

The Westfield Leader **The Scotch Plains - Fanwood TIMES**
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Legal Newspaper for the County of Union, New Jersey
 and for Westfield, Mountainside, Scotch Plains, Fanwood, Cranford and Garwood

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Letters to the Editor

The \$42-Million Tax Westfielders Pay To Union County Is Out Of Control

Good Afternoon Freeholder Mouded.

To be clear, I am not asking for Union County to write Westfield a property tax check as I know this goes against current tax laws. What I am asking is simply that Union County credit us back this amount (or portion thereof) if said Union County properties in Westfield were occupied by commercial entities (Reducing our tax burden from \$42 million to \$41.3 million).

However, you are correct when you say I have a misunderstanding. What I don't understand, like countless Westfield residents, is our out of control taxes we pay to Union County for very little value. (Certainly not anywhere near \$42 million in value.)

But perhaps me and thousands of other Westfield residents have this wrong and there is great value.

As a next step, I would ask that the appropriate people from Union County attend one of our upcoming council meetings and present how this \$42 million is spent/allocated. Because what does not ring true are your comments that the Union County Freeholders "are a team committed to serving all 500,000 plus residents of this county" and "Our programs benefit all parts of the county, with no one left behind."

Again, maybe we have this wrong and the county coming in will demonstrate otherwise.

I have copied our Town Administrator, Jim Gildea, who will work with you to schedule time during presentations portion of our council meetings.

Thanks in advance!

Frank Arena
Westfield Councilman

P.S. I've also copied Councilwoman Neylan who is the Vice-Chair of the Finance Policy Committee.

ABCDIJKLMNOPQRSTUWXYZ



Diction Deception

Below are four arcane words, each with four definitions - only one is correct. The others are made up. Are you sharp enough to discern this deception of diction?

If you can guess one correctly - good guess. If you get two - well-read individual. If you get three - word expert. If you get all four - You must have a lot of free time!

All words and correct definitions come from the board game Diction Deception.

Answers to last week's arcane words.

1. Vanglo - The West Indian name for sesame
2. Dicastery - In ancient Athens, a court of justice
3. Vansire - A small, weasel-like animal of Madagascar
4. Rapparee - A plunderer or robber

DEAURATE

1. To put on a pedestal; adore
2. Having a golden color
3. In mining, the process of removing, filtering or separating gold from its impurities
4. To convert or change the character

GOMPHIASIS

1. Looseness of the teeth
2. Constant wateriness of the eyes
3. Inflammation of a mucous membrane; especially of the nose or throat
4. The state of being afflicted with boils

DAYSMAN

1. A doorman or valet
2. An umpire or mediator
3. A street vendor; a seller of fruits and vegetables
4. A small suitcase

POCCOSIN

1. A carefree person
2. A mountain retreat or resort
3. A marsh or swamp
4. A tobacco or money pouch

Cranford Residents Should Feel Free to Comment on 'Reimagining'

The old saying, "you can't fight city hall" apparently seems to be running true in Cranford when it comes to residents expressing their views on the controversial "Reimagining" plan being proposed by Superintendent of Schools Scott Rubin, Ed.D. Over the past few months we have received a number of emails on this topic. Some have accused this newspaper of somehow being in cahoots with opponents of the proposal. Nothing could be further from the truth. We have not taken a position on Reimagining.

The main purpose for the Reimagining proposal, according to school officials, is to create a tuition-free full-day kindergarten in the township. The district currently offers a fee-based kindergarten program at a cost of \$680 per month per child. Cranford currently has eight schools: Cranford High School, Bloomingdale Avenue School (kindergarten to grade 2), Brookside Place School (kindergarten to grade 5), Livingston Avenue School (grades 3 to 5), Orange Avenue School (grades 3 to 8), Walnut Avenue School (kindergarten to grade 2), Hillside Avenue School (kindergarten to grade 8) and Lincoln School (home to the district's achievement programs.)

The latest proposal includes 10 different plans. The original proposal would create four kindergarten to grade 2 schools, one school for grades 3 to 5, and one middle school for grades 6 to 8.

Reimagining would do away with neighborhood schools for grades 3 to 8 and would cost the average assessed home \$267 in taxes per year. Plan 10, which provides full-day kindergarten and additional spaces at each elementary school, would cost \$362 in annual taxes. Plans 2 through 9 would range from \$415 to \$518 in annual taxes. Each total cost with all 10 plans includes a \$170 annual tax for a capital improvement bond for facility upgrades that have been deferred.

Members of the community who either oppose or support the plan are nervous about being quoted on this story. Of the nine residents we reached out to for a story published in our February 21 issue, only four would talk to us. Why is that? Also, what is the board of education's position on this plan?

We welcome comments from Cranford Board of Education members as well as residents stating their position on Reimagining Cranford Public Schools. Do residents without kids differ on the issue?

Westfield's Kim Mouded - New Freeholder, Same Result

The editorial exchange between Councilman Frank Arena of Westfield and newly-elected county freeholder, Kim Mouded, has been a must read for concerned Union County taxpayers. My take away so far is that Councilman Arena understands the ridiculous tax burden the county freeholder board imposes on us residents. Kim Mouded on the other hand is sadly not the breath of fresh air people had hoped for, but appears to be just the latest replacement gear in the 9-0 Democrat Freeholder tax-and-spend machine that has controlled the county from Elizabeth since the late 90's.

Frank Arena is doing his best to play David against the tone-deaf Goliath that is the freeholder board, attempting to restore power to the people of his town by refusing to give the county the money they've demanded. Meanwhile, Kim Mouded doesn't see any issue with the \$42-million levy imposed on her Town of Westfield. In her first few weeks in office, I guess she doesn't see the value in reducing the overlapping and likely redundant duties carried out by both the Sheriff's Department and County Police or investigating ways the county Department of Public Works can do a better job of working with municipal DPW's to reduce duplicate services or to better leverage each other.

It's also clear that Kim isn't interested in the value of bringing in private enterprise, and how much of a pivotal

an impact that would have on the local economy. In New York, local Democrats scared away billions of dollars and tons of jobs when they ran Amazon out of town. Here in Union County, Kim and the Democrats don't seem to be faring much better to bring in new businesses that could help balance our county checkbook. In a town reeling from the loss of Lerner David, the addition of a new corporate resident would mean a lot to the taxpayers of Westfield, but with the county tax burden as it is, we just aren't that attractive to new business.

Freeholder Mouded lauds the diversity of the freeholder board coming from different towns, ethnicities, races, religious backgrounds, etc. and that's a great thing reflective of Union County. Unfortunately, that's where the diversity ends with this board, as the approach to running county government is the same among all nine members - no challenge or difference of opinion to the usual order of business and burgeoning taxes. I thought there could be a chance that Kim Mouded might break the mold of Chairman "Nick Scutari's" wing of the Democratic Party, but after her last editorial, she's proven herself as more of the same, and that sucks for the rest of us county residents.

Joe Sarno
Former Garwood Councilman
2018 Candidate for Union County Freeholder

State Legislators Need to Address Affordable-Housing Issues

The wide-ranging and complex issues surrounding affordable housing in New Jersey remained in the spotlight locally last week, as elected municipal officials discussed petitioning state legislators to address current mandates regarding towns' affordable-housing obligations.

Since 2015 the courts have set forth guidelines for New Jersey municipalities regarding affordable-housing quotas, compelling towns to accept higher-density residential developments than they might otherwise have permitted or else face builder's remedy lawsuits.

In multiple communities within our readership area, such developments already have been proposed, are pending or completed. Among them are large-scale residential projects in Westfield, Scotch Plains, Cranford, Garwood and Mountainside, with a portion of the units within these developments designated as affordable.

While acknowledging that the need for affordable housing in New Jersey is a valid one, municipal government leaders and taxpayers alike are deeply concerned about the scope of the developments coming to their communities and their potential impact upon traffic, school districts, infrastructure and emergency services.

In Scotch Plains, an affordable-housing advisory committee was formed two months ago to advise the township governing body on affordable-housing matters. As its inaugural goals, the committee hopes to raise public awareness about how the township will fulfill its obligation, educate residents on the

process and formulate a plan to lobby state lawmakers to come up with a solution that better enables communities to manage their affordable-housing responsibilities.

During his address to the Union County Young Republicans last week, Scotch Plains Mayor Alexander Smith, who chairs his township's affordable-housing advisory committee, advocated for a bipartisan effort among municipalities to have the state Legislature - rather than the courts - oversee towns' affordable-housing obligations.

Both Mayor Smith and Deputy Mayor Joshua Losardo, who is vice-chairman of the advisory panel, expressed these sentiments at the February 13 meeting of the committee. Mayor Smith said that while the township government supports affordable housing, there needs to be a "reasonable process" for meeting this need. Mr. Losardo said the committee hopes state legislators will come up with a solution to affordable-housing obligations that is more "town-specific" instead of what he characterized as a "one-size-fits-all" philosophy being applied by the courts.

We concur that a bipartisan effort is needed to deal with affordable housing in New Jersey, and also that state legislators need to actively address issues that can potentially create hardships for municipalities as they struggle to meet their obligations now and in future years. Affordable housing is a necessity and a responsibility that communities share, but one that should be achievable without sacrificing quality of life.

Rezoning Actions By Westfield Mayor And Council Boggles The Mind

The only thing worse than the plan that the Mayor and Town Council devised to prevent a builder from legally subdividing a lot on New England Drive was Mr. Rossi's one-sided coverage in his February 14th article written for your paper. After a request for a conforming subdivision had been denied due to an incomplete application, the Mayor and the council decided to ram through a rezoning of the block from RS-12 to RS-16 in order to prevent what would otherwise be a routine subdivision. The article stated that Town Planner Don Sammet analyzed the properties that had "average lot frontage" of 122 feet.

Averages can be skewed by a few properties that are well above the average. In fact, a study by Sammet also showed that three of the 24 lots being rezoned are corner lots and don't even have New England Drive addresses. The two corner lots with Lamberts Mill Road addresses and the one with a Willow Grove Parkway address are contributing to the "average" width being over 100 feet.

That study by Sammet also showed that nine of the 24 lots don't meet the 90-foot minimum width requirements of the new RS-16 zone, nine of the 24 don't meet the 16,000-square-foot size requirements, and 11 of the 24 don't meet the minimum depth requirements. It's bad enough that at least 11 of the 24 lots won't meet the new RS-16 designation. Worse, as an attorney at the meeting pointed out, we don't even know how many of the lots became non-conforming under the RS-16 designation since it wasn't stated whether the 11 that fail to meet the minimum depth requirement also encompass those nine that don't meet either the minimum square footage and/or the minimum depth. Despite these issues, there was absolutely no discussion by the mayor and the council before they voted to approve the rezoning.

Based on the number of non-conforming lots under the re-zoning, it

boggles the mind that any competent reporter wouldn't challenge Mayor Brindle's comment that the 1991 zoning not designating the block as RS-16 was an oversight. Nor did your reporter bother to ask how many of the lots will fail to conform to the RS-16 designation, or how many of the current homes will now fail to adhere to one or more of the new zoning requirements, including side yard setbacks.

It also boggles the mind that so many of my neighbors think that having a non-conforming and more restrictive lot is a good idea and will be a positive for the block and their home values.

Louis Ackerman
Westfield

Letters to the Editor

I Decline To Take The Annual Stipend

I read with great interest your editorial last week about state legislation to prohibit local elected officials from receiving retroactive pay raises. I agree that no elected official should be able to give themselves retroactive raises and that raises should be limited to percentage caps. Politics should be about service, not self-enrichment.

When comparing the salaries of local elected officials, the editorial stated that "the five members of the Scotch Plains Township Council, including the mayor, each receive a \$6,000 annual stipend." While it is true that I am entitled to the \$6,000 annual stipend, I want to remind *The [SP-F] Times* and our residents that I voluntarily decline to take the annual stipend. I don't even cash the mandatory \$1 check that the township must send me each year. I believe that as long as Scotch Plains operates under its current form of government with part-time elected officials, we should change our salary ordinance to match neighboring towns like Westfield and Fanwood where elected officials receive \$1 annually.

At a recent event, a resident approached me and thanked me for being a part-time mayor who serves full time. I appreciated the recognition, and it makes me want to work harder for the people of Scotch Plains. Scotch Plains is at a pivotal junction with implementing downtown redevelopment and affordable housing, and I will continue to serve the people of Scotch Plains with 100 percent dedication at no cost to taxpayers.

Al Smith
Mayor of Scotch Plains

Report on the Impacts of a Partial Shutdown of the Trans-Hudson Tunnel

NEW YORK -- The Regional Plan Association leadership is heading to Washington, D.C. this week to present its findings on Capitol Hill and call for Gateway Tunnel funding.

A shutdown without a new tunnel would cost the national economy \$16 billion, reduce home values by \$22 billion, and lead to decreased economic productivity, job losses, increased congestion and crashes across the north-eastern United States.

Shutting down the Hudson River tunnels to repair the damage caused by Superstorm Sandy without having new tunnels already built would have far-reaching consequences across many sectors of our regional and national economy, according to a new report released by civic organization Regional Plan Association and Arup, a multinational professional services firm.

The report, entitled *A Preventable Crisis: The Economic and Human Costs of a Hudson River Rail Tunnel Shutdown*, details the human and economic toll of a partial Hudson River tunnel shutdown without the alternative that a new, fully-funded Gateway project would provide.

Thereport's findings are bleak, and among the most robust research on the implications of not fully funding Gateway to date:

A partial shutdown of the tunnels would mean dramatically expanded commute and travel times and increased congestion on public transportation and already stressed roadways and airports, leading to increased business and consumer costs, job loss, home devaluation, and health risks.

Effects of a four-year shutdown would cost the national economy \$16 billion, \$1.5 billion in federal tax revenue, and \$1 billion in state tax revenue outside of

New York and Jersey.

"This report is the most definitive wakeup call about what we could face if even just one existing tunnel is taken out of service and the dire implications of not moving forward immediately on the Gateway project," stated Fanwood Mayor Colleen Mahr, president of the New Jersey League of Municipalities. "Every municipality, whether a large urban area or small suburban town, will suffer steep declines in home values, revenue, and ability to attract businesses and investments. Thousands of new transit-oriented residential units will lose their appeal, further devastating communities and downtown business districts. The potential to devastate our region and millions of residents, workers and visitors is frightening and very real. The existing tunnels are on borrowed time."

About Regional Plan Association:

The Regional Plan Association is an independent, not-for-profit civic organization that develops and promotes ideas to improve the economic health, environmental resiliency and quality of life of the New York metropolitan area. We conduct research on transportation, land use, housing, good governance and the environment. We advise cities, communities and public agencies. And we advocate for change that will contribute to the prosperity of all residents of the region. Since the 1920s, RPA has produced four landmark plans for the region, the most recent was released in November 2017. For more information, please visit www.rpa.org or fourthplan.org.

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