

Residents Express Concerns Over UCC HVAC Unit

By CHRISTINA M. HINKE
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

COUNTY — Union County College (UCC) has returned to the planning board to present its preliminary and final site plan that would replace an aging HVAC system and build a condenser unit and a cooling tower on the roof of the library building.

UCC had come before the board over a year ago when UCC had plans to place the HVAC at ground level along its property on Princeton Road and the board asked UCC to consider alternate locations for the system. At last Wednesday's planning board meeting, UCC showed plans to place it on the roof. By the end of the night UCC asked to adjourn the hearing to January so it can address further concerns by the board and residents who live across the street from the college.

After the hearing, about two dozen residents who live on or near Myrtle Street made comments about its concerns of township-owned property that had been slated as affordable housing in the recently adopted-housing element that is to be presented to the Union County State Superior Court. They fear if the group homes are built it would mean forested land there would be lost, resulting in worsening flooding, the loss of a buffer that masked the Garden State Parkway, a loss of wildlife, loss of a "rural" feeling, and lowered home values, among other concerns.

In the hearing for the UCC application, residents of Princeton Road, who live in the closest proximity to the proposed location of the HVAC system, also had concerns.

Horace Walker, an architect for NV5 Architecture PC hired by UCC, showed photos during winter to show a clear depiction of the site line of the HVAC location, as well as a sketch.

Ann Dooley, planning board member and deputy mayor, said the township ordinance has a maximum building height of 35 feet. The plan presented by Mr. Walker has the total height of the HVAC system once it is fully screened with a sound barrier, would reach at a maximum of 75 feet high, measuring from the ground level of the building to the top of the screen.

"It is significantly above what our ordinance provides," Ms. Dooley said.

Planning board member Peter Taylor asked if alternate locations away from Princeton Road were considered. One area noted was an alleyway between two school buildings. However, placing it in that location would be too costly, according to the Robert Hogan, director of facilities, because it is further away from the equipment that the HVAC system would connect to. Mr. Hogan also said Springfield Avenue has the same hindrance.

Benjamin Mueller, who is an expert in the field of acoustics, and hired by UCC, said the noise emitted with the noise screen would be lower than the township's noise ordinance of a maximum of 50 dba.

At the property line of the closest resident, Mr. Mueller said the maximum noise level would be in the low to high 40's dba. With the sound barrier, he said, the noise would result "in little to no change to what exists today."

A nearby resident of Princeton Road, Susan Carollo, said "there is a lot of noise coming from mechanical equipment at the college campus." She said she sleeps with earplugs.

"There is a lot of noise... we hear humming and vibration all of the time... The noise is an issue," Nancy Apicella of Princeton Road said during public comments.

"Why the college is allowed to ignore ordinances from the town... Seems they are able to build forever and we are just letting them do it. ...The quality of life during a construction project... is horrendous. ...I am very concerned the college never looked at other places..." Ms. Apicella said. She said "it is unfair from a neighbor point of view" that they do not place the system in a location away from the residential area even if it is costly.

Gary Hall, an attorney representing UCC, said in response, "Let's keep in mind it is an education institution for children who maybe can't afford a four-year college... Taxpayers help fund it..."

"To say spend unlimited taxpayer money... is outrageous to expect that," Mr. Hall said.

"As I read the law... we are not applying for site-plan approval... they are conferring good faith with Cranford," Mr. Hall said. He said UCC is exempt from township ordinances because they are a public educational institution.

"This is really very challenging... the college's perception is that it is exempt from our land-use ordinances... it's true. But this is not... merely a height change... you are adding a cooling tower. With this project it will be 61 percent over our height ordinance, it will be the equivalent of a five-story building. It is 30 percent over existing. Those are radical changes... It's a tiny college nestled in a neighborhood. I'm not with you (that) the college is automatically exempt," Ms. Dooley said. "This is an aesthetic difference." Sixty percent of the tower and 88 percent of the tower will be visible from two residences located closest to the HVAC system location, she noted.

Mr. Taylor said the rooftop location is better than the ground level originally proposed.

Some members of the board also asked UCC if it would agree to have a post installation check of the site lines and noise emissions to ensure what was testified by its experts holds true. The application will continue January 16.

On Wednesday, January 30, the Hartz Mountain rezoning application for 750 Walnut Avenue, will be heard. Then on Wednesday, February 6, the National Christmas Tree Products application is to be heard.



Fred T. Rossi for The Westfield Leader and The Times
TAKING THE OATH... The 2019 township council welcomed three new members at its reorganization meeting on Tuesday in Scotch Plains. Pictured is Democrat Roshan White, left, as he takes the oath from State Senator Nicholas Scutari (D-22nd, Linden). Mr. Roshan's wife and children accompanied him. Also sworn into office were Democrats Elizabeth Stampler and Joshua Losardo.

Democrats Gain Council Majority In Scotch Plains

By FRED T. ROSSI
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

SCOTCH PLAINS — The new year saw Democrats assume control of the township council with the swearing-in of Elizabeth Stampler, Joshua Losardo and Roshan White to four-year terms on the governing body at Tuesday's reorganization meeting.

The three Democrats join Republican Mayor Alexander Smith and Republican councilman Ted Spera on a council dominated by Democrats for the first time since 2016. Since the early 1970s, Democrats have had a majority on the governing body in just five different years — 1999, 2013 and the early months of 2014, 2015 and 2016.

At the hour-long reorganization meeting, State Senator Nicholas Scutari (R-22nd, Scotch Plains), who is also the Union County Democratic Party chairman, administered the oaths of office to the three Democrats before a standing-room-only crowd at the municipal building. Mr. Losardo was then chosen to serve as deputy mayor for 2018.

In his new year's address, Mayor Smith thanked residents who were in attendance, telling them that "your participation is what makes this town go." He then reviewed what he called "a monumental year" for Scotch Plains, pronouncing the state of the town as being "strong."

The mayor looked back at several major accomplishments, including the passage last September of the first phase of the downtown redevelopment plan, one he said will "make our downtown more vibrant." He also said progress is being made on getting state officials to agree to re-route truck traffic from Park Avenue to Terrill Road, part of an effort to make the central business district more pedestrian-friendly and quieter.

The mayor also touted the township's AAA bond rating, the fully-staffed police department, the popular downtown events and the restoration of the Shady Rest clubhouse and the ongoing renovations of the Frazee House. He said that talks with Fanwood and Westfield are ongoing

to establish a regional public works department.

The mayor also spoke about the township's affordable-housing settlement that is a critical element in the downtown redevelopment efforts. While admitting that the issue will "be a challenge in the years ahead," the mayor said the legal settlement protects the township from builders' lawsuits until 2025. He also again urged the State Legislature to find ways to lessen the affordable-housing burden for municipalities. The mayor, as have several of his recent predecessors, also made a pitch for property tax relief from the state, saying the tax levy is "crushing our residents" and "stifling" job growth and small businesses.

Mayor Smith also announced two new programs, the first being a senior liaison program designed to centralize the township's ability to better meet the needs of senior citizens and the other being a Truth, Racial Healing and Transformation committee, made up of members of the Scotch Plains and Fanwood councils as well as members of the Scotch Plains-Fanwood Board of Education, that will address the effects of racism and "bring healing to where it exists."

The council also appointed the law firm of Rainone Coughlin and Minchello of Iselin to serve as township attorney this year. Deputy Mayor Losardo was appointed to the planning board, and James Checchio, Mike Weber and Sonali Davli were reappointed to that board. Kendra Duran and Chris Thompson were reappointed to the zoning board of adjustment.

The firm of Suplee Clooney of Westfield was reappointed as township auditor, Rogut McCarthy of Cranford was reappointed as bond counsel, Mott MacDonald was reappointed as township engineer, the law firm of DiFrancesco, Bateman, Kunzman, Davis, Lehrer and Flaum was reappointed as redevelopment attorney and as township prosecutor. Harbor Consultants of Cranford was reappointed as township planner and David Littman was again named public defender.

Recycling Changes to Take Effect Jan. 1 In Westfield

WESTFIELD — Due to significant shifts in the recycling industry, Westfield's residential recycling program will undergo changes that impact which types of plastics will be collected. Effective January 1, when the town's new contract begins with Giordano Company, Inc., only plastic types 1 and 2 will be accepted.

"This is an issue affecting many communities due to the collapse of the international marketplace for these recyclables. China, the primary market for America's recyclables, has placed a ban on many different types of plastics, which substantially limits the items being accepted for recycling," said Kris McAloon, town engineer and recycling coordinator. "In fact, a number of municipalities across Union County implemented these changes in plastic collection in June, 2018, but our vendor continued to honor the collection of plastics 1-7 in Westfield for the duration of the town's contract through the end of 2018."

As the expiration of the previous residential-recycling contract approached, the town put the new contract out to bid twice — both times receiving just one bid, from Giordano, at a rate nearly double that of 2018. After two bid attempts, the town was legally allowed to enter a negotiation process, and found that the industry standard is now a much higher rate for fewer collected plastic items.

"This is a one-year contract," added Mr. McAloon. "While there are currently no local markets for plastics 3 - 7, the town will continue to monitor alternative solutions for these items within the industry." Acceptable plastic materials will have a "PET," "PETE," or "HDPE" mark, or the number 1 or 2 within an imprinted

triangle on the bottom of the container. Examples include, but are not limited to, soft drink bottles, water bottles, cooking oil, milk jugs, cleaning agents, laundry detergents, and shampoo bottles. In addition, residents are reminded of the recycling changes that were implemented over the past year:

No plastic bags of any kind will be accepted, shredded paper is no longer accepted, and cardboard and paper must be dry. Containerizing recycling items at the curb is highly encouraged to minimize moisture contamination (all allowable recyclables may be commingled in the same reusable receptacle).

The town's annual Recycling and Conservation Center mailing was recently sent to all Westfield residents, and outlines the changes in detail, as well as the collection schedule for 2019, FAQs, and information about new services at the Conservation Center.

Westfield residents may bring their recyclables to the Conservation Center during its regular hours of operation. In addition to accepting standard curbside recycling items, the Conservation Center also accepts electronic waste, textiles, and scrap metal. A 2018 grant from the Union County Board of Chosen Freeholders' Recycling Enhancement Grant program allowed for further expansion of the recycling program; residents can now also drop off household batteries, fluorescent bulbs, plastic toys, plastic bags/film, and Styrofoam. No permit is necessary.

Residents can find additional details about Westfield's recycling and conservation efforts on the town website at www.westfieldnj.gov/recycling and www.westfieldnj.gov/conservation.

Planning Bd. Begins Hearing on Barnes Tract

By MICHAEL BONACCORSO
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

MOUNTAINSIDE — The planning board began evaluating the Barnes Tract redevelopment site plan at December 20 planning board hearing. The site plan proposes a 32-unit townhouse and apartment complex development on 5.5 acres, accessing Mountain Avenue located at the end of Knights Bridge Road, stated the applicant's professional planner Christine A. Nazzaro-Cofone.

After three-and-a-half hours of professional testimony, the board did not render a final decision on the site plan, as all professional witnesses had not yet testified, stated Planning Board Chairman John Tomaine. The site-plan hearing will continue at the January board meeting.

The Barnes Tract redevelopment site along Mountain Avenue will keep Mountainside compliant with the court-mandated affordable-housing obligations, Ms. Nazzaro-Cofone stated. Six of the 32 units will be designated as affordable units.

Developer Gary Gaglioti told The Westfield Leader and The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times that The Garnico Group LLC's application includes 26 market-rate townhouses with the project defined as a "targeted development" in which the townhomes will be marketed to "empty-nesters."

"Empty-nesters" have children who have moved out of state or live in another state throughout the year, but the "nester" wants to have a home available for their older children or grandchildren to visit sporadically throughout the year, stated Mr. Gaglioti.

"The homes should have little or no impact on the Mountainside school district as the development is not targeted to individuals starting a family or designed as many starter homes are," Mr. Gaglioti told The Leader/Times.

Mr. Gaglioti said the homes will "probably be priced in the mid-\$800,000 range."

"Usually people looking to start a family do not purchase homes that expensive or with the design nature they have. Well established retirees who want a luxurious, newly-constructed home, fulfilling the needs for their reduced lifestyle do," Mr. Gaglioti told The Leader/Times.

Mr. Gaglioti said he understands that Mountainside must meet "court-ordered affordable housing obligations." He says the development fulfills the "court-ordered housing obligations" in a way which "benefits and respects" the community.

Garnico employed architect John Saracco who designed a 35-unit development in Warren, which is "almost fully sold out" having similar development designs, Mr. Gaglioti said. The Warren project yielded "almost no school-aged children," he said.

The development will include six separate buildings, stated Mr. Gaglioti, adding that the six affordable units will be split between two buildings including four affordable apartments in one building and two affordable units a second building.

"The plan must come to fruition," Ms. Cofone said.

Ms. Cofone said the site plan details housing providing "sufficient space in appropriate locations."

The applicant is seeking building-height variance relief as the borough or-

dinance limited a building's height to 36 feet with the application proposing building heights of 39.6 feet, stated Ms. Cofone. The applicant is seeking a front-yard setback variance as the ordinance allows for a front-yard setback of 30 feet while the applicant is proposing a 26.4 feet.

Ms. Cofone said the building height variance is a request for a 10 percent increase over allowed heights.

The applicant's professional architect, John Saracco, said the development will include six separate two-story buildings. The building's design aesthetic is described in the site plan as "certainly colonial," stated Ms. Cofone.

Ms. Cofone said the "colonial aesthetic" is the noted as the "desired" design standard detailed in the redevelopment plan. The colonial aesthetic is detailed in the building's siding design and roofing design, he said.

Mr. Saracco said each building's height was considered when respecting the visual impact on neighboring roads such as Mountain Avenue and Knights Bridge Road. He said certain buildings within the development were designed without basement windows.

The window-less design was to in keep with a two-story aesthetic for pedestrians passing the development from Mountain Avenue, stated Mr. Saracco.

Five different housing design layouts are depicted in the site plan, but "it feels like 10," stated Mr. Saracco. The project architect (Mr. Saracco) and engineers created a "well thought out" layout including a building's bed-room mix amongst other factors influencing specific design intentions, stated Mr. Saracco.

The applicant's professional engineer and land surveyor, Lee Titus, said the site plan considers storm-water runoff including water retention and detention for two-year storms, 10-year storms, and 100-year storms. Storm designations include water runoff volumes expected for a storm occurrence within the designated time frame, Mr. Titus explained.

For all storm classifications, the site plan's storm-water run-off solution is designed to "decrease the run-off" volume during a designated time period during a storm and after a storm, stated Mr. Titus.

Bio filters implemented below ground level are will remove unwanted chemicals contained within the surface water including asphalt particles and other man-made contaminants from entering the fluvial system, stated Mr. Titus.

Professional Landscape and Design Architect Gregg Spadaro said the proposed landscaping design will minimize the possibility for "root damage" to existing trees. When soil grading is altered in a given area, trees root systems can be disrupted causing trees to die, stated Ms. Spadaro.

He said the site plan aims at preserving existing trees, especially those along Knights Bridge Road.

At the next hearing, any parties opposing the application will be heard including any relevant witnesses proposed by the applicant's opposition as well as the applicant's remaining professional witnesses are expected to testify.

County Becomes First In NJ To Rollout Body-Worn Cams

COUNTY — Following months of planning, Union County is poised to become the first county in New Jersey that is exclusively patrolled by local law enforcement to have all of its departments outfitted with body-worn cameras, acting Union County Prosecutor Michael A. Monahan announced December 27.

Mr. Monahan, who earlier this year launched an initiative to ensure full countywide implementation, was joined by county officials and most of Union County's 21 municipal police chiefs at the Andrew K. Ruotolo Justice Center in downtown Elizabeth to mark the occasion.

"I am confident there will come a time when body-worn cameras are as commonplace as any other item in a police officer's tool kit," Prosecutor Monahan said. "But for now, we can be satisfied in the knowledge that Union County, on the issue of body-worn cameras, is at the vanguard among law enforcement in New Jersey, progressively ahead of the curve and leading the way. And for that, I thank our chiefs for their commitment to delivering transparency, accountability, and professionalism to the public."

The Prosecutor's Office distributed approximately \$181,000 of its forfeiture funds to six municipal police departments in 2018 to cover significant shares of their first-year startup costs for their body-worn cameras, ancillary equipment, and file storage. All of those departments are currently in various active stages of body-worn camera deployment, a process anticipated to be completed early in 2019.

The announcement comes a little more than three years after the Prosecutor's Office launched what that point was New Jersey's largest county-funded, multi-municipality body-worn camera pilot program of its kind, with nine departments signing up for the initial rollout in late 2015. The remaining departments in Union County independently implemented body-worn cameras at various points during the next several years.

The New Jersey Attorney General's Office awarded 15 police departments in Union County a total of \$376,500 to purchase body-worn cameras as part of past funding programs that offered over \$3 million to police agencies across the state to acquire the devices.

"I share a firm commitment with law enforcement across New Jersey to fostering stronger police-community relations through increased transparency and accountability," said Attorney General Gurbir Grewal said. "Body-worn cameras are an important tool for promoting confidence in our police officers by holding them accountable, while also protecting them from unfounded complaints and helping them gather evidence. I applaud Prosecutor Monahan and leaders throughout Union County for recognizing that these devices make officers more effective and enhance the safety of the public and police alike."

The first directive issued by Attorney General Grewal after taking office established a policy that made body- and dash-camera videos of police deadly force incidents subject to public release, follow-

ing a formal request, once the initial investigation of the incident is substantially complete, typically within 20 days of the incident.

The body-worn cameras used by patrol officers throughout Union County are activated at the start of calls for service — officer safety permitting — and during any on-duty encounter with a civilian, with several exceptions for certain situations and in sensitive venues such as schools or houses of worship. Circumstances in which the cameras are in use include traffic stops, vehicle searches, arrests, and more.

During the course of each workday, officers also "tag" their videos electronically, filing them into different categories, and this can be accomplished using a variety of devices, from smart phones to laptops. Once each officer returns to police headquarters following a shift, he or she removes their camera and places it in a docking station; at that point the footage is uploaded to cloud storage or local servers while the device also recharges automatically.

Bramnick Warns of More Murphy tax hikes

TRENTON — Assembly Republican Leader Jon Bramnick stood up for taxpayers after Governor Phil Murphy said he may propose new tax increases when he unveils his budget in March.

"Taxpayers should beware," said Mr. Bramnick (R-21st, Westfield). "After raising \$1.4 billion in new taxes last year, Murphy may do it again. Republicans in the Assembly will stand united to defend taxpayers and middle-class families."

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Courtesy of Township of Scotch Plains
FIRST ELECTRICAL VEHICLE SHOW... In October, Scotch Plains sponsored the first electric vehicle show to be held in Union County. Mayor Al Smith is pictured presenting the Best in Show trophy to Alex Brown for his 2016 Chevrolet Volt.



Kristan McAlinay for The Westfield Leader and The Times
NEW FANWOOD COUNCILWOMAN... Patricia Walsh is sworn in to her first term on the Fanwood Borough Council by Mayor Colleen Mahr at Tuesday's reorganization meeting, surrounded by family members. Councilwoman Walsh, a New York City public school teacher, raised her four children in Fanwood. Her late brother, Bruce, was a Fanwood councilman during the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s. Her husband, Neil, is a Fanwood recreation commissioner.

RVSA Gives 2.5-Percent Raise to Employees

By WAYNE BAKER
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

RAHWAY — The Rahway Valley Sewerage Authority's (RVSA) saw many of the normal kinds of year-end decision making including a 2.5 percent raise for most salaried employees at their December 13 meeting.

A resolution to raise 2019 salaries was introduced. Marty Rothfelder, Westfield's commissioner, introduced an amendment to reduce the raise to 2 percent, based on the most recent consumer price index (CPI) data. The amendment failed, but the original resolution passed, so salaried

employees will receive the larger raise.

Seven employees were named in a resolution for being promoted and having appropriate salary adjustments made as a result. Thomas Macaluso was promoted to laboratory manager, William Yachera becomes assistant laboratory manager, Edward Kochick moves to maintenance manager, David Patrick is promoted to maintenance coordinator, George Cheskovich becomes biosolids energy supervisor, Patrick Kellaway and Helder Malta move to shift supervisor. These changes were primarily the result of two employees retiring.

The RVSA versus New Jersey, et al. case proceeds essentially unchanged. The state's motion to dismiss hasn't been decided. RVSA's counsel, Dennis Estis, said something significant had happened, when he prepared his report. That development was to be discussed in closed session. Following the meeting, The Westfield Leader and The Times located a reference that the state's motion to dismiss the Two Rivers Water Reclamation Authority versus State of New Jersey, et al. was terminated by the court on December 11. The case is similar to the RVSA case, though not identical.

The meeting ended with a roughly 90-minute closed session, followed immediately by adjournment. The next regular meeting is scheduled for Sunday, January 27.

Union County to Hold Reorganization Jan. 6

COUNTY — Union County government will hold its annual 163rd reorganization at the Union County Courthouse this Sunday, January 6, at noon.

Kimberly Palmieri-Moulded of Westfield and Andrea Staten of Roselle will be sworn in as new freeholders and Freeholder Rebecca Williams of Plainfield will be sworn in to fill an unexpired term on the board. Freeholder Alexander Mirabella of Fanwood will take the oath for his eighth term. Also, the Freeholders are expected to select Bette Jane Kowalski of Cranford as chairman and Mr. Mirabella vice-chairman for 2019.