

Westfield BOE Moves Forward With Referendum for Full-Day K

By JENNIFER GLACKIN
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD — Westfield voters will get a chance to make their opinions known on full-day kindergarten at a special March 2020 bond referendum election.

At a public workshop session during Tuesday night's meeting, the Westfield Board of Education (BOE) voted 6 to 3 to move forward with a referendum for bonds needed to construct additions to some of the local schools. Gretchan Ohlig, Tara Oporto and Michael Bielen voted no. Board member Brendan Galligan stated that he "does not feel as if we (the district) really needs full-day kindergarten, but the

public keeps asking for it, so let's put the question to the voters."

Thirteen hundred respondents answered a survey by the board. Board member Robert Garrison relayed that the overall response was positive; 70.5 percent of respondents either fully supported or most likely supported full-day kindergarten, while 21.9 percent said they did not, and 7.3 percent said they were uncertain.

According to Business Administrator Dana Sullivan, an enrollment study shows the number of incoming first graders for the 2019-2020 school year is 455. The actual enrollment of half-day kindergarten students is 221. Therefore, the pro-

jected increase of students for a full-day kindergarten program is 232 more students. Twenty-three classrooms will be needed to house a full-day kindergarten of this size. Currently, the schools have nine classrooms available and need 14 additional rooms. This is based on a class size of roughly 20 students.

According to Ms. Sullivan, to provide these rooms, expansions will need to be added to some of the local schools. Washington Elementary, Jefferson Elementary and Wilson Elementary Schools have been determined suitable for expansion. The estimated cost combined for all three schools is \$13 million to \$14.3 million. Franklin, McKinley and Lincoln Elementary Schools were deemed not suitable due to lack of land. Tamaques Elementary School's land grade would require additional building costs to construct on the slope, around \$12.7 million just for this school, and is therefore considered unsuitable, she said.

Other ideas for expansion, such as the BOE offices and private building acquisitions, were deemed not appropriate due to the updating, re-fitting and rehabilitation costs to meet current school building codes. Also researched, but considered unsuitable as long-term solutions, were trailers and refurbished shipping containers.

Ms. Sullivan said if the bond referendum passes in March 2020, the public will have a separate vote in November of 2021 to increase the overall operating budget that will rise above the state cap, due to the additional staff needed to run the full-day kindergarten program. If both of those pass, full-day kindergarten would be available in September 2022. Currently, 10 percent of New Jersey schools do not have full-day kindergarten.

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Cranford Explains New July 2 Date for Fireworks

By CHRISTINA M. HINKE
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

CRANFORD — The township committee meeting Tuesday began with a presentation by Emergency Management Coordinator Lieutenant Matthew Lubin about why the fireworks display at Nomahegan Park to celebrate the country's independence was moved from the Fourth of July to July 2 this year.

There was a threat and hazard identification and risk assessment conducted, he said. A list of reasons was spelled out. Some of those reasons included that Union County and state resources are tied up with high-profile events down the shore and in the city; tree overgrowth in the park, and that portions of fallout zones are inaccessible to safety personnel, he said. Also, the fireworks display has grown to where roughly 6,500 spectators attend the event at the park. The presentation stated that the event has grown substantially over the years and is one result of a growing



CELEBRATE CRANFORD...Kids Zone activities were popular during Sunday's Celebrate Cranford event. Children had fun jumping over or dodging the arm in the Meltdown, playing carnival games and cornhole, and the bouncy houses, as this little one did in the Sesame Street-themed bounce house.

Christina M. Hinke for The Westfield Leader

Cranford Planning Bd. Says 'No' To Rezoning of 750 Walnut Ave.

By CHRISTINA M. HINKE
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

CRANFORD — The planning board had a heart, and said no to 750 Walnut. The board unanimously denied, by a 10-to-0 vote Wednesday night, Hartz Mountain Industries' application to rezone 750 Walnut Avenue from a C-3 zone to a multi-family residential zone. The board's vote is considered a recommendation to the township committee, which will make the final decision whether to rezone the property. Before the township committee can vote, the planning board at one of the

board's upcoming scheduled meetings will have to pass a resolution of its decision, which then moves to the township committee.

The board had multiple votes on multiple questions it had to consider, and deliberated and made statements for its reasoning to not recommend the rezoning of the property. The first was to consider if the property as it is zoned has fallen into inutility, which means "uselessness or no practical use," Board Chairwoman Kathleen Murray said.

The board cited the testimony by the applicant did not provide a burden of proof that the property has fallen into inutility where it can no longer be leased or sold for the uses in the C-3 zone, and that the rezone would not further the purpose of the land-use law and goals of the township's master plan.

Board member Chris Chapman, who began stating his reasons for voting against the application, had said the board's real-estate expert had "sufficient reliable evidence" that supported that the property is not in inutility or would be in inutility if not rezoned. He also cited citizen objectors' comments on the application. Board member Peter Taylor said that Hartz experts "lack credibility" and that their real-estate expert used a "passive approach" in

marketing and leasing space. "Most of the hardships Hartz has identified...are self-imposed," Mr. Chapman said.

The board maintained that the applicant's real-estate expert testimony was not consistent with the board's expert. The board cited rates per square feet that were too high; poor marketing of the property; that Hartz had no investment in the property since 1988 other than retrofitting a building for one tenant, Bank of America, which vacated in recent years; that the applicant neglected to actively pursue tenants of similar types of businesses such as Summit Medical Group, which had been in negotiation, but fell through, to lease part of the property; that Hartz Mountain's refusal to rent smaller square footage of property has created a self-inflicted burden, and the application with the planning board has resulted in a lack of interest from lessors.

Also, the board found the testimony by the applicant's engineer regarding lack of access to the New Jersey Turnpike and Route 1 as not reliable because the current industrial trucking company there presently has large trucks coming and going, and that modern industrial

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PRESERVING WESTFIELD...The Westfield Historic Preservation Commission presented its annual Harry Devlin Awards at a ceremony last Thursday night in the Community Room of the Westfield Municipal Building.

Paul Lachenauer for The Westfield Leader

Y Seeks to Use Back Yards Of Homes for Parking

By JILL BURKE
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD — The Westfield Area Y appeared before the town's board of adjustment Monday night seeking approval to use three residential houses' backyards as employee parking. The proposal, if approved, would create 15 to 20 new parking spaces.

Mark Elsass, chief executive officer of the Westfield Area Y, spoke on behalf of the organization. The Y has existed at its current Clark Street location since 1923 and owns all three houses cited in the application. Three staff members live with their families on the second floor of each house, while the lower levels are used as storage for Y equipment.

The Westfield Area Y employs about 430 staff members across all their facilities, most of whom are part-time, and 15 to 30 of whom are working at the Clark Street location at any given time. There also is a

night shift of six to eight workers, meaning that the Y is staffed at all times. The Y proposed to use the new parking areas for full-time and overnight employees, to prevent a heavy flow of movement in and out of the residential area as part-time employees' shorter shifts begin and end.

Representatives of the Y explained that rather than seeking approval to demolish the three houses and create one large parking lot, they are trying to be good neighbors and preserve the integrity of the residential char-

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Correction

In a report dated May 30, The Westfield Leader should have reported that Riker, Danzig, Scherer, Hyland represented Commissioner Jean-Albert Maisonneuve, and the Township of Cranford, in a lawsuit filed by Benedict Caiola. The suit was dismissed.



KIDS ZONE...Cranford came out Sunday to celebrate being named the number one downtown in New Jersey. The Cranford Jaycees donated the Kids Zone activities for the day. Kids had fun jumping over or dodging the arm in the Meltdown, above, playing carnival games and cornhole, and enjoying the bouncy houses. Fitness sessions were a part of the event as well.

Christina M. Hinke for The Westfield Leader

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IT'S A NO VOTE...Cranford Planning Board member Peter Taylor, center, discusses the Hartz Mountain application at the June 5 board meeting. The board rejected a change in zoning for 750 Walnut Avenue in a 10-to-0 vote.

Christina M. Hinke for The Westfield Leader

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