

Westfield Central Avenue Project Set to Go to Bid by County

By MICHAEL J. POLLACK
Specialty Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD - The Central Avenue corridor project, which seeks to improve traffic flow and safety along the county roadway, will go out to bid by the end of August. The project calls for the implementation of modernized traffic-control devices and the reconfiguration of several intersections on Central Avenue, from the Clark border through to North Avenue in Westfield.

The project, which has taken years to gain traction, is under the jurisdiction of Union County, which will pick up the tab for the venture.

Union County Public Information Officer Sebastian D'Elia told *The*

Westfield Leader that Union County government would advertise for bids on the project in roughly two to three weeks. Money from the New Jersey Department of Transportation's County Aid Fund, not federal stimulus dollars, he said, would help pay for the project.

When asked for estimates on how much the project could cost, Mr. D'Elia said, "County policy is to not disclose engineering estimates prior to bid opening."

Traffic consultant Gordon Meth, who advised Westfield during the process, told *The Leader*, "generally speaking," that he would estimate a \$200,000 per-light charge, and that the cost for the six modernized traffic lights - North and South Avenues, Park and Grove Streets,

Clifton Street/Sycamore Avenue and a pedestrian-activated signal - would be close to \$1.2 million.

"So, we're talking, once curb work is factored in, at least \$1.5 million for everything," he said.

At Westfield's last public council meeting, before a month-long summer recess, Public Safety, Transportation and Parking Committee Chairman Mark Ciarrocca allowed *The Leader* to review the final drawings of the project. It marks the culmination of the combined efforts of Town Engineer Kris McAloon, Union County Engineer Thomas Mineo, Mr. Ciarrocca, Westfield Mayor Andy Skibitsky, Freeholder Chairman Al Mirabella and Mr. Meth.

During the August 4 council meeting, Mr. Ciarrocca said that, after seeing the drawings, he is "happy to report that everything we have requested, which came about through the Citizens Traffic Safety Advisory Committee meetings, is in it."

The final changes will result in the following: the addition of a pedestrian-activated crosswalk and traffic light in the vicinity of Central Avenue and Clover Street; the creation of cul-de-sacs on Cambridge Road and Belmar Terrace; the replacement of antiquated traffic lights with modernized ones that can be sequenced - at Sycamore Avenue, Grove and Park Streets - and a dedicated left-hand-turn lane and signal at the intersections of Central and South Avenues, as well as Central and North Avenues.

Mr. Ciarrocca said one of the goals of the project is to "upgrade the entire system along Central Avenue, so that the lights can be properly timed and traffic stays on Central. We don't want traffic to push off to [parallel] streets like Carleton Road, Boulevard and Summit Avenue."

Mr. Mineo, through e-mail, told *The Leader* that once work begins, most likely this fall, he estimates a six- to nine-month process until the project is finished.

Mr. Ciarrocca diagramed, with the

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Fanwood Mayor Named To Government Ethics Panel

By PAUL J. PEYTON
Specialty Written for The Westfield Leader

FANWOOD - Borough Mayor Colleen Mahr has been named to Governor Jon Corzine's 10-member local government ethics board. The appointment comes a month after an FBI sweep led to the arrests of state legislators, mayors, council members and rabbis on corruption charges, the latest of corruption probes that has led to the conviction of over 130 elected officials.

The governor created the ethics task force on September 28, 2008, through an executive order (no. 119), though the task force has been left dormant until this time. The order states that since the current local government ethics laws were adopted in 1991, "there has not been a thorough review of the efficacy of those laws, nor any comprehensive study of the need for amendments."

"For the Borough of Fanwood, for Union County, this is an honor to serve," Mayor Mahr said when reached for comment on Tuesday. "It's an honor that I am viewed as someone who can bring a very fair and partial balanced approach to this very sort of passionate conversation that is happening up and down this state and to try and reign in this negativity that is running rampant when it comes to ethics or the lack of ethics from our elected officials."

The mayor said, "Most of the mayors (in New Jersey) are honest hard-working ethical people, but there are those that aren't." She said the panel would need to try and determine "what is the common thread that has bound all of these corruption charges."

"Is it the advancing of some land-use decisions (by developers) who think it's going to fast track, which is why they give the bribes? Is it the pay-to-play reform? Is it zoning matters at the local level that need to be taken a hard look at?" Mayor Mahr questioned.

"The large majority of us (mayors) do not get compensated or get very small compensation to do this. I get a dollar a year. I've made a total of six dollars since I've been here. So, I am not in it monetarily. I would never think to put my hand out for any quid pro quo, but the fact that others would



BEAUTY AT THE MARKET...The Westfield Farmers Market displays its beauty last Saturday with lovely ladies glowing among the shining flowers. The market is open every Saturday with fresh produce through November at the South Avenue Train Station parking lot.

Creation of Union County Court Being Eyed to Enhance Revenues

By PAUL J. PEYTON
Specialty Written for The Westfield Leader

ELIZABETH - In an effort to increase revenues for county government, Union County officials are considering the creation of a county court system.

Union is one of five county police units among the 21 counties in the state. Bergen, Camden, Essex and Morris also have county departments, although Morris and Camden operate county parks police departments.

Union County has hired a retired Berkeley Heights Police Department captain, Andrew Moran, to develop a strategic plan for the county's public safety department. Besides a county court system, the county is eyeing a county-wide Emergency Medical Services (EMS) system, shared radio services system and/or expansion of police and fire emergency radio frequencies, as well as a consolidated 9-1-1 dispatch center, possibly covering the entire county or specific regions.

County Manager George Devaney said in a press release earlier this month that the strategic plan is aimed at "ensuring high-quality service and maximum efficiency" while raising revenues.

"We don't want to lose sight of this," county spokesman Sebastian D'Elia told *The Westfield Leader*. "It's revenue on everything" that the county is looking to increase. He said the location for a county court was still "under consideration." The county's public safety department is located on North Avenue in Westfield.

In addition, Mr. D'Elia said the county was also looking to expand the accreditation of the county police department by reviewing all of its rules and procedures.

"It will help with the flexibility of the department" by providing "operational efficiency," as well as reducing the department's "risk of liability," Mr. D'Elia said.

The county spokesman said a county court could be considered a "companion piece" to a recently enacted ordinance whereby the county will now collect half of all fees associated with the towing and impounding of vehicles towed per police request in the county.

The county's ordinance increased the fees for towing of disabled or impounded vehicles from county roads or property to between \$150 and \$450 for towing plus another \$35 to \$100 for daily storage fees for impounded vehicles; the county collects half of the storage fees when vehicles are stored

on commercial towing facility lots. The county has left open the option to create its own storage site for towed vehicles, whereby the county would collect 100 percent of the storage fees. The county must license towing companies. The freeholders also increased those fees.

Regarding whether a county court was being considered as part of a shared-services agreement with towns, Mr. D'Elia said, "Yes, we will look at everything we can do" (to help towns).

When asked where the cases that come before a county court are currently being heard, Mr. D'Elia said, "Many of the cases [are] likely tried in municipal courts." Concerning how much revenue a county court might net for the county, Mr. D'Elia said the county was still "looking to project it (revenue) out."

Bergen County is the only county with a county court system. According to Bergen County spokeswoman Sheri Hensley, the Bergen County Central Municipal Court was created in 1997 to save the county money. This system has an annual budget of \$940,947 and employs three judges, three prosecutors, a public defender and a staff of 14.

Ms. Hensley said the central court generated \$4.5 million in revenue for the county last year out of \$6.7 million collected.

When asked what types of cases the central court hears, Ms. Hensley responded that typically, cases are from the Bergen County police and sheriff's

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Cranford Aims Development; Announces Flood Funding

By CHRISTINA M. HINKE
Specialty Written for The Westfield Leader

CRANFORD - Mayor David Robinson at Tuesday's Township Committee meeting announced Olé Fire & Grill will open in the Cranford Crossing development on South Avenue in the space previously occupied by Cusi restaurant. Since its first occupant opened two years ago, Cranford Crossing has had trouble filling the retail space on the ground level and spots still remain unoccupied. It also could not sell the condominiums proposed above and switched the housing to rental units.

He also announced a skateboard park is planned for Hillside Avenue

off Centennial Avenue near the tennis courts. The park will be built "at no additional cost to the taxpayer," he said. Funding comes from donations.

The House of Representatives recently passed a \$300,000 grant to move forward the Northeast Quadrant Stormwater Management Project in the township, Deputy Mayor Mark Smith announced.

"To our great pleasure, this funding will be coming from Washington," he said.

Rep. Leonard Lance (R-7th) had moved this issue in front of his peers after hearing at a Cranford Flood Advisory Committee meeting about the

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CORRUPTION CRACKDOWN...Asm. Jon Bramnick (R-21), center, and attorney Robert Stahl, right, are interviewed by *The Westfield Leader* Publisher Horace Corbin last Wednesday in the newspaper's Westfield office on the state's efforts to deal with government corruption. The video is on goleader.com.

Dealing With Corruption In New Jersey Discussed

By HORACE CORBIN
Specialty Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD - Asm. Jon Bramnick and attorney Robert Stahl provided an interview on Wednesday, August 12, with Horace Corbin, publisher of *The Westfield Leader* and *The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times*, on the subject of "Dealing With Corruption in New Jersey." The 40-minute video is available online at goleader.com.

Asm. Bramnick (R-21) is the Assembly minority whip and represents 200,000 people across 16 towns, including Westfield, in the state.

Mr. Stahl is a former federal prosecutor and is now an attorney defending clients accused of white-collar crime in areas such as political corruption and fraud. He was recently brought on to defend 87-year-old Rabbi Saul Kasson of Brooklyn who was caught up in last month's FBI sweep of 44 corrupt officials in New Jersey. He was unable to comment on that matter.

Mr. Bramnick said the Assembly Republican Policy Committee is holding hearings in Trenton (which started Monday) because the "archaic rules of the Legislature do not permit public input or debate on broad issues facing the government." Even on the floor of the Assembly, a legislator can only discuss the specific bill being presented. "So, the very strong interest of the legislature is not to have broad, public discussion - we never even had a debate on property taxes," said Mr. Bramnick.

He said these hearings would provide an open discussion on corruption with public input, which has never

occurred. The hearing's goal is to expose the cause of public corruption and draft legislation to prevent it.

When asked if television news stations would televise the hearings, Mr. Bramnick said it is unlikely that NJN or News12 will televise the hearings, although he would welcome coverage.

Mr. Bramnick acknowledged that corruption has been "highly editorialized in the press." He agreed that it might be the result of "greed, avarice and a system arranged to permit it." He noted though, "We're not going back to ground zero because, in fact, it has never been discussed at all by the Legislature. It's been just press releases back and forth between the two parties."

Mr. Corbin asked Mr. Stahl to respond to the public's perception of New Jersey as being the most corrupt state in the country. Mr. Stahl said that a recent study suggests that New Jersey may actually rate seventh in the nation in corruption. Three of the last five governors of Illinois are in prison for example. Mr. Bramnick added that the TV show "Sopranos" might add to the public's negative perception of New Jersey.

Mr. Bramnick said, "Those that are guilty [of public corruption] may have developed a sense of empowerment; egos start to grow and they are treated like royalty." He said they develop a feeling that "no one can touch you." Still, he said the question remains - "Just because you're charged with a crime, should you give up your office?"

Mr. Corbin asked if the hearings were solely on corrupt politicians or

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A ROYAL VISIT AT THE WSW...Ashley Shaffer, Miss New Jersey 2009, visit students at the Westfield Summer Workshop (WSW) on its closing day, July 31. An opera singer, Ms. Shaffer performed for the students at their "Happening" show and visited with the children in several classes. Pictured is Miss New Jersey, center, holding crown, with cast members from the WSW Summer Stage Theater production of *Little Shop of Horrors*.



RELAXED AMIGOS...Three friends enjoy each other's company downtown last week in Westfield during the weekly Jazz Night performances.

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