

Officials Opposed to Changes In NJ Affordable Housing Rules

By: KATHERINE VOWELL
 Specially Written for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times

AREA — The State 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 units 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 numbers 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 [housing] affordable 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.



Wayne Baker for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times
IT'S A BLAST... Light rain didn't dampen spirits as crowds watched Independence Day fireworks at Nomahegan Park in Cranford.

Fanwood Council Approves Police Dispatcher Ordinance

By TED RITTER
 Specially Written for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times

FANWOOD — Mayor Colleen Mahr and the borough council, at their regular monthly meeting Tuesday night, approved an ordinance that would result in the hiring of police dispatchers.

Prior to a public hearing and approval of the measure on second reading, Councilman Bruce Walsh explained that the ordinance "establishes the position of police dispatcher in the future, should the mayor and council wish to do so."

Councilwoman Katherine Mitchell set Fanwood and Kenilworth are the only two Union County municipalities that do not have dispatchers. "I think that speaks volumes," she said.

During the hearing on the measure, other opinions were voiced.

Watson Road resident David Pickering spoke against the ordinance, referencing the borough's ongoing budget discussions.

"You don't need the position unless you've already decided to get rid of police officers and replace them with dispatchers," he said.

"I don't want us to be less protected [to save] dollars," said Mr. Pickering, adding, "You get what you pay for."

"If you adopt this [ordinance]," he continued, "that sends a clear message that we're ready [to lay off police officers], and I think that's a huge mistake."

Gavin Sheehan, with PBA Local 123, said, "We're not opposed to the borough council hiring dispatchers...to supplement and add to the police department." However, he said, the police union was "strongly

opposed" to hiring them to replace officers.

Woodland Avenue resident Tom Tzerfos credited Fanwood police officers with saving his life during a medical emergency.

"I urge you to reconsider making any cutbacks," he said, referencing police and public works personnel. "Keep them where they are; we need them," he stated.

Councilman Anthony Parenti, the borough's former police chief, said the idea of hiring police dispatchers has been "on the back burner" for at least 10 years.

"Is [the ordinance] designed to replace police officers? Absolutely not," said Councilman Parenti. "It's designed to supplement the officers we already have."

The governing body later approved a separate measure to explore options for shared services grant funding that could help pay for dispatchers.

Councilman Walsh, who also is the borough's police commissioner, said, "I strongly disagree with the inference that we have already made up our mind [about layoffs]."

"I would much rather have a police officer on the street than answering a telephone, and that's why we're doing this," the councilman said.

During her comments on the issue, Mayor Mahr said, "Just like people are doing in their households, they expect us to do more with less." She added that, "we have struggled" during ongoing budget deliberations.

"You may not agree with everything, but you have to understand the situation we're in," she said.

Borough Moving Ahead To Fix Pipes on Belvidere Ave.

By SARA MAGNOLA
 Specially Written for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times

FANWOOD — The Fanwood Borough Council received a report at its July 1 from Dan Madden, who was filling in for Borough Engineer Joseph Pryor, regarding the new drainage pipes being installed along Belvidere Avenue, during their agenda setting meeting on July 1.

"I have crawled in there personally and can tell you firsthand that the pipes are deformed, but are not collapsing," Mr. Madden said. The company who was contracted to clear the pipes of debris and run a liner along the interior of the canal discovered that some areas of the pipe had been crushed when originally installed.

This, in conjunction with a large amount of built-up debris, caused the pipes to rust, resulting in a 400-foot area where the bottom has been completely rusted through. The large amounts of debris included several "bowling ball sized stones that [didn't] get there naturally," Mr. Madden said.

Mr. Madden reported that Mr. Pryor recommended creating a cement-based channel to seal disconnected joints in the piping and prevent further soil migration in the compromised areas. While the project will be more intensive than originally thought, the contracted company has agreed to complete the work for the same amount of money, but was asking for immediate approval from the council, since they have completed the rest of the work and plan to "demobilize" in the next couple of days.

Borough Attorney Dennis Estis said he needs to thoroughly assess the situation to determine if the nature of the change would require a new bid.

The council also discussed a request from the Fanwood Police Department to implement a new parking ordinance on Birchwood Terrace due to an increase in traffic. The proposed ordinance would prohibit parking on both sides of the street during school hours on the block-long cul-de-sac, which is located directly next to the west side of Scotch Plains-Fanwood High School, and gets "triple" the traffic during the school hours, according to Councilman David Valian. The council decided to meet with street residents to get their feedback, before proceeding further with the new ordinance.

In new business, the council dis-



Courtesy of Stanley Biner
CAR FIRE... On Monday, July 7, at approximately 6:30 a.m., police and fire personnel responded to reports of a car fire on Herbert Avenue and Second Street in Fanwood. The car sustained damage of an undetermined amount. It was thought to be owned by a commuter outside of town using the Fanwood train station.



Ted Ritter for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times
VOLUNTEER OF THE MONTH... John Celardo, right, accepts a portrait of Fanwood's historic train station from Councilman Bruce Walsh. Mr. Celardo, who has been active for years with the planning board and in historic preservation initiatives, was honored at the July 8 council meeting. Councilman Walsh said Mr. Celardo, through his volunteer work, "epitomizes what it means to be a resident of Fanwood." Mayor Mahr called him "a really special Fanwoodian."

Scotch Plains Council OK's Salaries for Police, Public Works

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

SCOTCH PLAINS — The township council on Tuesday introduced three ordinances that set salaries and salary ranges for police department personnel as well as public works, recreation and other township employees.

The police department's multi-year contract, which covers all personnel with powers of arrest except for Police Chief Brian Mahoney, is set to expire at the end of this year, and the PBA requested and received a one-year extension through 2009 with the same salary increase as in 2008.

According to Township Manager Thomas Atkins, the average salary increase will be about 3.52 percent. He told the council he believes "it's a good settlement," and that the PBA

believes likewise.

The contract with the Scotch Plains Public Works and Recreation Association, which encompasses skilled blue-collar employees, sets out a salary increase schedule for about 16 separate job titles through mid-2010. Mr. Atkins said during negotiations, the union had asked for a no-layoff guarantee in exchange for lower salary increases.

But Mr. Atkins, who has been warning the council of tough financial times for township finances in coming years, told the council at its meeting on Tuesday, that "prospects of layoffs is a reality you might — and I stress, might — have to resort to" in coming years if cutting appropriations is the only way to achieve a balanced municipal budget.

The salary ordinance covering library and several other job titles includes a salary range for the yet-to-be-hired manager of the new Special Improvement District of \$10,000 to \$60,000.

All three ordinances will be voted on after public hearings on Tuesday, August 12.

In other business, Mayor Martin Marks said the township council is "on the precipice" of naming a new municipal manager to succeed Mr. Atkins, who is retiring at the end of August after 28 years at the helm. The

mayor said an announcement would likely be made "sometime in the next few weeks." The council has spent the last several months interviewing candidates for the position.

Earlier in the evening, at its conference meeting, the council discussed a memorandum from Township Attorney Brian Levine that concluded that Deputy Mayor Nancy Malool does not have any conflict of interest in regard to the recently approved ordinance establishing an SID.

At the public hearing last month, it was alleged that Mrs. Malool, an attorney with downtown offices within the SID boundaries, would directly benefit from being part of the SID. In order to prevent any perception of a conflict, she recused herself from the council's vote, which was 3-to-1 in favor of approving the ordinance.

Mr. Levine said that N.J.S.A. 40A:9-22.5(i) states that "no local government officer shall be deemed in conflict...if no material or monetary gain accrues to him as a member of any business, profession, occupation or group, to any greater extent than any gain could reasonably be expected to accrue to any other member of such business, profession, occupation or group."

He told the council Mrs. Malool is "not in any different position than

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Scotch Plains Dems Name Mullen to Replace Samuel

By FRED T. ROSSI
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SCOTCH PLAINS — Township Democrats last week selected attorney Theresa Mullen to replace Richard Samuel as the party's candidate for township council in this fall's municipal election.

Ms. Mullen will face Republican Mary DePaola for the council seat, currently held by two-term Republican Paulette Coronato, who chose not to seek re-election.

Mr. Samuel quit the race late last month, citing personal time constraints and a desire to be involved with the presidential and congressional campaigns.

Township Clerk Barbara Riepe con-

firmed that Ms. Mullen filed her candidacy paperwork with the Union County Clerk's Office.

Ms. Mullen told *The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times* this week that she has been active in the local Democratic Party since moving to Scotch Plains five years ago, and

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Clarification

SCOTCH PLAINS — A headline printed in last week's newspaper on coverage of the Scotch Plains-Fanwood Board of Education (BOE) was perhaps confusing to our readers. Please see letter from SPF Superintendent of Schools Margaret Hayes on page 5.



Sara Magnola for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times
NO ONE'S HOME... This abandoned residence on the corner of Saville Row and Martine Avenue drew complaints from neighbors due to its unsightly appearance and overgrown landscaping, prompting the Borough of Fanwood to send in the Department of Public Works to clean it up. The borough is in the process of acquiring a lien on the property.

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