

## WF to Set Sewer Charge, Public Decorum Spirals on Other Matters

By LAUREN S. BARR  
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD – In order to help finance the municipal budget for 2012, Finance Committee Chairman Sam Della Fera announced at Tuesday night's council meeting that Westfield will need to implement a sewer utility charge to residents.

"Our goal has been to preserve the quality of life that Westfield residents have come to expect," Councilman Della Fera said. He cited a \$5-million drop in non-tax revenue over the last four years, decreases in state aid and the state's 2-percent cap requirement as issues that make the budget process difficult.

Councilman Della Fera said that the town has a budget gap of over \$1

million, and the town's bill from the Rahway Valley Sewerage Authority (RVSA) is \$3.6 million for 2012. He said residents will not bear the entire cost of the RVSA bill and that he "expect(s) that it will not be popular."

Mayor Andy Skibitsky asked if there was some idea of how many employees would have to be laid off if the town chose not to bill for the sewer utility, to which Councilman Della Fera replied that it would mean 40 to 50 employees.

The mayor said the town already has gone from 250 employees to 200 over the past few years. He told the council, "I know this isn't going to be the most popular thing to do, but I think it's the right thing to do."

Town Administrator Jim Gildea said that information on how much resi-

dents would be billed would be forthcoming in the next two weeks.

Just before closing the conference session, Mayor Skibitsky announced that he had met with Union County Freeholders on Thursday to discuss the Central Avenue pedestrian crossing and issues on North Avenue. He then distributed a report by the engineering firm Pennoni Associates commissioned by the freeholders, along with a council resolution supporting the current location of the pedestrian crossing signal.

Approximately 10 minutes later, the council began its regular public meeting, where Mayor Skibitsky gave a presentation on the history of the Central Avenue pedestrian crossing signal and highlights of the report from Pennoni.

The report concludes that, "considering the roadway characteristics, the relative newness of HAWK signals to the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD) and New Jersey drivers, and taking into account the results of the signal warrant analyses performed, our recommendation is to replace current mid-block HAWK signal with a 'standard' signal installation at Central Avenue and Clover Street." The report states that the installation of a standard signal would require additional work, "without necessarily providing any measurable improvement in intersection safety."

After the presentation, the council passed a resolution not to endorse Pennoni's recommendation to replace the light, thus leaving the current HAWK signal in place. The borough's action will be forwarded to Union County, Borough Clerk Claire Gray told *The Westfield Leader* that the county would have paid for the changes in signals as it was a county project.

Third Ward Councilman Dave Haas cast the only dissenting vote on the resolution. He said that while the process of public meetings and outreach that took place leading up to the placement of the pedestrian crossing signal "was a very good process," he was still unsure if that was the safest location. He added that if both locations were equally safe, he feels that the council has an obligation to those who live there and the impact it has on their homes. Councilman Haas also was critical of the council voting on such a resolution without more time for both members of the council and the public to view the report.

During public comment, resident Frank Foley said that he went to all of

## Gov. Christie Supports CF Mayor's Stance on Birchwood

By FRED T. ROSSI  
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

CRANFORD – Mayor David Robinson expressed appreciation for Governor Chris Christie's seemingly supportive comments about the township's stance on the proposed Birchwood Avenue development.

At the township committee's meeting on Tuesday evening, a resident played an audio tape of the governor's remarks – made recently on a radio call-in program – in which Governor Christie, when questioned by a Cranford resident, said the state Department of Community Affairs had met with local officials and was "working on resolving the matter."

The governor went on to say that he was "concerned about [the proposed development] from a flooding perspective," adding that "it doesn't sound to me like it's a very wise idea." The governor, who told the caller that he had lived in Cranford in the late 1980s, said that the proposed 360 housing units would worsen the effects from the next severe flood.

Earlier in the meeting, township attorney Phil Morin briefly recounted last month's denial of a motion for reconsideration in the township's lawsuit against Cranford Development



IMAGINING A BRIGHTER FUTURE... Representatives of Imagine, Inc., a year-round grief support center set to open this spring for children, teenagers and adults coping with loss due to death and illness, visit the offices of *The Westfield Leader* last Friday to discuss the new Westfield-based program. Pictured, from left to right, are: Keith Hertell, chairman of Imagine's board of trustees; Mary Robinson, executive director, and Community Editor Suzette Stalker.

## WF BOE Proposes \$94.65 Mil. Budget With \$87.2 Mil. Tax Levy

By KIMBERLY A. BROADWELL  
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD – Members of the Westfield Board of Education (BOE) and audience members heard a brief presentation given last week by Vincent Yaniro, business administrator, about the district's preliminary \$94,644,198 school budget and \$87,201,039 tax levy. The proposed tax levy is proposed at a 1.9 percent increase from last year.

At the February 7 meeting, Mr. Yaniro announced that the proposed tax levy would "be within the state budgeted (2 percent) cap." He then noted that this tentative proposed budget would be on the agenda for board approval at the next BOE meeting on Tuesday, February 28.

In his proposal, Mr. Yaniro outlined that the tax levy has gone up by \$1,656,605 since last year's spending plan. These increases include \$312,502 for upgrades in the science technology, engineering and math curriculum as well as increasing enrollment. It was reported that the technology line for last year's budget was

\$277,420 where this year's equals \$794,270. This, Mr. Yaniro stated, included upgrades to computer equipment that was seven years old or older. In addition, school supplies and equipment have increased by \$1,942 and athletics has a \$20,126

budget increase. Mr. Yaniro also stated in his presentation that the special education line has increased by \$454,541.

Mr. Yaniro pointed out that pension and health benefits have decreased by

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## ShopRite Reopens After Fire in Meat Department

By PAUL J. PEYTON  
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

GARWOOD – The Garwood ShopRite reopened Tuesday morning after a small fire in the meat department shut the North Avenue supermarket late Monday.

According to Garwood Police Captain James Pipala, borough police officers responded to the store Monday on a 3:45 p.m. report of a smoke condition caused by an electrical fire in the area of the meat department. Upon police arrival, the fire was extinguished by employees with fire extinguishers. Captain Pipala reported that there was a heavy smoke condition in the store.

The Garwood Fire Department responded along with the first aid squad and Union County EMS. Officers on scene evacuated the store and se-

cured the area. One ShopRite employee was treated for difficulty breathing and released at the scene.

A Westfield Regional Board of Health representative responded to the scene and the business was closed for the remainder of the day. Liz Lope, a spokesperson for Wakefern Corp., the distribution arm of ShopRite supermarkets, told *The Westfield Leader* that the store was evacuated and closed as a precaution due to smoke conditions. She said the store was reopened following inspections by authorities, including the health department, after any exposed food was disposed of as ordered by the health inspector.

Westfield Health Officer Megan Avallone told *The Leader* that the store was reopened at 10:30 a.m. Tuesday morning.



IMPROMPTU BBQ... The Garwood ShopRite reopened Tuesday morning after a small fire in the meat department shut the North Avenue supermarket late Monday. The fire, thought to be electrical in nature, originated in the area of the meat department.



CLEAN FUTURE... Approximately 30 protesters gather at the Westfield train station February 8 to protest New Jersey pulling out of the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI). See story page 3.

## Indoor Sports Complex OK'd By MS Planning Bd.

By CHRISTINA M. HINKE  
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

MOUNTAINSIDE – After six months of deliberation, the Mountainside Planning Board last Thursday voted 6 to 1 to approve the application for the Triboro Sports indoor sports complex on Sheffield Street.

Planning Board Chairman John Tomaine was the sole dissenter. "There is inconsistency, there is an inapplicable argument, and when you remove all of that away, again what is left is the board acting to rezone this property becomes a misuse by virtue of granting the ordinance, which it has no authority to do," Mr. Tomaine said. He also said the applicant did not meet the positive criteria to grant the use variance.

"The chairman understood the law," said Glenn Kienz of Weiner and Lesniak LLC, who was an attorney hired by objector Ben Caiola of 868 Hillside Avenue in Westfield.

When the board gave its vote, some board members said that the borough's master plan should be revised.

"We have changed from a manufacturing society to a service society,"

board member Theodore Zawslak said. Residents from Mountainside and Springfield packed the council chambers to address the board regarding the proposed 80,000-square-foot indoor sports complex.

Triboro Sports is proposing erecting an indoor sports complex at 270 Sheffield Street where a vacant industrial building currently sits. There are no existing variances. New variances include a use variance, retail sales, café, foundation area over 35 percent where 51.3 percent is proposed, lot coverage over 75 percent where 86 percent is proposed, HVAC system location, insufficient buffer area, insufficient parking spaces, parking spaces in the front yard, side yard parking, parking space measuring 9 feet by 20 feet is required and 9 feet by 18 feet is proposed, and an accessory structure. The property also is located in a flood zone.

Residents voiced concerns of noise, floodlights from the parking lots streaming into their backyards, traffic, the size of the building, stormwater runoff to Charles Street, the potential unsavory behavior that may occur in the parking

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OFFICIAL BUSINESS... Members of Franklin Elementary School's Den 7, Boy Scout Pack 172, met recently with Westfield Mayor Andy Skibitsky as part of their Webelos' Citizen Requirement. The scouts posted the colors that same evening to open the town council meeting.

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