

Freeholders OK Grant Program For Raritan Valley Line Towns

By PAUL J. PEYTON
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

Continuing its efforts to connect western Union County with its most eastern portion, the Board of Chosen Freeholders approved a resolution last Thursday authorizing a new grant program for communities along NJ Transit's Raritan Valley Rail Line so that these towns can create their own economic development plans.

As part of the program, municipalities can apply for a county grant to hire consultants to conduct their own studies.

Deputy County Manager George W. Devanney, who heads up the county's Economic Development Department, noted that his department would consider requests from towns to conduct the studies.

Towns along the county's proposed Cross County Rail Line project will also be eligible for the grants. The seamless or light rail transit route would connect Plainfield to Elizabethport with access to the Newark International Airport monorail system.

Freeholder Donald Goncalves, who heads the Freeholders Economic Development Committee, explained that the program, in effect, reinvests funds in communities so that they "can decide their own destiny when it comes to economic development."

Freeholder Lewis Mingo, Jr., of Plainfield, also a member of the Economic Development Committee, said the program will benefit Union County's economy all the way to its far western fringes — an area which was often considered, "out of sight, out of mind" when it came to county government.

"I support this program wholeheartedly," Mr. Goncalves added.

The funding for the studies expands the county Planning Grant Program. Towns along the Raritan and Cross-County Rail Link will have the opportunity to explore the possible reuse of dormant commercial

residential sites while the county implements its cross rail link.

The proposed rail link will provide 18 miles of interconnected rapid transit service. Working with the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, the county is seeking to eventually connect its rail system from midtown Elizabeth to Newark International Airport. The East-West rail link would enable commuters on the Raritan Line to connect with Elizabethport and continue on to Newark Airport.

NJ Transit is planning to build a station opposite the airport on the North Jersey Line, which will connect to the passenger monorail train system already in use. The monorail was originally constructed to connect passengers with long-term parking lots on the outer edges of the airport, to the terminals.

County officials and Freeholders are pushing through the rail link project in an effort to meet the anticipated demands from daily commuters and visitors to the port area, once development projects are completed. The major projects include the construction of the Jersey Gardens Mall (formerly the Metro Mall) and the expansion of the IKEA furniture store.

The resolution approved by the Freeholders provides \$300,000 to explore development of so-called brownfields. A total of \$200,000 of this amount would come from the Federal government's now defunct Urban Development Action Grant (UDAG) program.

Deputy County Manager Devanney said the county will use funds to repay a Federal grant to the county from 10 years earlier. The money has remained dormant since that time.

According to JoAnn Gemenden of the Bureau of Economic Affairs, brownfields are defined as abandoned and under used industrial, commercial and residential properties where redevelopment of the sites is "com-

plicated by real or perceived environmental contamination."

She explained that many of these sites may not be contaminated but the perception is that they are, since the lots have sat vacant for so many years.

As part of the program, eight municipalities in the county would receive grants of \$25,000 with two towns receiving \$50,000. The amounts will be based on land area and population figures of the municipality.

According to the resolution, communities with an area in excess of six square miles and a population greater than 40,000 will receive an award of \$50,000 while those communities not

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COUNTY FREEHOLDER HEAD RIPS PROPOSAL

GOP Chair Proposes Freeholder Districts

Union County Republican Chairman Frank X. McDermott, of Westfield, last week unveiled a proposal to create three Freeholder districts — each of which would be represented by two members of the Union County Board of Chosen Freeholders. Another Freeholder would be elected to a county-wide or at-large seat. Also, the number of seats on the board would be reduced from nine to seven.

The plan has met with sharp criticism from the current Chairman of the Democratically-controlled Freeholder board, Daniel P. Sullivan, of Elizabeth.

Currently, there are nine members of the county Freeholder board elected county-wide. Each year three Freeholders are elected to three-year terms. By virtue of three consecutive sweeps at the election polls beginning in 1995, Democrats now have a 9-0 majority on the board.

"This plan would ensure two-party government for the taxpayers of Union County. Under Democrat con-



LAWDAY...Union County Freeholder Vice Chairman Nicholas P. Scutari, right, presents a resolution in recognition of the designation by the Chief Justice of the State Supreme Court proclaiming May 1 as "Law Day, U.S.A." to Union County Assignment Judge Edward W. Beglin, Jr. in his courtroom during the ceremonies held in Union County.

Union County Holds Law Day Celebration at Court House

Union County Freeholder Board Vice Chairman Nicholas P. Scutari participated in the annual Law Day Celebration held at the Union County Court House on May 1.

The program administered by Union County Assignment Judge Edward W. Beglin, Jr., saw nine additional Superior Court judges in attendance with Judge Rudy Coleman as a featured speaker.

"As an attorney, I find this day of reflection and appreciation for the importance the administration of justice plays in the life of our county to be extremely valuable," Freeholder Scutari said.

He noted that as an attorney he often appears before judges throughout the state representing his clients.

"In its basic terms it is essential that the citizenry of Union County have an understanding and respect for the administration of justice which goes on every day in the court rooms of our county. The judges, who were present on May 1, help to emphasize the need to stop and reflect on the importance of Law Day," he said.

A life-long resident of Linden, Freeholder Scutari is serving his second year on the Freeholder board. He

is a member of the Union County Bar Association, the National Association's Council of School Attorneys, the Middlesex County Trial Lawyers Association, the Richard J. Hughes American Inn of Court and the National Eagle Scout Association.

4-H Fair to be Held At Trailside June 14

The Union County 4-H Fair, featuring activities for the whole family, will be held on Sunday, June 14, from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. at the Trailside Nature and Science Center in Mountainside.

Planned activities and attractions include face painting, children's games, a dog demonstration, 4-H club exhibits, a water balloon toss, an egg toss, a bubblegum blowing contest, refreshments and much more.

4-H is a department of Rutgers Cooperative Extension, which provides information and educational services without regard to race, color, national origin, disability or handicap, or age.



A DEBT OF GRATITUDE...Members of the Union County Board of Chosen Freeholders recently honored county residents who put their lives on the line for the safety of others at the Blessing of the Firefighters, held at St. Genevieve Church in Elizabeth. "These men and women have volunteered to risk life and limb to protect our lives and our homes," said Freeholder Chairman Daniel P. Sullivan, second from right in the front row, flanked by fellow Freeholders Linda d. Stender and Alexander Mirabella. Some of Union County's 21 municipalities have paid fire departments, but in many cases, departments are solely staffed and led by volunteers.

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