Garwood Councilman’s Health Insurance Benefits Sparks Row

By BRIAN TRUSDELL
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

GARWOOD – Councilman Joe Sarno’s proposal to revoke health insurance benefits for Council President Lou Petruzzelli sparked sharp words on both sides at Monday’s council meeting but was introduced before the full council despite being voted down at the committee level.

More than once Mayor Charles Lombardo banged his gavel to restore order, at one point making a sharp rap during an exchange between Councilman Jim Mathieu and Mr. Petruzzelli, saying the issue was “getting personal.”

Several residents supporting the ordinance to deny health insurance benefits to part-time employees— including elected officials— and those opposed took turns expressing their opinion during the public comment portion of the meeting, at times addressing each other instead of council members.

At issue is the state law that allows elected officials who had been enrolled in the government insurance would be null and void.

Opponents seized on Mr. Renaud’s opinion, with Mr. Martin saying he checked with the borough’s insurance agent, who told him that if the borough changed the ordinance, declaring at different times the statute was both vague and unclear.

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