

IMPORTANT INFORMATION REGARDING

WESTFIELD REVALUATION

It's the first time in more than three decades that Westfield residents will deal with the uncertainty of tax assessments. And there's a pressing question on the minds of many Westfield homeowners... *Will I be overpaying my taxes when the Westfield Revaluation Process is done?*

▶ You can find valuable information and videos about the revaluation and appeal processes at WestfieldRevaluation.com.

Afford.-Housing Issue Topic For Young Republicans

By FRED T. ROSSI
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

SCOTCH PLAINS – Scotch Plains Mayor Alexander Smith told a meeting of the Union County Young Republicans last Wednesday night that state legislators are “not interested” in addressing the affordable-housing numbers that courts throughout the state have imposed on towns.

“The state is broken,” he said, and builders are not concerned with the impact of large numbers of new housing units on schools and infrastructure. “There’s a crisis going on in the state,” the mayor added.

A 2018 court settlement with a group of builders will result in just over 450 affordable-housing units, out of a total of just under 2,700 total housing units, being built in Scotch Plains by 2025. Several large properties are slated for the new developments, including the Bowcraft Amusement Park on Route 22, the former Parker Gardens property on Terrill Road, the Amberg garden center on Lamberts Mill Road, several properties in and around the central business district, a tract of land on North Avenue next to the Charlie Brown’s restaurant and several smaller lots on Jerusalem Road across from Scotch Hills Country Club and on Beryllium Road and Waldheim Avenue off Plainfield Avenue.

Mr. Smith said he hopes his township’s newly-formed affordable-housing advisory committee can eventually expand its efforts to other towns as it seeks to secure a legislative solution to the court-imposed housing obligations many municipalities are facing.

The mayor briefly reviewed the history of Scotch Plains’ affordable-housing obligations with the small group gathered at the Stage House Tavern before the discussion turned to other related issues including property taxes and school funding. The mayor said New Jersey is expensive because of high property taxes used to fund public schools, especially in the more-distressed urban school districts earmarked for higher state funding by court rulings over the past several decades.

One attendee at last week’s meeting, Joseph Sarno, a former member of the

Garwood Borough Council who now lives in Scotch Plains, singled out one such urban district and said that, “as Jersey City has gotten richer, we’re still subsidizing them, and it’s not fair.” Meanwhile, the mayor said that Scotch Plains and Fanwood property owners sent more than \$50 million to the state during the past several years but had only gotten back a few million dollars in state aid for the school system.

J.D. Bryden, the chairman of the Young Republicans, noted that “the two biggest problems in New Jersey” — school funding and affordable housing — “are driven by legal action,” and asked why Democrats who have controlled the state Legislature for most of the past two decades have not done more to address the twin problems. He called it “laughable” that Democratic mayors complain about their towns’ housing obligations but do not talk to local Democratic state legislators.

The Scotch Plains Council created the affordable-housing advisory committee in December to advise and assist the governing body regarding affordable housing, related regulations and legislation and the township’s affordable-housing obligations. The group’s initial efforts will focus on increasing public awareness of how affordable housing is being implemented, educating the public about the issue and developing an action plan that will include contacting and lobbying state legislators to enact a legislative solution.

Mayor Smith called the committee a “very effective organized group” and said that, “as we move forward, we want to take this to other towns” and hopefully spur movement toward the Legislature — not the courts — taking the lead on the housing issue and also setting out affordable-housing obligations on a regional — not a town-by-town — basis. “This is not a Republican or Democratic issue,” he said. “It’s a town issue.”

With legislative elections for state Assembly taking place in November, Mayor Smith said it was important for his township’s affordable-housing committee to “get its act together” by early spring so that the issue becomes a topic of discussion during the run up to the June Primary elections.

Westfield Council

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related to construction fencing was passed that states a construction site shall have a six-foot-high chain link fence with a mesh fabric attached and be set around the perimeter of the construction site to protect the health and safety of the public.

Frank Arena was the sole dissenter regarding two resolutions to authorize the submittal of grants for Sustainable Jersey. Two grant applications, one for \$2,000 for the Green Team’s Zero Single Use Plastics initiative, and the second for \$10,000 to support the Styrofoam recycling program, which the town administrators.

An amendment to a purchase approval of an aerial lift for the Department of Public Works (DPW) was made to increase the cost to \$162,893, which adds about \$9,000 for a Through Box.

In the mayor’s update, Mayor Shelley Brindle noted that Ambeli Greek Restaurant is to close its doors. Spice Bazaar is to relocate its restaurant from Quimby Street to the Ambeli space and then open a Pan Asian restaurant at the Quimby location, she said. Ambeli has decided to focus on its original location in Cranford, Mayor Brindle said of the business owner’s decision to close in Westfield.

Mayor Brindle said the “root of the problem” regarding vacancies downtown is the “lack of daytime foot traffic.” She equated this lack of foot traffic to the reduction of employees in the town. “We have lost hundreds of employees over the last several years due to a lack of employee parking and modern office space. If we can improve daytime foot traffic, the retail problem will take care of itself, which is something I expect to be addressed in our Master Plan,” Mayor Brindle said in her statement.

The town also is looking at a Smart Streets Initiative with a goal to make a pedestrian-friendly corridor, Mayor Brindle said.

Mayor Brindle recently met with Union County Freeholder Chairwoman Bette Jane Kowalski to discuss

Westfield’s priorities, which include a lower county tax rate, support for a peak one-seat ride, new lighted turf fields and enhanced traffic and pedestrian safety measures on county roads.

The town also will begin a new email initiative where residents can opt-in to receive email updates from the town, including the bi-weekly Mayor’s Update provided at every town council meeting. Mayor Brindle said this is to help inform those residents who are not getting information through social media.

To further Mayor Brindle’s initiative to get the one-seat ride on the Raritan Valley Train line, she announced that there will be two upcoming meetings in town on this front. On Wednesday, March 6, at 5 p.m., NJ Transit and the Department of Transportation will host a public listening session at the South Avenue train station. Then on Thursday, March 7, a meeting of the Raritan Valley Line Mayors Alliance, along with invited legislators, will be held to discuss the legislative strategy to obtain a Raritan Valley Line peak one-seat ride.

The public-private contract for the Westfield ice rink is to come to its end for this year, when on Friday, March 1, the rink will hold its last operational day. Two public skating sessions will be held that day, one from 4:40 to 6:10 p.m. and another from 7:30 to 9 p.m., with a family hockey session scheduled in between. The basketball courts will be restored by Monday, April 1. The town has yet to make a decision as to whether it will renegotiate another lease for the rink at Gumbert Park.

Resident Nancy Carolan during public comment said the Wilson Elementary School’s ice-skating fundraiser this year was held at the Westfield ice rink and had sold double the amount of tickets than it did last year when it was held at Warinanco Ice Skating Center. She said she thinks the appeal of having the rink in the same town is why more tickets were sold.

Milan Sledge, Community Outreach Specialist, Housing and Community Development Network of New Jersey, spoke in response to an update Planner Don Sammet provided to the town council on its current standings with its compliance with affordable housing. Ms. Sledge had listed a handful of groups that provide housing, and said she would like the town to reach out to those organizations. Mr. Sammet had mentioned that The Arc of Union County and another affordable-housing developer have been in contact with the town to work toward providing the additional 20 affordable-housing units the town is to provide by 2025.

Freeholders

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rect negative impact for Cranford homeowners in one of Cranford’s most desirable areas?” Mrs. Krause asked. “No one expects such an ugly intrusion into a beautiful residential neighborhood. Why we have to tolerate this is the question.”

She asked the board to “use all areas at your disposal to eliminate a 130-foot cell tower in a beautiful Union County area.”

During Freeholder comments, Freeholder Kimberly Palmieri-Moudeed of Westfield announced a free lecture on the life of Virginia Apgar, an anesthesiologist at New York-Presbyterian Hospital, who founded the Apgar score for newly-born babies in 1952. The lecture will be held on Wednesday, March 27, at 7 p.m., at the Westfield Memorial Library.

PUBLIC NOTICE

Mountainside Board of Education
Schedule of Meetings 2019

All meetings will be held in the Beechwood School Susan O. Collier Media Center located at 1497 Woodacres Drive, Mountainside, NJ 07092 or in the Deerfield School Media Center located at 302 Central Avenue, Mountainside, NJ 07092.

All meetings will be regularly scheduled meetings of the Board to begin at 7:00 p.m. unless otherwise noted. It is anticipated that the Board will adjourn to Executive Session immediately following the initial roll call to review matters appropriate for discussion in private under the Open Public Meetings Act.

The Board will return from Executive Session to continue the public portion of the meeting at 8:00 p.m., at which time the Board will consider and act upon its public session agenda items.

Tuesday, March 5, 2019 (Executive Session) 6:45 p.m.

Thursday, March 7, 2019 (Executive Session) 6:15 p.m.

Tuesday, March 12, 2019 (Executive Session) 6:45 p.m.

Monday, March 18, 2019 (For purpose of a budget hearing on submission of preliminary budget)

Tuesday, March 26, 2019

Tuesday, April 23, 2019 (tentative Regular Meeting and Public Hearing on Budget)

Tuesday, May 28, 2019

Tuesday, June 25, 2019

Tuesday, July 23, 2019

Tuesday, August 27, 2019

Tuesday, September 24, 2019

Tuesday, October 22, 2019

Tuesday, November 19, 2019

Tuesday, December 17, 2019

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Garwood Residents Learn Of Revaluation Process

By MICHAEL BONACCORSO
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

GARWOOD – Realty Appraisal’s proprietor Neil Rubenstein presented a roadmap to Garwood’s property tax revaluation process at a town-hall style meeting at Lincoln School on Monday evening. The borough hired Realty Appraisal to complete revaluation process.

Mr. Rubenstein said Union County’s Division of Taxation mandated Garwood and all Union County municipalities to undergo a tax reassessment which will be financially realized on tax bills by July 2020. Mr. Rubenstein said the process has been in effect since the 1950s, but has not taken place in Garwood for over 30 years.

Property revaluations are not meant to increase every homeowner’s taxes, stated Mr. Rubenstein. Revaluations are purposed to update property values to their current values after nearly 30 years of change, he said.

“The process is meant to re-balance or bring everything into equilibrium,” Mr. Rubenstein said.

Some properties will go up in value, some properties will remain the same, and some properties will pay less, stated Mr. Rubenstein.

The notion is the higher property assessments are valued, tax rates are adjusted to decrease by percentage, stated Mr. Rubenstein. Any residents or business owners who feel their assessment was inaccurately calculated can appeal by May 1, 2020.

The evaluation process considers a home’s neighborhood, topography, square footage, noise factors, interior and exterior improvements, and other variables, which would be recognized in the sale process as benefiting the sell price or reducing the sell price to comparable properties, stated Mr. Rubenstein.

A home with an addition since the last revaluation would theoretically be worth more than a home with similar property dimensions in the same neighborhood without the addition,

stated Mr. Rubenstein.

Mr. Rubenstein said tax assessors employed by his firm will carry two forms of identification, will wear yellow vests, and will enter people’s homes after arranging an appointment or upon asking when the assessor is “canvassing” the neighborhood. All assessors can be walked through a home by the homeowner, stated Mr. Rubenstein.

The interior review is conducted with a laser to measure the home’s interior dimensions and is a “relatively brief” review, he said. Homeowners who do not allow the assessors in to conduct a review will be categorized as having improved their interiors, stated Mr. Rubenstein. He said any homeowner who is not present when the assessor is in the neighborhood can book an interior review appointment at a time which is convenient for them.

Mr. Rubenstein said the Russo property is an example of commercial improvements which need to be recognized in the revaluation process. As vacant land, the South Avenue property is assessed less than if 350 units were fully operable and collecting income, he explained.

After the South Avenue property is redeveloped, the property’s assessment will be changed to account for the additional income and the intrinsically higher re-sell value. Commercial properties which have been devalued since they were redeveloped before the last tax assessment over 30 years ago will be reassessed appropriately, Mr. Rubenstein explained.

Realty Appraisal oversaw Westfield’s revaluation which was just concluded, stated Mr. Rubenstein. Over 10,000 homes in Westfield were reviewed including both exterior and interior inspections, stated Mr. Rubenstein.

Any residents who have questions can contact the company directly, accessing information through the borough’s website, or contact borough hall, stated Mr. Rubenstein.

RVSA Assessments

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Westfield Leader.

In other business, the Authority’s lawsuit against the state’s 2-percent cap on authority charges has passed the briefing stage. The Authority is awaiting word from the judge. Comments also were submitted to the New Jersey Department of Community Affairs regarding the proposed regulations.

Flow rights hearings for three municipalities, Rahway, Clark and Springfield, currently are scheduled for Thursday, March 21. These will deal with excess flows during the year ending September 30, 2018.

Questions regarding the accuracy of a meter designated RV01 serving Springfield appear to be nearing resolution. The meter had been exhibiting some erratic behavior, which resolved about August 22. A supplementary meter installed temporarily as a check is reading within 2 to 3 percent. Michael Furci, Springfield’s commissioner, asked about how the problem could be addressed.

Mr. Meehan, replied, “I and I (inflows and infiltration) must be addressed.” (I and I is water from non-sewer sources entering the system.) Mr. Furci then asked about changing the metering time. Dennis Estis, the Authority’s counsel, read a brief segment of the bylaws including the term “for a period, however brief,” which means the metering period cannot be changed without a bylaw change. Mr. Furci asked for help from RVSA to explain what is needed to the town’s government, to which Mr. Meehan readily agreed.

Mr. Furci mentioned the possibility of buying flow rights from Garwood. When 500,000 gallons per day was suggested as the amount required to resolve the issue, Mr. Furci said he did not think Springfield was talking that high.

John Buonocore, the Authority’s in-house engineer, spoke on the issue. He noted that in most towns, the storm induced peaking factor was about five times (the sewage flow quintupled), while for Springfield the peaking factor is about 2.5 times, so there is probably not a lot of rain induced inflows and infiltration. The implication was that groundwater infiltration is a major contributor to their issue. He said that most other towns typically use about 30 percent of their flow rights, while Springfield typically uses about 60 percent.

This meeting served as the annual reorganization meeting. Louis Lambe, Cranford’s commissioner, was elected chairman and Loren Harms, Roselle Park’s commissioner, was elected vice-chairman. Outgoing Chairman Robert Rachlin of Rahway was presented with a plaque in thanks for his service.

At the beginning of the meeting, following elections, Michael Gelin was sworn in as Woodbridge’s commissioner and John Tomaine was sworn in as Mountainside’s commissioner. Stephen Greet has been reappointed as Garwood’s commissioner, but his absence from the meeting prevented him from being sworn in. All three were reappointments.

Updates to the Authority’s By-Laws and Code of Ethics also were approved. The changes to both were described as minor.

The next regular meeting of the RVSA’s board will be held on March 21, at 7:05 p.m.

NJ Transit Listening Tour Comes to WF

WESTFIELD — NJ Transit Executive Director Kevin Corbett and New Jersey Department of Transportation Commissioner Diane Gutierrez-Scaccetti will host a public listening session about service trouble on the Raritan Valley Line at the Westfield Train Station on Wednesday, March 6 at 5 p.m. The session is part of what NJ Transit has billed as its “Listening Tours.”

Westfield Mayor Shelley Brindle and Fanwood Mayor Colleen Mahr and the Raritan Valley Mayors Alliance will also be there to advocate for improved service and one-seat ride to New York City.

Corrections

In a front-page story in last week’s issue of *The Westfield Leader* on the proposed Reimagining plan for the Cranford Public Schools, Cristine Grace’s name was misspelled. Also, the article should have reported that Christine Bradley, and not Cristine Grace, expressed concern over the district moving ahead with full-day kindergarten prematurely. The quotes below that paragraph, “Are we shooting ourselves in the foot?” and “Where is the educational proof?” were said by Ms. Bradley. We apologize for the errors.

A front-page story on coverage of last week’s Cranford Township Committee meeting should have reported that resident Barry O’Donovan, owner of The Kilkenny House, said proposed state legislation would allow establishments applying for a liquor license that have a hot plate, to be no less than 800 square feet to obtain a liquor license. Current law requires the kitchen alone to be 500 square feet in size.

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