

## Board of Adjustment Denies Apartments on Grove Street

By MICHAEL BONACCORSO  
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD – Applicant CGFR LLC was denied a two-story addition by the board of adjustment last Wednesday to construct 18 residential apartments at 214 East Grove Street.

Attorney John Schmidt told the board the commercial building, which is already zoned for residential apartments on the second floor, has been vacant for many years. Mr. Schmidt said the building owner, builder Ralph Rapuano, is considering residential apartments because of the building's "economic inutility."

"There are no offers on the table," Mr. Rapuano said.

Mr. Rapuano said commercial space throughout New Jersey is becoming "less in demand." He said his purchase of the building was intended to offer office space or medical space for rent.

"There have been no bites in over 10 years," said Mr. Rapuano, referring to purchase offers or rental offers.

Mr. Rapuano stated that he has been paying taxes on the property and declaring the property as a loss "for many years." Instead of "boarding the windows up" or leaving the property vacant, he said he wanted to renovate the property for a desired use for apartments.

He said providing residential units

would have a positive impact on patrons visiting Westfield or those passing the building going towards Westfield's downtown business district.

Planning board member Matt Sontz stated that the applicant did not introduce "expert witnesses" to testify on the building's economic inutility. Mr. Sontz questioned the building's rental price, asking if a professional real estate agent or "commercial expert" was going to testify for the applicant.

Mr. Rapuano said he had "scaled down the project" from 20 to 18 units. Of the 18 proposed units, 13 would be single-bedroom units, he said. Five of the units would measure less than 750 square feet. Residential units in the "O-1 Zone" are required to be at least 750 square feet or a variance is required, stated Mr. Schmidt.

Mr. Rapuano sought a variance for the five residential units (less than 750 square feet) because he believed there was "a demand for affordable units less than 750 square feet."

Professional planner William Hollows stated that the proposed residential units would provide "senior housing, affordable housing, and a housing resource for 'empty nesters.'" The building would require 104 parking stalls for commercial use, stated Mr. Hollows.

He said the "needed amount" for residential use would be no more than 34 stalls, with the applicant proposing 40 parking stalls to accommodate the proposed 18 residential units.

With 13 of the units proposed as one-bedroom apartments, the parking demand would be less compared to similar projects throughout Westfield with multi-bedroom units, stated Mr. Hollows.

"The building is easily adaptable for this use," said Mr. Hollows, describing the proposed renovations to

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COURTESY OF WESTFIELD POLICE DEPARTMENT  
CAPTAIN PADOVANO...Westfield Police Captain Frank Padovano signs paperwork following his swearing-in to his new rank at last week's town council meeting.

## DWC OKs \$416,347 Budget; Discusses Master Plan

By DOMINIC A. LAGANO  
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD — During its board of directors' meeting held Monday evening, the Downtown Westfield Corporation (DWC), the management entity of the Special Improvement District (SID), formally approved its budget for the 2019 fiscal year with a unanimous vote.

At \$416,347.12, the budget will remain "flat," as there will be little increase from last year's budget of \$416,347. Businesses located in the SID pay a special tax to fund the DWC's budget for the year.

"The directive was to keep the budget the same as last year," announced Sherry Cronin, DWC executive director. "It then has to be presented to the finance committee of the Westfield Town Council on February 27. The current operating budget and updates

to the capital budget of the town will also be discussed."

The town council, the body ultimately responsible for the DWC budget's final approval, incorporates the DWC budget into its own for state approval. Town council members will vote on Westfield's municipal budget in March after a presentation to the public.

Jeffrey Christakos, newly-installed DWC vice-chairman and a longtime resident of Westfield, commented on this year's budget process. "We require that the budget remains static. We have a fiduciary responsibility to be prudent with our spending and so we force ourselves to this commitment," he said.

Mr. Christakos is department chairman and accounting professor at Monmouth University and also a part-

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COURTESY OF WESTFIELD PUBLIC SCHOOLS  
MERIT SCHOLARSHIP FINALISTS...Four Westfield High School seniors have advanced as finalists in the 2019 National Merit Scholarship Program, having met academic and other standards to become eligible for scholarships. The program honors students who show exceptional academic ability and potential for success in rigorous college studies. Pictured here in September with Principal Derrick Nelson are, from left to right, Madeline Reynders, Zachary Youssef, Edward Xing and Austin Chen who, at that time, had earned semi-finalist ranking.

## Parents Weigh in on Changes In Cranford School District

By ROBYN ORR-GIOFFRE  
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

CRANFORD — A proposal for the "Reimagining" of the Cranford school district was introduced at the board of education (BOE) meeting in October, and since that time parents and other residents have exerted much energy expressing their opinions.

At the time, plan one, referred to as the "Reimagining" of the Cranford school district, was put forth by Superintendent of Schools Scott Rubin, Ed.D., and the Cranford BOE.

Demographer Ross Haber looked at the district and created a report considering various options to realize the goal of full-day kindergarten.

Three meetings were planned for residents and parents to get feedback and have questions answered. An overwhelming response from the community resulted in an additional 12 meetings with a variety of opportunities for community feedback and the unveiling of nine additional plans.

While some parents, like Christine Grace, who says she is in favor of plans one through nine, believe that the BOE and the superintendent have been "transparent" and "receptive" during the meetings and "encouraging" of feedback, other parents, such as Chris Acosta, who is in favor of plans 8, 9 and 10, find the presentations on the proposal to be more of "a sales pitch."

Parent Christine Bradley expressed frustration following her attendance of the meetings and noted she felt only one "Reimagining" plan was really explained, commenting, "I don't know anything about the other plans."

Ms. Bradley further commented that she felt the meetings "promote the pros of what a comprehensive middle school can do," and do not consider the cons.

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COURTESY OF WESTFIELD POLICE DEPARTMENT  
NEW CAPTAIN AND CHAPLAINS...At last week's Westfield Town Council meeting, Frank Padovano, left, was sworn in as a captain in the Westfield Police Department (WPD). Also, Rabbi Douglas Sagal, second from left, and Deacon Keith Gibbons, third from left, were appointed to serve as the first chaplains in the WPD. At right is Police Chief Chris Battiloro.

## Twp. Committee Not to Act Until March on Sale of Lot

By MICHAEL BONACCORSO  
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

CRANFORD — The township committee on Tuesday announced that any decisions about the 83 Myrtle Street municipal property sale will not be made until the March governing body meeting. The property development has been opposed by neighboring residents during the last several workshop agenda meetings.

Resident concerns prompted Mayor Patrick Giblin and the township committee to re-examine the property's relation to Cranford's master plan and the property's relation to Cranford's affordable-housing requirements.

At Tuesday's township committee meeting the governing body unanimously approved an ordinance increasing Cranford's public pool fees for adult membership packages and family membership packages. The membership fees will increase by \$5 per two adult members, stated Deputy Mayor Ann Dooley. Families choosing to purchase seasonal memberships for a two-adult and two-children package will pay a \$10 total price increase, stated Ms. Dooley.

The membership increases were prompted by the rise in the minimum wage and the subsequent increased operational costs associated with paying staff, Commissioner Dooley stated.

Resident Barry O'Donovan, owner of The Kilkenny House, said he wanted to make the township committee aware of a proposed New Jersey legislative measure which would greatly "devalue" liquor licenses throughout the state while posing public safety risks. Mr. O'Donovan stated that the proposed measure would allow businesses with a "hot plate" and an establishment "no less than 500 square feet" to obtain a

liquor license.

Mr. O'Donovan said when he applied for a liquor license, businesses were required to have a "kitchen which was 500 square feet (in size)," let alone an entire establishment totaling 500 square feet. The proposed legislation, he said, would price liquor license fees at \$1,500 to \$10,000 a year.

He said the legislation would not only have a negative economic impact on business owners who have purchased liquor licenses at a premium, but tax appeals associated with the businesses would decrease in assessed value, which he said would hurt municipalities.

Mr. O'Donovan said licenses being issued in vast quantities would increase alcohol consumption, posing "safety risks." He said "Rave Nights," where operators could throw "high-risk" alcohol-infused parties with the operators making money, could become a common routine.

Mr. O'Donovan said because his liquor license is a costly investment, the liability and responsibility the bar owner adheres to is much greater than a business owner who has only invested \$1,500 for the new proposed licenses.

He asked the township committee

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COURTESY OF MERCEDES FOI-OKAMOTO  
ANOTHER DEMOLITION...A house on Scutter Road in Westfield has been demolished. To make room for a new home, many mature trees were cut down.

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