

Asm. Bramnick Seeks Change In Affordable-Housing Laws

By CHRISTINA M. HINKE
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

CRANFORD—Assemblyman Jon Bramnick (R-21st, Westfield), Republican Assembly Minority Leader, held a town-hall-style meeting at Kilkenny House July 9 to discuss his ideas on how to change state laws that require municipalities to provide a certain number of affordable-housing units.

Mr. Bramnick asserted that he is not against providing affordable housing, but rather he is against the high-density housing that goes along with including affordable housing within a development and the courts being in charge of the determination.

In municipalities in Union County such as Cranford, Westfield,

Garwood, Scotch Plains, Mountainside and Fanwood, residents are seeing large-scale apartment buildings being erected with what is called inclusionary housing, meaning developers build high-density housing that sets aside, typically, 15 to 20 percent for affordable housing, and the municipalities will include that in their affordable-housing allotment that the court imposes upon them.

For instance, Scotch Plains is expected to have 3,000 new apartments built, with about 15 percent of those earmarked as affordable housing, after the township settled its affordable housing with the court earlier this year.

Cranford has been slapped with builder's remedy lawsuits that has

required the municipality to build hundreds of units, and the township currently is working to fulfill its lawsuits' obligation that is to be met by the end of the year; it still has yet to reach a third-round affordable-housing agreement.

Westfield settled with the courts last year, and most recently a new apartment complex on South and Central Avenues was built with inclusionary housing. The town also has earmarked commercial properties such as Westfield Lumber and Williams Nursery as spaces that could potentially become residential with inclusionary housing.

"Now the court is micro-managing how many units you have to build in these communities and that is ridiculous," Mr. Bramnick said. In his opinion, the courts should not be making the decision.

He called the issue partisan. "On this issue, Democrats like this concept of moving high-density housing into municipalities," he said. "They won't pass or let us vote on any of these bills that would change the law."

At the town-hall meeting last week, Mr. Bramnick and Republican Assemblywoman Nancy Muñoz (R-21st, Summit) were joined by about 30 to 40 people in attendance, including residents from Cranford and Clark who have concerns about the 905 apartments that have been proposed at 750 Walnut Avenue in Cranford by Hartz Mountain Industries, which currently is looking to rezone the commercial property to residential.

In response to the rezoning Hartz is proposing, Mr. Bramnick commented, "...in essence, the developer says I can no longer rent...I want to put housing up...Why? In essence, the easiest way to make money."

"I don't know the politics but I would doubt that local officials want

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Cranford Introduces Ord. To Designate Historic Dist.

By KIMBERLY A. BROADWELL
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

CRANFORD—With many proud Sunny Acres residents looking on in the audience, members of the Cranford Township Committee, Tuesday night, unanimously passed upon first reading an ordinance declaring the Sunny Acres area of Cranford a historic district.

Sunny Acres resident and member of the Cranford Preservation Advisory Board, Loretta Smith, spoke about how proud she was at being a resident of the Sunny Acres portion of the township and proud that the Sunny Acres section is the first area to be designated as a historic district.

According to Ms. Smith, there are 172 homes that are a part of the Sunny Acres area that is off Raritan Road in the southeast corner of Cranford near the Garden State Parkway and bordering the Rahway River.

Ms. Smith explained that the houses were all built by the Sears Roebuck Company from 1940 to 1943 under the "Home Club Plan."

It was further noted that the Sunny Acres Association was created shortly after the construction of the homes, "to get the contractor and Sears to correct and fix construction issues."

Another member of Cranford's Historic Preservation Advisory Board, Nancy Price, also spoke on behalf of the history-making ordinance. Ms. Price noted that of the 172 houses, 134, or 78 percent of them, are still recognizable as to the original construction.

She also noted that the area was the original Osceola Farms dating back to the early 1900s.

Ms. Price concluded by noting that the designation "does not prevent homeowners from making changes to their homes."

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TRYING TO AVOID BEING FLAGGED...The Westfield ball carrier tries to elude a host of Cranford Cougars in the Scotch Plains-Fanwood Union County Mudturtle Flag Rugby Day held at Park Middle School in Scotch Plains on July 14. See story on page 9 of Sports.

Paperboard Property to Have Maximum of 124 Units

By MICHAEL BONACCORSO
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

GARWOOD—A special town-hall-style meeting was held last Thursday allowing borough residents to gather insight and ask questions regarding the Paperboard redevelopment project.

"No more than 124 rental units" will be developed at the North Avenue site, stated borough redevelopment attorney William Northgrave. As per a state Superior Court ruling, 15 percent of the 124 units must be listed as "affordable," stated Mr.

Northgrave.

Mr. Northgrave said the site was selected for affordable housing as per the borough's affordable-housing agreement, meaning redevelopment at the location is "inevitable or unavoidable" as per court rulings, he said.

Mr. Northgrave said, based on the property's "affordable-housing status," the developer could build a much denser development without major input from the borough's planning board, borough council or residents. However, Garden Homes, the developer, operating under Garwood Developers LLC, has chosen to work with borough leaders and residents to develop an end product best suited for the community, said Mr. Northgrave.

The existing structure's status as "deemed beyond repair" and no longer viable for use made the property eligible for affordable-housing designation under court rulings, stated Mr. Northgrave.

Garden Homes principal Tony DiGiovanni said an agreement was made per negotiations with borough officials to not develop any "three-bedroom market-rate units" at the site. Mr. DiGiovanni said the developer and borough officials have concluded three-bedroom units correlate with more families, thus more school-aged children.

Affordable-housing rulings establish that 18 of 124 units (15 percent of the total units developed) must be "marketed or priced" as affordable units, stated Mr. DiGiovanni. He said

60 percent of the affordable units must be two-bedroom units, 20 percent of the affordable units must be three-bedroom units, and 20 percent of the affordable units must be one-bedroom units.

He said this means that four units of the 124 total units will be three-bedroom units per affordable-housing rules and not by the developer's or the borough's choice.

Mr. DiGiovanni said the Paperboard site is "very significant" in comparable size to the Russo Development properties on South Avenue. However, the Paperboard development will be "significantly smaller," with 124 units versus the 300 total units being developed by Russo on South Avenue.

"They asked for a quality product. Officials (Garwood mayor and council) have fought us (negotiated) to lower the unit numbers," said Mr. DiGiovanni, responding to a resident who suggested suburban New Jersey is becoming "more like the Bronx" with dense housing.

Mr. Northgrave said the resident's question implies that the housing plan could have been averted or eliminated by the council, which is not possible under court rulings.

"Affordable housing (court rulings) is driving the need for density," Mr. Northgrave said.

The Paperboard site will be 60 percent less dense than the Russo Development sites, stated Mr. DiGiovanni.

The Paperboard building's facade will be incorporated into the

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RESCUE THESE PETS...Wise Animal Shelter took part in Westfield's Customer Appreciation Days, which were held July 12 to 15.

Committee Seeks Upgrades To Cranford Muni. Offices

By KIMBERLY A. BROADWELL
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

CRANFORD—After some discussion, members of the Cranford Township Committee decided to put together a renovation Request for Proposals (RFPs) to upgrade office layout improvements for the second floor of Township Hall. The second floor houses the Engineering, Finance and Building offices at the township's municipal establishment located on Springfield Avenue.

Deputy Mayor Ann Dooley stated that the improvements are important for the township's building because the offices are old and were not efficient because the oversized furniture takes up too much space, leaving township employees crowded inside the rooms. She also noted that there were some structural repairs that were needed, including fixing a leaking pipe in the ceiling in the finance office. The other members of the committee all agreed with her assess-

ment, except for Mayor Thomas H. Hannen, Jr.

Mayor Hannen was the only member of the township committee to vote no on the proposal request, saying he thought that money for the project would be better spent on things such as street improvements.

In other business, Deputy Mayor Dooley addressed the township committee members about drafting a zoning board communication in either a letter, e-mail or resolution regarding the zoning board strictly enforcing the impervious coverage regulations to improve flooding conditions. Members of the committee discussed some of the new flooding areas and increased water in the sewers from all the new construction. Also discussed was enforcing the side-, rear- and front-yard setbacks.

Commissioner Mary O'Connor suggested putting a presentation together for the zoning board members.

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FLIP OVER...The Mountainside Police, Mountainside Rescue Squad and Atlantic Ambulance Paramedics responded to the scene of an overturned vehicle Saturday at 2:36 p.m. near the center aisle u-turn on Route 22 West following a two-vehicle accident that resulted in non-life-threatening injuries. The Mountainside Fire Department also was on the scene to assist with extrication and scene safety.

Courtesy of Mountainside Police



HIGH RISE...A rendering of the proposed residential development to replace the paperboard commercial property on North Avenue in Garwood. "No more than 124 rental units" will be developed at the site, stated the Garwood borough redevelopment attorney, William Northgrave, at a town-hall-style meeting held last Thursday.

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