. The Westfield Leader recently [published] a letter about how reputable I am," Mr. Ward said.

Mr. Ward's application will continue to be heard at a meeting open to the public on Wednesday, January 30, at Lincoln School at 7:45 p.m.

## POLICE BLOTTER

### Westfield

Sunday, January 6, an employee of a business on the 200 block of East Broad Street reported that someone defaced with red ink graffiti the wall and ground just outside the front door of the business.

Sunday, January 6, a Tinton Falls resident reported the theft of her Louis Vuitton wallet and its contents from the counter of a business on the 300 block of South Avenue, East. The wallet contained her driver's license, \$500 in cash and assorted credit cards.

Monday, January 7, Brandon Gassmann, 23, of Winfield Park was arrested at the Linden Police Department on a Westfield criminal warrant. He was released after posting \$195 bail.

Monday, January 7, Scott Callender, 21, of Westfield was arrested at Westfield police headquarters on a Westfield motor vehicle warrant. He was released after posting \$175 bail.

Monday, January 7, Gordon Novak, 44, of Westfield was arrested on the 400 block of Coddling Road on a no-bail New Jersey wanted person fugitive warrant. He was turned over to the Union County Sheriff's Department.

Monday, January 7, Derek Mogull, 24, of Scotch Plains was arrested on two Westfield motor vehicle warrants at Westfield police headquarters. He was released after posting \$110 bail to settle the two warrants.

Monday, January 7, Michael Risberg, 19, of Westfield was arrested on a Westfield motor vehicle warrant at Westfield police headquarters. He was released after posting \$175 bail.

Thursday, January 10, Alfonso Willock, 33, of Flushing, N.Y. was arrested on outstanding traffic warrants from Secaucus and Newark, with bail amounts of \$250 and \$200, respectively, following a motor vehicle stop at Central Avenue and Cacciola Place. He was released after posting bail.

Friday, January 11, Susan Krause, 59, of Westfield was arrested and charged with driving while intoxicated (DWI) after a motor vehicle stop at East Broad Street and Gallows Hill Road. She was released on her own recognizance to a responsible individual.

Saturday, January 12, Amanda Bracuto, 20, of Kenilworth was arrested and charged with possession of less than 50 grams of suspected marijuana and an outstanding Roselle Park traffic warrant with bail of \$800, after a motor vehicle stop at South and Windsor Avenues.

She was released on her own recognizance on the warrant per Roselle Park Municipal Court and issued a summons on the marijuana possession charge prior to being released.

Saturday, January 12, a resident of the 1400 block of Boynton Avenue reported that the motor vehicle he had borrowed from a family member was damaged while parked in the roadway outside his home. The driver's side window was smashed.

Saturday, January 12, a resident of the 300 block of Roger Avenue reported the passenger side window on his motor vehicle was smashed while the vehicle was parked in his driveway.

Saturday, January 12, Bernard P. Burns, 26, of Phillipsburg was arrested on the 500 block of Rahway Avenue on a Pohatcong motor vehicle warrant after being stopped on the 500 block of Rahway Avenue for a motor vehicle violation. He was released after posting \$190 bail.

### Mountainside

Tuesday, January 1, Darrell Benford, 24, of Plainfield was arrested on an outstanding warrant from Mountainside for \$250 and a warrant out of Springfield for \$1,000.

Tuesday, January 1, staff at a Route 22 theater reported finding the wallet belonging to the daughter of a Newark firefighter. Police contacted the owner.

Wednesday, January 2, Roy Bryan, 49, of Plainfield, was arrested for driving with a suspended license after being stopped by police on Route 22 at Lawrence Avenue for having passenger license plates on a commercial vehicle. He was given a Thursday, January 17 municipal court date.

Thursday, January 3, Amirah Brack, 21, of Plainfield was arrested by the Fanwood Police Department and turned over to Mountainside on an outstanding warrant of \$165.

Friday, January 4, a Whipoorwill Way resident reported that he lost his New Jersey driver's license while flying through O'Hare Airport in Chicago last month.

Sunday, January 6, Jacqueline Crowell, 23, of Mountainside was arrested for DWI over her car ran off the road at Sunny Slope Drive and Summit Road. Police reported the woman's two children were in the car at the time. Her mother was contacted to take care of the children.

Crowell was also charged with refusal to submit to a breath test and careless driving, police said.

Monday, January 7, a Kings Court resident came to police headquarters to report a missing silver Olympus digital camera. The victim said he last had the camera while at Webster Hall in New York City on New Year's Day. The camera is valued at \$375.

Monday, January 7, a Sheffield Street business owner reported that his Chevrolet truck was burglarized. Police said the right center tool compartment door of the vehicle was pryed open and that work tools were stolen. The victim said he would review surveillance tapes and contact the detective bureau.

Tuesday, January 8, a Wyoming Drive resident reported that he received a letter from a Publisher's Gaming Co. saying he had won a million dollars. A check for \$4,835 was included. The resident was instructed to send a money order for \$2,500 to a Walmart in Canada. He cashed the check and contacted the company to arrange delivery of the prize before contacting police.

Police said this is a "classic money scam."

Tuesday, January 8, a Summit Road resident reported that she received a letter from a credit card company of balance transfers in the amounts of \$9,900 and \$9,500 to a credit card and a department store card, respectively, in her name. The victim said she did not have credit cards with either company. The victim notified the major credit bureaus. The detective bureau is investigating.

Thursday, January 10, three juveniles were arrested and charged with being under the influence and in possession of marijuana following a complaint of a suspicious vehicle on Outlook Drive, West. Police found an envelope of marijuana and a blunt cigar, which was bagged for evidence. The juveniles were released to their parents.

Monday, January 14, a Darby Lane resident reported her wallet was missing. She reported that the wallet contained \$40 in cash, credit cards, her driver's license, Social Security card and personal items.

Monday, January 14, an employee of a Route 22 nursing home reported the theft of a 32-inch LG flat screen LCD TV. The TV was valued at \$800.

### Garwood

Saturday, January 12, Sean Ferro, 19, of Westfield was arrested on the 400 block of Locust Avenue and charged with underage consumption of alcohol. He was arrested after police discovered him lying unresponsive on the ground near a tree. With the assistance of police he slowly came around. Police detected a strong odor of alcohol on his breath. Ferro was transported to police headquarters where he was released to a family member pending a municipal court date.

Sunday, January 13, Brendan Stark, 20, of Cranford was arrested and charged with underage consumption of alcohol on the 100 block of South Avenue.

Police observed several individuals in a parking lot to a service station and stopped to investigate. While interviewing the individuals, police said they detected a strong odor of alcohol on Stark's breath. According to police, Stark admitted to consuming five beers earlier. He was transported to police headquarters and released to a family member pending a municipal court date.

### Fanwood

Wednesday, January 9, Jamie V. Mercer, 39, of Plainfield was arrested on active warrants out of Scotch Plains, Jersey City and Bulloch County, GA after a motor vehicle stop in the 50 block of South Avenue.

Wednesday, January 9, William R. Myers, 51, of Plainfield was arrested on an outstanding Plainfield warrant after a motor vehicle stop on Terrill Road.

Wednesday, January 9, Richard J. Harden, 54, of Plainfield was arrested on an outstanding Fanwood warrant after a field investigation.

Thursday, January 10, William A. Reid, 22, of Plainfield was arrested on an outstanding Plainfield warrant after a motor vehicle stop on North Avenue. According to police, he was also charged with obstruction of justice after providing police with false information. He was processed and turned over to the Plainfield Police Department, authorities said.

Thursday, January 10, Lori E. Armour, 48, of Plainfield was arrested on an outstanding East Windsor warrant after a motor vehicle stop on Terrill Road.

Friday, January 11, Salvatore Savatteri, 58, of Scotch Plains was arrested on an outstanding Clark warrant after a motor vehicle stop on LaGrande Avenue.

Sometime between 9:30 p.m. on Friday, January 11, and 9:30 p.m. on Saturday, January 12, a resident of Tilloss Road reported that someone entered his unlocked vehicle while it was parked in his driveway and attempted to steal the vehicle by tampering with the ignition switch. According to police, the attempt was unsuccessful.

Saturday, January 12, sometime between 11 and 11:30 p.m. a resident of Oakridge Road reported that someone stole his red, four-door 2004 Hyundai while it was parked unlocked in his driveway with the keys in the ignition.

Sunday, January 13, James H. Gordon, 39, of Plainfield was arrested on an outstanding Maplewood warrant after a motor vehicle stop on Terrill Road.

Monday, January 14, Samira R. Jones, 32, of Scotch Plains was arrested on an outstanding Newark warrant after a motor vehicle stop on Pleasant Avenue.

### Scotch Plains

Friday, January 11, an employee at a Terrill Road business reported that someone hit his vehicle and then left the scene without reporting the accident.

Friday, January 11, Khyrie Jenkins, 22, of Plainfield was arrested for an outstanding warrant after a motor vehicle stop.

Saturday, January 12, a resident of Montague Avenue reported that someone entered his unlocked vehicle and removed cash and CDs valued at approximately \$160.

Saturday, January 12, a resident of Cook Avenue reported that someone entered his unlocked vehicle and removed a global positioning system (GPS) valued at approximately \$250.

Saturday, January 12, Kyle McLean, 27, of Willingsboro was arrested for an outstanding warrant after being stopped for a motor vehicle violation.

Saturday, January 12 a resident of Union Avenue reported that someone entered his unlocked vehicle and removed approximately \$40.

Sunday, January 13, Willie Pena, 32, of New York, NY was arrested and charged with DWI. According to police, Pena was involved in a motor vehicle accident at which time officers smelled a strong odor of alcohol. Pena was transported to headquarters where he was processed and released with a summons, police said.



Benjamin Corbin for The Westfield Leader  
MEDIA FRENZY...Reporters and camera crews flock to the Union County Police Headquarters on North Avenue in Westfield last Thursday, where escaped convict Otis Blunt was locked up after his capture in Mexico City on Tuesday, January 8.

## South Avenue Improvement

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The council gave its full endorsement.

During the council's Code Review and Town Property Committee report, Committee Chairman and Fourth Ward Councilman Jim Foerst took the council through a draft of the historic-preservation ordinance.

Primarily, the work of the historic-preservation commission and former town planner Judith Thornton (see related story on Pg. 1) sought to bring the town's existing ordinance, dating back to 1980, "up to code."

Mr. Foerst turned the discussion to the three overarching recommendations of the commission.

First, pertaining to membership, the commission recommended amending the existing ruling to "allow for more specialized people to become members," Mr. Foerst said.

He said the mayor would be able to appoint non-Westfield residents, such as architect Robert Algarin, who are knowledgeable about the community and could provide insight to the process.

Secondly, the ordinance would amend the appeal procedure for denials of "certificates of appropriateness."

Mr. Foerst said, at present, if the commission denies a certificate, there exists a 12-month waiting period after which property owners are "free to do whatever they want" and do not need to comply with the commission's findings.

He said the new rules "make it easier to get an answer and have a right to appeal."

Instead of a 12-month wait, the property owner would have the "immediate right" to take the denial to the board of adjustment and seek relief.

A board-of-adjustment denial could be appealed in state Superior Court.

Thirdly, Mr. Foerst said the "big issue" surrounded property rights. He said he did not want it to appear that the town, on an arbitrary basis, "waved a magic wand" and deemed certain properties as historic.

An individual property owner who wishes to consider his or her home historic must now meet all federal guide-

lines and consent to having the home designated as such.

In terms of designating a district, or zone, as historic, Mr. Foerst said the commission would initiate the process with a neighborhood, asking why it feels it should be considered historic and presenting the area with the necessary consent documents.

Whereas previously, 25 percent of residents in a zone would have to petition in order to oppose the historic classification, the commission has agreed to decrease that figure to 20 percent to make it "easier for protesters."

There is also an opportunity for those within 200 feet to weigh in on the decision.

Second Ward Councilwoman JoAnn Neylan suggested the commission "clean up" the language that specifies how a new buyer is notified of a home's historic features.

Mr. Caruana said the Code Review Committee, of which he is a member, "is split."

He said while the new rules "respect an individual owner's rights, we are throwing reservation out the window if the situation occurs in a district (zone)."

"I am really concerned," Mr. Caruana said, "and a little troubled that a homeowner (in a zone) can be affected without his consent."

Mr. Foerst asked in response, "Isn't this a democracy? At the end of the day, if enough people want something, don't we need to protect them?"

In separate business, Mr. Ciarrocca, during his public-safety committee report, commented about a recent fatality on North Avenue.

Mr. Ciarrocca called the incident "unfortunate" and stressed the need for pedestrians to use the crosswalks.

Mr. Ciarrocca defended the work of the police force, saying that from 2006 to 2007, moving violations dispensed by Westfield police officers rose from 3,060 to 4,762. In addition, Mr. Ciarrocca said the number of indictable criminal offenses dropped from 346 to 214 during that time. He credited and thanked the police for its "visible presence."

## Planner Thornton Leaves

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mat. I will return to assist as needed."

Mr. Marsh also said she would stay on through the "Little Gatehouse" development. "We've made headway. There's one more witness, then the board makes its decision."

In terms of her departure, he said, "I miss her. We worked very closely together...but I'll be stepping up, taking a more active role in the day-to-day operation...I'm a professional planner. It's not like we are without expertise."

In terms of finding a replacement, Mr. Marsh said the town has received five résumés at this point. He said he hoped to have another planner on board in a month or two.

"It's a great loss, but it's not a tragedy. We're back to our (previous) situation."

Prior to Ms. Thornton, who earned

an annual salary of \$88,000 in Westfield, Westfield utilized the services of Blais Brancheau, who earned a \$105 hourly rate.

"She has left us in a better place," Mr. Marsh said. "She was extremely productive in a short time."

Mr. Foerst agreed. "She will definitely be missed," he said. "But when the state picks you to be the Highlands planner, it's an opportunity of a lifetime. You can't pass it up."

Ms. Thornton said she enjoyed her time in Westfield and "never considered leaving." In terms of her new position, she said it presented "a great opportunity."

"It's an exciting opportunity, and I couldn't refuse," she said. "I absolutely, thoroughly enjoyed my time in Westfield. It was a great experience."

## UC Jail Escapes Blunt, Espinosa Returned to Prison

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Pennsylvania, formerly of Elizabeth.

Cortez was charged with resisting arrest. A confirmed member of the Bloods gang, Espinosa was to be sentenced to 17 years in prison after pleading guilty to manslaughter for his involvement in a drive-by shooting in Elizabeth in 2005.

Blunt was awaiting trial for robbery and weapons-possession charges from a shooting at a Hillside convenience store, authorities said.

Mr. Romankow said Blunt used a 10-pound iron handle to a fire-sprinkler-shutoff valve, which he obtained from an unlocked closet in the high-security section of the jail. He and Espinosa took turns banging on the cinder block for some two weeks. The inmates hid the hole with posters of bikini-clad women. They stuffed sheets under their blankets to hide their disappearance, authorities said.

According to published reports, jail guards did not notice that the two inmates had escaped until 20 hours later.

Mr. Romankow said his office performed a reenactment of the escape and found there was a considerable amount of noise generated from banging on the jail wall. Also, officials said inmates are to be checked every eight hours and have their meals delivered to their cells.

According to the website of television's "America's Most Wanted," it was not known if nearby

trains obscured the banging noise from jail guards.

The basement apartment on a Summer Street in Elizabeth where Espinosa was hiding out was charred by fire on Sunday. Fire officials have said the blaze may have been intentionally set.

This development follows the January 2 suicide of jail guard Rudolph Zurick, 40, of South Amboy who was the corrections