

Armed Robbery at 7-Eleven Prompts Safety Concerns

By CHRISTINA M. HINKE
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD — The public comment portion of the town council meeting Tuesday had a number of residents coming to the microphone to talk about their concerns with public safety. An arrest was made of a suspect concerning an armed robbery of the 7-Eleven on Central Avenue that took place on January 25 around 2 a.m. Residents who live in the area of the 7-Eleven had asked why they were not notified of the robbery so that they could be on alert. They had said they want to be notified, such as via a Nixle Alert. Police Chief

Christopher Battiloro said a press release was sent out on Monday.

Chief Battiloro said the police department only transmits alerts when immediate action needs to be taken. “Based on our on-scene investigation in the morning hours, we determined the suspect fled the area and did not present an immediate threat to the immediate residents,” Chief Battiloro said. He said video footage gave the appearance the robber was armed, and later police found an imitation firearm in the immediate area. While the suspect had left the town, he returned and was subsequently arrested on Central Avenue

after a foot chase, the chief said. Police dogs also were used in the pursuit, he said.

In an effort to become more proactive, Chief Battiloro said the police department will be looking to conduct random routine checks of all 24-hour businesses and take other proactive measures, which he did not specify.

Ordinances that would restrict 24-hour businesses, and others prescribing safety measures at 24-hour operations, were brought up by residents. Shawn Muller of Carleton Road said this was brought up in 2016 during the 7-Eleven planning board application and that nothing was ever done by the council.

“Every day this place stays in business we are in danger,” said Mr. Muller.

It also was asked if the concept of having cameras placed on Lawrence Avenue and Central Avenue would be considered. The council’s public safety committee is to discuss this at a committee meeting. Councilman Michael Dardia said.

Colleen Meacock and Susan Levy of the Gumbert Park Neighborhood Coalition reported on the noise associated with the Westfield Ice Rink at Gumbert Park. They asked the council to not renew the one-year lease after the rink is closed for the season on Friday, March 1. Mayor Shelley Brindle said she has left the matter to the recreation commission to decide whether or not to recommend renewing the contract, after which the town council would vote.

Mayor Brindle also said the town received approval from the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection to place a barrier on one side that would deflect noise towards North Avenue.

During business matters, the town council passed on first reading a union contract for Department of Public Works (DPW) employees that would provide for a 2-percent increase in wages through

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2019 OFFICERS... Mayor Shelley Brindle swears in the 2019 Westfield Volunteer Rescue Squad officers at Saturday’s officers installation and annual dinner-dance at The Grand Summit Hotel in Summit. Pictured, from left to right, are: Equipment Lieutenant Eric Taylor, Deputy Chief Tremain Ellis, Chief Sergio Guzman, Assistant Treasurer Kendall Hagan, Treasurer Keith Peterson, Secretary Candy Jackovino, Vice-President Michael Besaw and President David Sloan.



TRENTON UPDATE... The Greater Westfield Area Chamber of Commerce (GWACC) hosted its annual Legislative Panel last Wednesday to discuss the New Jersey Economic and Fiscal Policy Workgroup’s “Path to Progress” report. Pictured, from left to right, are: Assembly Majority Leader Louis Greenwald (D-6th, Voorhees), Assembly Minority Leader Jon Bramnick (R-21st, Westfield), Senate Minority Leader Tom Kean, Jr. (R-21st, Westfield) and Senator Joe Cryan (D-20th, Union).

Planning Board Approves Plan for Barnes Tract

By KATE BROWNE
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

MOUNTAINSIDE — The planning board unanimously approved the Garnico Group’s proposal to redevelop the Barnes Tract at Tuesday’s meeting. Thirty-two units will be constructed on the 5.5-acre site located at the end of Knights Bridge Road, with six of the units designated as affordable housing. Construction of these units will meet the community’s court-ordered affordable-housing obligations.

The site plan which was approved envisions six separate two-story buildings that will have a colonial aesthetic. The Garnico Group sought a building-height variance since Mountainside limits a building’s height to 36 feet and the new townhouses will be 39.6 feet in height. The applicant also sought a front-yard setback variance since the

borough’s ordinance allows for a front-yard setback of 30 feet while the site will require a 26.4-foot setback.

Over the course of several lengthy meetings, board members heard testimony from the applicant’s planner, Christine Nazzaro-Cofone; architect, John Saracco; professional engineer and land surveyor, Lee Titus, and professional landscape and design architect, Gregg Spadaro. At Tuesday’s meeting, traffic expert Elizabeth Dolan of Dolan and Dean Consulting Engineers testified that a traffic analysis of the roadway from the site and the intersection of New Providence Road and Mountain Avenue revealed trip generation projections of 16 vehicles an hour during peak morning traffic and 21 an hour during the evening rush. She opined that these “minimal volumes” were “safe

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NEW COUNCILMAN... Union County Sheriff Peter Corvelli swears in Russ Graham as a member of the Garwood Borough Council last Thursday. He fills the council seat vacated by Mayor Sara Todisco.

Neighbors Ask For Help To Stop UCC Cell Tower

By PAUL J. PEYTON
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

CRANFORD — A group of Cranford residents again pleaded with the Union County Freeholder Board last Thursday to do what it can to stop construction of a 140-foot cell tower on the Cranford campus of Union County College (UCC).

Ray Licata said the cell tower would be 230 feet from the nearest residences on Princeton Road. He cited studies by the National Toxicology Program (NTP) for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services National Toxicology Program (NTP) and the Ramazzini Institute in Italy which show that cell-tower radiation “has health effects.”

Mr. Licata said Verizon’s contract with UCC, approved by the college board in October, includes a distributed antenna system or DAS. He said DAS includes an antenna on the roof and antennas inside a building to provide cell reception.

“There are also plans for them to build a new parking garage so they could put more antennas on top of that or any other buildings,” he said.

Mr. Licata said the college plans to expand cell-phone coverage from the campus on Springfield Avenue all the way to the Cranford train station on North Avenue.

“This is an educational institution. Why are they concerned about cell coverage to residents of Cranford all the way down to the train station?” Mr. Licata asked. “The answer is money,” he said, noting UCC will get \$34,000 a year for the next 25 years, and that Verizon would profit by selling the tower in the years ahead.

The college has said the cell tower is sought to ensure all employees and students have cell coverage for emergency messages in the event of a campus-wide emergency such as an active

shooter. Currently, there are areas where there is no cell-phone coverage, UCC staff has said.

Freeholder Angel Estrada asked Mr. Licata to provide copies of the reports he cited, noting that none of the information he has read “are binding that there is any danger or impact to people in general.”

Chemeda Mindy Kipness of Colby Lane in Cranford, a resident since 2004, noted that the cell tower would be built on land that is “already” elevated 20 feet, surrounded by 70-foot-high trees adjacent to Princeton Road, between Colby Lane and UCC’s parking lot.

She said most cell towers are located in commercial areas, “not near these kinds of residential areas.”

“This is going to impact the entire north side of Cranford and Westfield,” she said. “The cell tower will be less than 1,000 feet from close to 300 homes in just Cranford; even more if you include Westfield.”

She said Washington Elementary School in Westfield and Brookside Elementary School in Cranford are in close proximity to where the tower would be located at UCC. Ms. Kipness also said it is estimated nearby home values would drop 20 percent if the tower is constructed.

Ms. Kipness asked the board to help “find other ways that this cell tower proposal can be remediated.”

Michael Normann of Colby Lane commented, “Cranford and Westfield residents do not want a 130 to 150-foot cell tower in a residential community.”

Marietta Horne of Princeton Road questioned why UCC is “being allowed to circumvent public opinion and safety and allowed unfettered commercial development on public property.” She said the tower would be located within 500 feet of her bedroom.

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Residents Seek Answers On Traffic From ‘Reimagining’

By MICHAEL BONACCORSO
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

CRANFORD — Several residents asked the township committee at Tuesday’s meeting for their insight and purview regarding the impact “Reimagining Cranford” will have on traffic, neighborhoods and related increased school-budget costs.

The board of education proposed “Reimagining Cranford” or a “10-plan” outline providing alternative busing, school redistricting, and a school centralization plan, stated resi-

dent Chris Acosta. Mayor Patrick Giblin said other than furthering a beneficial relationship with the school board, the township committee does not oversee school budgets, strategic plans and long-term capital expenditure plans.

Mayor Giblin stated that any major changes requiring extra funding from taxpayers for the board of education or the school system is voted on during election time through a referendum. A referendum would be a separate “yes-or-no” vote by Cranford residents to allow the board to seek additional tax dollars to fund its plan.

The board of education cannot spend additional funds or levy additional taxes without “voter approval,” Mayor Giblin stated.

Mayor Giblin said the “10-plan” proposal from his “understanding” is still being discussed amongst board of education members who are seeking public feedback and input from other significant professionals associated with the board of education operations.

“I am banging my head against the wall. Sixty percent of taxes go to the

board of education,” Mr. Acosta said. Mr. Acosta said seven of the 10 “Reimagining” plans involve a “busing component.” The plans propose 19 buses “to be put on the streets of Cranford,” Mr. Acosta stated.

“The traffic is so horrendous,” said Mr. Acosta, describing the expected impact buses will have on downtown rush-hour traffic coupled with traffic from new housing developments.

The Cranford neighborhoods are “known” historically for “walkability” by students to a nearby school. The proposed “Reimagining” plan would eliminate the neighborhood relevance to the education system, stated Mr. Acosta.

“I represent the people of Cranford. Please reach out to me with any questions or concerns,” Commissioner Mary O’Connor responded.

Resident Lauren O’Brien said police and fire department response times will be hindered by the increased traffic the school buses will create.

“We have put our trust and confidence in you,” said Ms. O’Brien, who asked the township committee for its

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LEARNING ABOUT DR. KING... First graders at Tamaques School in Westfield honor Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. by reciting a portion of his “I Have a Dream” speech and discussing the meaning of Dr. King’s legendary oration at the March on Washington in August 1963. “It’s like living your inside out,” said one youngster when asked about a part of the speech where the civil rights leader said, “I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character.” Led by the first-grade team of Linda D’Onofrio, Mary Montes and Jenna Utman, the students also created a mural poster entitled “Reach for the Highest Good.”

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