

Mayor, Resident Discuss State of Downtown Area

By DOMINIC A. LAGANO
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD — During its regular conference session Tuesday evening, the town council discussed the state of the downtown area and the prospect of luring new businesses to it.

The question was raised by resident Tim Harrington during the public comments portion of the council's conference session. Mr. Harrington said he was concerned about the future of the downtown and equated it to the City of Plainfield.

"I'm beginning to wonder whether Westfield today is what Plainfield was in the early sixties in the central business district. It's something that needs to be considered," Mr. Harrington said.

Mr. Harrington stated that with the advent of online shopping and online banking, "we've lost six banks in town in the last six years," and the "huge consolidation" of medical practices is causing a "major impact on towns."

Mr. Harrington continued, "When you start looking around you can spot some vacant spaces, but I know some more that are coming that haven't been announced yet. I don't have the answer, but I've identified a problem that really needs to get addressed. In summary, I think that may be the most fundamental crucial issue... it is some-

thing that we have to consider."

When questioned by Mayor Andrew Skibitsky about his recommendations for a solution, Mr. Harrington replied that the Downtown Westfield Corporation (DWC) should, "come up with some facts for the council - what is going on." He also suggested that the DWC hire someone to conduct "a serious survey" to determine solutions.

The DWC is the management entity of the Special Improvement District (SID), an area downtown which covers most of the businesses in Westfield.

In addition to promoting events such as Girls Night Out, the Downtown 5K Run and Pizza Extravaganza, the Sweet Sounds Downtown Jazz Festival and the like, the DWC regularly promotes the Town of Westfield to attract new businesses to the SID.

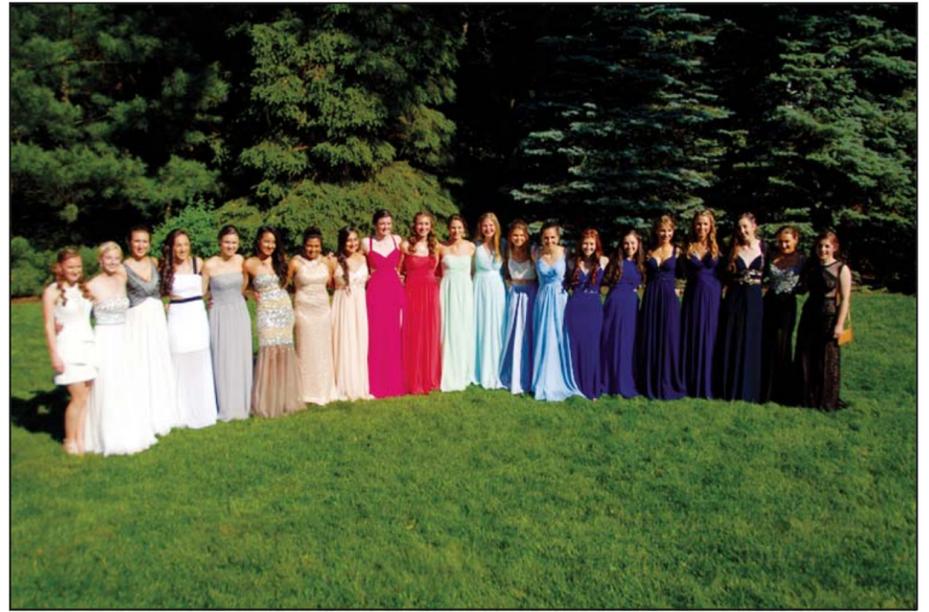
As covered in the February 26 edition of *The Westfield Leader*, the DWC also prepares a yearly report which is forwarded to the New Jersey Department of Community Affairs, the organization that oversees New Jersey's Special Improvement Districts throughout the state.

According to that report, in 2014 20 businesses closed in the past year and 33 new ones were created in Westfield's downtown area, for a net gain of 13 businesses.

There was an average 2.59-percent vacancy rate last year, accounting for 42,918 square feet of retail space that was available. Eighty-four building rehabilitations and one new construction project were completed last year. In all, the SID investments and reinvestments, including new purchases, accounted for \$4,841,404 last year.

"I think that we're all aware the retail paradigm is changing, no doubt about that," Mayor Skibitsky stated. "Westfield, even though we do have some vacancies, our occupancy rate is

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GIRL POWER...This group of girls gather in the backyard of Michael and Tara Rohwetter's home on Golf Edge in Westfield on Saturday afternoon prior to going to the senior prom. Courtesy of Stu Mooney

Bruns Named Assistant Admin., Senior Housing Open June 25

By BRIAN TRUSDELL
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

GARWOOD — Borough Treasurer Sandy Bruns has been recommended as the in-house staff member to become the borough's assistant administrator, a newly created position that will serve as a backup to Borough Clerk Christina Ariemma.

Administrative Review Committee Chairwoman Ann Tarantino put forth Ms. Bruns' name at Tuesday's borough council meeting, saying a

resolution would be introduced at the council's next meeting on Tuesday, June 23, to formalize the appointment.

"She is the CFO, treasurer and, next to the administrator, has the most knowledge of the borough functions and the government procedures, making her the obvious choice," Mrs. Tarantino said.

The resolution also will set the compensation for the position at \$4,500 annually, Mrs. Tarantino said. This amount will be in addition to her salary as borough treasurer.

The announcement came in a relatively short hour-long meeting in which Ms. Ariemma also spoke about a public works shared service agreement with Fanwood. Reading from a prepared statement, Ms. Ariemma said the details were not ready for public discussion, but that there have been negotiations with Fanwood for "certain management functions and other matters in the Department of Public Works."

Council members held a closed executive session at the last council meeting on May 26 to discuss a shared services agreement with Fanwood but no details were disclosed.

At Tuesday's meeting, Mayor Charles Lombardo, council members nor Ms. Ariemma would neither confirm nor deny reports on local blogs

and Internet forums that DPW Superintendent Fred Corbett was being dismissed and replaced by Fanwood's DPW management.

"Unfortunately, at this time, they are not able to comment on that," Ms. Ariemma said.

She did say the matter would be up for discussion at the June 23 council meeting, but also said the discussion could be in open or closed session.

"The proposal, if accepted, will not result in any reduction of services provided by the Department of Public Works," Ms. Ariemma said in her prepared statement.

In other action, the council unanimously approved the \$59,000 purchase of a police dispatch console and related equipment and the issuance of a bond to cover the cost. The issue had been discussed previously on several occasions.

The council also gave Ms. Ariemma approval to sign the lease agreement with the Burger King restaurant on North Avenue for the leasing of 36 parking spaces that would be made available to commuters.

A resolution setting the cost to commuters has yet to be introduced. Additionally, the council debated applying for a Union County matching grant for recreation improvements and enhancements. Council President

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Paul Lachnauer for The Westfield Leader

FRESH BREAD...This customer admires bread from Hoboken Farms at Cranford's first ever Sunday morning farmers' market held in the South Avenue train station parking lot. The market is sponsored by the Cranford Community Connection.

Board Okays Applications, Rejects Bi-Level Expansion

By DELL SIMEONE
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD — The zoning board met on Monday evening and had a full roster of applications. The meeting lasted until 11:30 p.m. Several applications were carried to the Monday, July 13 meeting.

The following applications were approved:

Barry and Jennifer Jaruzelski, 210 South Euclid Avenue, sought approval to construct a steeper sloped roof above their existing garage. They wish to install a lift to store a vehicle which will bring a vehicle to the upper story. Mr. Jaruzelski said that the home is historic and the driveway is long and narrow. He said parking in the front yard is not permitted and if a third car was parked behind the home it would be impossible to back out without driving across the patio.

The home is preserved and historically correct, he said. The couple would like to add a gambrel roof which would not change the footprint of the garage. Board Chairman William Heinbokel said, "It's a different way of dealing with the problem." Their neighbor, Shawn Flaherty, testified that he supported the new construction.

Francesco and Lisa Flora Mola, of 108 Surrey Lane, were approved to build a first-floor addition and a front porch. Mr. Mola said they want to improve the aesthetics and functionality of their home. The ordinance requires a rear-yard setback of 35 feet where the Molas proposed 29 feet. The ordinance requires a maximum FAR (floor area ratio) of 37 percent, where they proposed 39.4 percent. Their architect, P.J. Kumar, said they would like to enhance the architecture. Right

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Courtesy of Andrew Krakauer

OUR BIG NIGHT...Westfield High School's senior prom was held Saturday night. Prior to heading to the big dance, these seniors and their dates attended a pre-prom party at the home of Alison Krakauer. Pictured, from left to right, are: Ansh Jhaveri and Grace Cook, Eric Herber and Emily Forcht, Michael Armento and Bianca DeVito, Alison Krakauer and Alex Ionescu, Amanda Durante and Brad Whitman, and Lindsey Strauss and Jack Siegel.

BOE Honors Top Teachers, Discusses Proposed Bond Ref.

By DELL SIMEONE
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD — The board of education met on Tuesday evening and honored district teachers, heard the result of a community survey and presented rationale for a proposed bond ordinance.

Board President Richard Mattessich presented Christine Cabrales with the Optimist Club of Westfield's intermediate school Teacher-of-The-Year Award. Ms. Cabrales is a physical education and health teacher at the Edison Intermediate School. He also presented the same award to Erika Hodges, a language arts teacher at the Roosevelt Intermediate School. Antony Farag, a social studies teacher at Westfield High School, who was not present, received the Robert and Linda Foose Memorial Award.

Judith McLaughlin, a Westfield High School (WHS) science teacher, received the Above and Beyond Award for making a difference in the life of a struggling child. Josh Gorodnick, a Westfield High School physics teacher, received the WHS PTO award for his enthusiasm and dedication. Annora Happe-Conway, a Westfield High School art teacher, received the Distinguished Teacher-of-The-Year Award for her dedicated commitment to intellectual pursuits.

After the awards ceremony there was a brief reception followed by Superintendent of Schools Margaret Dolan's report on the 2015 parent/community survey of the Westfield Public Schools. She said the response rate was good and that 500 people took part in the survey. The present year responses were compared to the responses from 2009. The results were mostly favorable and showed that the

participants believe the district is fulfilling its mission of helping students to reach their highest potential and to become well-balanced, productive and responsible citizens.

Dana Sullivan, business administrator, said it was necessary for the district to have a bond ordinance because a number of high-priority capital projects must be done in the next 12 to 24 months. She said capital projects cannot be funded through the operating budget because of the 2-percent cap on tax levy increases. Ms. Sullivan said the average age of the district buildings is 77 years.

There are 7,000 students and staff who use these buildings daily. She said 40 percent of the principal and interest cost for most projects is available through state debt service aid. She added that now construction costs and interest rates are favorable. Many of the projects are infrastructure upgrades and for safety purposes. Technology upgrades are necessary in some schools, she said. The bond referendum question should be on the ballot in November or December, she said.

At one point during the meeting, board member Mitch Slater restated his opposition to having an armed police officer in the school district.

During the public portion of the meeting, longtime Westfield resident and former councilman, Anthony LaPorta, objected to the recent student art show in which students depicted police brutality. Mr. LaPorta quoted statistics on the number of police officers killed each year in the line of duty. Superintendent Dolan explained that the students were given an assignment to depict both sides of a controversial subject. She said it was regrettable that social media made

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TALENTED ENTERTAINER...Among the attractions at Sunday's second annual Garwood Rocks! festival was this juggler on stilts. Paul Lachnauer for The Westfield Leader

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