

Officials Opposed to Changes in NJ Affordable Housing Rules

By: KATHERINE VOWELL
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

AREA — The Senate on June 23 approved, by a tally of 21-16, the biggest overhaul of the state's affordable housing regulations in 20 years. The legislation, A-500, regarding the revisions made to the Council on Affordable Housing (COAH), was passed in a 44-34-2 assembly vote, which mainly fell along party lines.

Major changes in the bill are: the elimination of Regional Contribution Agreements (RCA); a 2.5 percent non-residential development fee to fund construction and renovation, and the creation of a state commission to manage funding.

COAH also released revised growth share rules stipulating that one affordable housing unit to be constructed for

every four market-rate units and for every 16 jobs. Previous ratios were one for every eight units and one for every 25 jobs, respectively.

Much of the controversy has surrounded the elimination of RCAs. The RCA was a method for a fully developed town to meet its affordable housing quota by paying a neighboring community to build units where land is available.

Towns like Westfield have used RCAs to manage their growth, according to Senator Tom Kean Jr. (LD-22, Westfield), a Republican, who voted against the bill.

"The concern is that the affordable housing obligations could trump open space and preserved areas," Mr. Kean said.

"A lot of the affordable housing num-

bers are flawed; they are based on 2002, rather than last year's data," he added. "Using aerial photographs taken in 2002, the Council on Affordable Housing has [mandated] municipalities to build new housing on military bases, nature preserves, college campuses and even at highway medians and rest stops."

Westfield GOP Councilman Jim Foerst said that without the RCA, it would be difficult for towns to satisfy their affordable housing obligations within their borders.

"It doesn't make sense to force towns to squeeze these affordable [housing] obligations within their own borders when there are towns looking to develop blighted areas, looking to have some affordable units in their areas," Mr. Foerst said.

Mr. Foerst said builders who are faced with a lack of available land and restrictions on the scope of development "have the right to exercise a 'builder's remedy lawsuit' and sue the Town of Westfield and force us, under the COAH law, to allow [them] to put in 50 [instead of the acceptable 16] units because [they are] including affordable units in the mix."

Assemblywoman Linda Stender (LD-22, Fanwood), a Democrat, also voted against the bill, primarily because she "opposed the elimination of RCA as part of the legislation."

"I don't believe that the legislation will do what it was intended to do," Ms. Stender said. "I agree with the goals, and there certainly is a need for affordable housing, but I did not agree with this legislation as the solution."

"We should be looking at more intense development in the already-developed areas of the urban communities that have the infrastructure in place, instead of contributing to suburban sprawl," she added.

In a press release issued by the Assembly Democratic Majority Office, Assembly Speaker Joseph Roberts (LD-5, Camden), who sponsored the bill, stated, "New Jerseyans need homes they can afford and jobs they can reach. The state must lead by example by expanding access to equitable and affordable housing."

In that same press release, Assemblyman Jerry Green (LD-22, Plainfield), who also sponsored the bill, stated, "Low-income New Jersey families are burdened by some of the highest rents and housing costs in the nation. We have a moral responsibility to countless New Jerseyans - disabled residents, families living on limited incomes and senior citizens - to ensure access to housing is safe and affordable."

While many are concerned with the elimination of RCAs, Michael Cerra, senior legislative analyst for the New Jersey League of Municipalities, said the shortfall for the commercial development fee would have more of a statewide impact, since

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Deerfield Graduates Seventy-Seven Students

By DEBBIE HOFFMAN
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

MOUNTAINSIDE — The parking lot of Deerfield Middle School in Mountainside was overflowing with cars and guests last Wednesday to attend the graduation of 77 of the borough's eighth graders.

The 39 boys and 38 girls were met with thunderous applause and a few whoops and yelps as they paraded down an aisle flanked by their family and friends.

In her opening remarks, class salutatorian Abigail Pires said "today is the day we leave the place with most of our childhood memories" as she reminded her classmates that when they first entered Deerfield "it seemed like an eternity until we became big eighth graders."

Chief School Administrator Jeanette Baubles, before honoring the graduates, asked the crowd to honor two former Deerfield students, Reid Kelley and Nicholas Perez-Santalla, who are currently serving in the military.

Ms. Baubles said she will "deeply miss" this graduating class and reminded the students that "each and everyone of us is a work in progress."

The next principal of Governor Livingston High School in Berkeley Heights, which the borough's high schoolers attend, Scott McKinney, said he "can't wait to see all the great things you'll accomplish as Highlanders."

Sixty-four of the graduates will be



CELEBRATING INDEPENDENCE...The Sons of the American Revolution color guard retreats after delivering the flag at last Thursday's concert by the Westfield Community Band at Mindowaskin Park. The color guard (front to rear) is composed of Ken Ward of Westfield, Steve Clarke of Madison and Dick Blundin of North Plainfield.

Planning Board Approves Three-Home Subdivision on Rahway Ave.

By KATIE ROGERS
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD — The Westfield Planning Board on Monday approved final subdivision plans submitted by Daunno Development Company of Clark to build three, new single-family residences on Rahway Avenue in Westfield. Currently, the property contains two homes and open land in the rear.

The original proposal for the land was brought before the board in November 2005, and developers returned three years later seeking approval for their final updated plans.

Attorney Alan Trembulak presented the plans of Daunno Development Company. Michael Lanzafama of Casey and Keller Associates of Millburn represented the new team of engineers brought on board for the final plans.

Mr. Lanzafama said errors in lot estimation from the original plans have been corrected and the current estimation is 20,056 square feet. He said the county has reviewed loose ends from the first site map, which show the boundaries of the property and a new public road. The new road will be a cul-de-sac.

"We have secured all questions from 2005," Mr. Lanzafama said.

Mr. Lanzafama and Mr. Trembulak also announced to the board that plans to develop have been agreed upon by adjoining homes, and are therefore eligible to move forward with the project at the approval of the planning

board. "We have attained a tree removal permit and the layout was Okayed by the fire department," Mr. Trembulak said.

Rudolph Daunno, founder of Daunno Development Company, described plans to build a preview home before going ahead with the other two homes.

"We call them preview homes, not model homes, because no two homes on the subdivision will look alike," Mr. Daunno said.

He said all site improvements in the area will be completed within three to

four months, whereas the homes will take between six and seven months to build. The developers anticipate beginning to build in September.

The proposal was first approved by board member Robert Newell and given a second vote by town engineer Kenneth Marsh.

With the board's approval, the Daunno group will move forward with plans to take out a loan to begin work on the project. The board will memorialize the plans on Aug. 4, 2008.

The subdivision, Forest Glen Realty Association, was previously

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Residents to Bear Sidewalk, Curb Replacements Costs

By MICHAEL J. POLLACK
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD — At last week's public meeting, the Westfield Council discussed upcoming changes to the town's curb and sidewalk replacement policies.

During the meeting's public comment portion, Doris Chamberlain of West Broad Street questioned the council as to when the new proposed sidewalk-improvement plan would take effect.

Two weeks ago, the council discussed a preliminary policy change in which the town would continue both the sidewalk and curb improvement programs, but interested residents would fund the assessments in full. In the past, it was a 50/50 venture between the town and interested residents.

Mr. Gildea addressed Ms. Chamberlain and said the town would continue to perform the work, and residents can spread payment over three years.

When asked if the town would only apply the new fee structure to future projects, Mr. Gildea responded, "At this point, the intention is that any current people on the waiting list... would be subject to the new policy."

GW to Receive \$250,000 In Additional State Aid

By RAYNOR DENITZIO
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

GARWOOD — The Garwood Borough Council announced on Tuesday that it would receive \$250,000 in extraordinary aid, pending a formal announcement by the state (on Wednesday). This additional aid will further decrease the tax levy of the borough's 2008 municipal budget.

Mayor Dennis McCarthy said he was informed of the aid by District 21 legislators, Senator Tom Kean Jr. and Assemblyman Jon Bramnick on Tuesday. Mr. Bramnick and Mr. Kean spoke briefly during the meeting to thank the mayor and council for their joint efforts in securing the aid.

"We understand how hard it is to do

your job," Mr. Bramnick said. "We're happy that the state recognizes how important it is to help communities like Garwood."

Borough Council President and Finance Committee Chairwoman, Kathleen Villaggio, said the additional aid, combined with \$251,550 in Consolidated Municipal Property Tax Relief Aid and the budget cuts recommended by the finance committee, should result in an average tax increase for municipal services of \$191 per home assessed at \$100,000, down from an estimate of \$518 in the initial budget.

"It's going down \$327 per \$100,000 assessed household, on the average,"

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IT'S A BLAST... Light rain didn't dampen spirits as crowds watched Independence Day fireworks at Nomahegan Park in Cranford.

Residents Sue Planning Bd. Over 'Little Gatehouse'

By PAUL J. PEYTON
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD — A group of Westfield residents have filed a lawsuit against the town's planning board and a resident, and are seeking a reversal of the board's approval to subdivide and create two new building lots on Canterbury Lane off of Wychwood Road. One of the lots would feature a new home in front of the smaller of two Gatehouses at the East Broad Street entrance to Wychwood.

The board approved the application in February, by a 6-1 tally, to subdivide the existing lot into two lots, with the applicant planning to construct a two-story, 4,000-square-foot English country manor-style home at 200 Canterbury Lane.

Residents Bruce Blumberg, Betty List, William Tittle, Brian and Kathleen Fitzpatrick, Amy Jester, Frank MacPherson, Gail Teese, George DeDominco and Siobhan Davey brought the suit.

Mr. Fitzpatrick told *The Westfield Leader* that the lawsuit alleges three points whereby the board's decision should be reversed. The plaintiffs argue that the front of the home is not Wychwood Road but East Broad Street, that the Marsella application "identified the wrong back lot" and that the location of the new home creates a safety issue.

The plaintiffs argue that the board "erroneously" concluded and was "derelict" in its duties in determining the front of the home is on East Broad.

"As early as September 14, 2006, the subject property was considered to have frontage on East Broad Street," according to the lawsuit. The plaintiffs argue that placing the front of the structure on Wychwood "would allow [Ms. Marsella] to construct a larger house

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OVERTURNING DECISION...Amy Jester, assignment editor Paul Peyton, Brian Fitzpatrick and intern Marisa Stotter meet at *The Westfield Leader* office Friday to discuss the "Little Gatehouse" project. Mr. Fitzpatrick and Ms. Jester, residents of Wychwood, filed a lawsuit against the Town of Westfield, the planning board and the applicant, seeking to overturn the planning board's prior decision.

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