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PANCAKES AND BREAKFAST SANDWICHES... A hungry line builds at Saturday's Westfield Rotary Club annual breakfast at Westfield High School. Proceeds from the event support the club's scholarship fund.

Mountainside Council Reviews Preliminary Budget

BY KATE BROWNE
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

MOUNTAINSIDE — The members of the Mountainside Borough Council analyzed the municipality's proposed operating budget during their Tuesday work session. Councilman Keith Turner presided over the meeting due to the absence of Mayor Paul Mirabelli.

According to Councilman Turner, the budget will be introduced at the next public meeting, which will be held on Tuesday, March 19. The preliminary budget anticipates a tax increase of 1.7 percent for the average assessed home. Chief Financial Officer Jill Goode advised that the average home in Mountainside is valued at \$163,338. This results in an average tax increase of \$18.09. Last year the tax increase was .69 percent or approximately \$19; while the percentage has increased the dollar impact is lower due to an increase in the amount of new construction.

Several of the community's mandatory expenses have increased, including the fees assessed by the Rahway Valley Sewerage Authority, which have increased \$50,000; police pensions, which have gone up \$541,724, and the cost of recycling, which has increased \$80,000. In addition, approximately \$675,000 in legal fees and expenses were incurred in connection with the ongoing employment discrimination case and the total cost of the county-ordered prop-

erty reevaluation project, which will cost more than \$100,000.

In addition, there were several cost reductions, including the budget for snow removal, which may, depending on the weather, be \$47,000 less than anticipated; insurance premiums, which are approximately \$10,000 less than planned, and a reduction in cable franchise fees.

In other business, Councilman Robert Messler urged residents to take advantage of the New Jersey Tree Recovery campaign, which will give residents free tree seedlings to help replace the trees that were damaged or destroyed by Superstorm Sandy. From 9 to 11 a.m. on Saturday, April 27, residents will be able to pick up tree seedlings at Borough Hall. The seedlings will be made available on a first-come, first-served basis and will include instructions on how to store, care for and plant them. Homeowners should plant the seedlings, which will range from one to two feet, within two days of pickup to prevent them from drying out, and should not plant any seedlings within three feet of a roadway.

The goal of the free tree program is to distribute 600,000 trees to New Jersey residents. It is a joint event between the Borough of Mountainside, the New Jersey Forest Service, the New Jersey Soil Conservation District, Sustainable Jersey, the Arbor Day Foundation, BJ's Wholesale Club, Canon and Federal Express.

Town-Hall Mtg. Held to End Court-Mandated Housing

By WAYNE BAKER
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

CRANFORD — On Tuesday evening, Union County College (UCC) hosted state Assembly Republican Leader Jon Bramnick and Assemblywoman Holly Schepisi (R-39, Westwood) for a town hall on stopping court-mandated affordable housing which has resulted in significant increase in high-density housing development. Mr. Bramnick represents the 21st District, comprising parts of Morris, Somerset, and Union Counties. Ms. Schepisi's district covers portions of Bergen and Passaic Counties.

The meeting was held primarily to address and inform residents concerned about the 750 Walnut Avenue project in Cranford, which the property owner, Hartz Mountain, is proposing to rezone the property from commercial to residential to allow for 905 apartments.

Prior to the meeting, a page was distributed listing numerous bills, which are intended to address overdevelopment as a result of judicial decisions on affordable housing.

Asm. Bramnick described the State Legislature's failure to act on affordable housing as an abdication of one of their responsibilities. He said, "Even the courts, even judges, don't want this responsibility."

Both Asm. Bramnick and Asw. Schepisi pointed out that the litigation involved in these cases results in town councils essentially having "guns to their heads and having to choose the least-worst option." Occasionally settlements include actual gag orders, which Asw. Schepisi described as "surreal." She also pointed out that because of this opaqueness, nobody can accurately measure the progress that's been made.

An inquiry by a member of the public resulted in an interesting point by Asw.

Schepisi, who said that her town of River Vale and Harding Township had both dedicated tax money to developing affordable housing without developers. This means that while the affordable housing is developed, it's done so without the usual four-to-one ratio of market rate housing to affordable housing, thus minimizing the burden on town infrastructure such as roads and schools.

Several members of the public questioned the presenters, among them was Rita LaBrutto of Cranford. She pointed out that Governor Phil Murphy's newly presented budget includes \$60 million for affordable housing.

Asw. Schepisi noted that budget represents approximately 210 units of about 600 square feet. She also stated for the \$250,000 to \$300,000 per unit, a family could be provided with a housing voucher for a suburban location for 18 to 20 years.

Responding to another person's inquiry, Asw. Schepisi said that the current methodology does not count housing vouchers, mobile homes, tiny homes, or foreclosure units.

Another member of the public was Jim Bird, former mayor of Hopewell Township, a community in Mercer County. Mr. Bird said that the 60 square mile, historically agricultural town has seen its population grow three-and-a-half times since 1960. He said the growth forced the town to build schools, add teachers, administrators, and police. He said he is 100 percent behind a moratorium on the court-mandated housing.

As the meeting closed, both presenters encouraged those desirous of change to reach out to Governor Murphy, their state legislators, and friends and relatives who could do the same and encourage the Legislature to pass laws on this matter.



STOP HIGH DENSITY HOUSING... On Tuesday evening, Union County College hosted state Assembly Republican Leader Jon Bramnick (R-21st, Westfield) and Assemblywoman Holly Schepisi (R-39, Westwood) for a town hall on stopping court-mandated affordable housing which has resulted in a significant increase in high-density housing developments.

County Budget Hearings Begin Next Week

ELIZABETH — The Fiscal Committee of the Union County Board of Chosen Freeholders will hold public hearings on the 2019 Union County executive budget on Monday, March 11 in Kenilworth and Tuesday, March 12 in Elizabeth, both at 5 p.m., and Monday, March 18 at the Westfield Municipal Building at 5:30 p.m.

On March 11, the Sheriff's Office; Department of Corrections; Department of Engineering, Public Works and Facilities Management; Department of Parks and Recreation; Surrogate's Office will give budget presentations at the Union County Galloping Hill Golf Clubhouse, 3 Golf Drive, Kenilworth.

On March 12, the Election Board; Department of Economic Development; Department of Human Services, and Department of Public Safety will discuss their budgets at the Union County Administration Building, sixth floor, Freeholders meeting room, 10 Elizabethtown Plaza, Elizabeth.

On March 18, the Union County Clerk's Office, Department of Administrative Services; Office of County Counsel and Prosecutor's Office will present budgets at the Westfield Municipal Building, 425 East Broad Street, Westfield.

While there are no public comments at these meetings, the public is welcome to attend and listen to the discussion. The Freeholder Board's Fiscal Committee will conduct their review before the Freeholder Board as a whole votes to introduce the budget later this year.

WF Planning Board

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The building's owner, attorney Frank McIntyre, has operated a law practice from the site numerous years ago. Mr. McIntyre said the office space on the second floor can be described as "antiquated." He said this allows him to revitalize the internal and external structure, allowing for new commercial tenants to rent the second-floor office space.

The dormer would add 300 square feet to the structure, stated Mr. McIntyre. The planning board approved for Mr. McIntyre over a year ago to renovate the building's basement. The basement renovation would have required 17 spaces of on-site parking when only nine spaces were provided, stated Mr. McIntyre.

Mr. McIntyre said the parking conundrum has been resolved by his "working funeral home." During the day, the funeral home allows Mr. McIntyre's visiting clients to park in their parking lot if needed. Mr. McIntyre's office often does not operate during evenings when the funeral home needs extra spaces for wakes, stated Mr. McIntyre.

Planning board member Michael La Place said the addition does not intrude or "physically impose" on the East Broad streetscape while adding an aesthetic benefit to the building's rear façade. Mr. La Place said he fully supports the application as the project was design sensitive in relation to "size efficiency."



HEALTHY LIVING... Garwood Mayor Sara Todisco presents Victoria Coglianesse with a proclamation acknowledging ShopRite's efforts to promote "healthier living" within the borough. Ms. Coglianesse is a retail dietitian at the Garwood supermarket.

Garwood Council

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intended to recognize the need for "limiting any tax increases while maintaining top-quality services," Mr. Lazarow said. Budget review meetings will be held on Tuesday, March 12, at 7 p.m., and Tuesday, March 26, at 7 p.m., affording the public the opportunity "to go through the budget and ask questions," stated Mr. Lazarow.

An informal meeting will be held on Wednesday, March 20, at Borough Hall with Councilman Lazarow, Councilwoman Jennifer Blumenstock and Mayor Todisco present.

"I hope to encourage all members of the public to attend any of these special budget or 'breaking down the budget' meetings to provide their feedback, concerns and questions," Mr. Lazarow said.

On Thursday, March 21, Union County Division on Aging staff will be at the Garwood Public Library from 10 a.m. until noon to assist senior citizens age 60 and older or their caregivers with information on

various services. Such services include meal delivery, respite care, adult day care, and support services for caregivers, stated Mr. Lazarow.

ShopRite's registered dietitian, Victoria Coglianesse, discussed the services ShopRite provides free for residents who want healthy snack lists, meal plans and nutritional advice. Ms. Coglianesse said ShopRite has worked closely with the borough and residents in the past to develop adolescent nutritional programming or activities promoting healthy lifestyles.

Mayor Todisco presented Ms. Coglianesse with a proclamation acknowledging ShopRite's efforts to promote "healthier living" within the borough.

The Garwood Police Department is accepting applications for part-time school crossing guards, stated Councilman Michael Ince. Prior experience is not necessary.

"Anyone interested can pick up an application at the police window," Mr. Ince said.



SNOW BOWL... Andrew Syeiler, an athlete on the Hawks team for the Special Olympics, speaks on behalf of the proclamation honoring the Special Olympics at a Cranford Township Committee meeting Tuesday. "Being a Special Olympic athlete means a lot to me...I didn't realize I could use my athletic ability for more than myself..." Andrew said. He stands with members of the Luke's Warriors and Shark Finns, and Phil Morin, founder of Snow Bowl, which will take place March 16 at MetLife Stadium. Mr. Morin is holding his son, Finn, a first grader who has Down syndrome. Donate at www.njsnowbowl.org.

Cranford Committee Votes To Sell Myrtle Property

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that side of the street and back it up to residences is deplorable and it is not acceptable. Opening this door is a gateway to additional development," Ms. Mayer said.

Commissioner Mary O'Connor, the sole commissioner to vote against the sale of 83 Myrtle Street, said she did not have enough facts on the mixed-use development on the other parcel of Myrtle Street, and voted against the sale of 83 Myrtle because of the residents' concerns.

Denise McDermott of Hory Street, who has previously lived on Myrtle Street, said, "We are just fighting for our neighborhoods. It has nothing to do with what's begin built there. There is a small barrier that keeps us sane."

Jack Ryan said he felt the township commissioners misled the group of residents opposing the sale when in December at a public committee meeting Mr. Ryan said then Mayor Tom Hannen, Jr. had said the township was "spit balling" ideas about the property, but three months later the property is sold. At the same meeting, another resident Thomas Kash, said a recording of the meeting showed one of the male individuals on the township committee had said, "This is going to be a lot tougher than we thought," he said. He said the statement equates to the township deliberately keeping the matter of the sale of the property from the residents.

Mr. Kash, who lives in the neighborhood, said the opposition to the sale has nothing to do with the use as a group home after Mr. Hannen said group homes at the location is an "appropriate use" in the community. He said people in the township have approached him that there is a need for special-needs housing. Mayor Hannen said he "misjudged" the level of resistance the residents would have for special-needs housing.

"As a former Eagle Scout, with family who has disabilities...the town continually neglected this issue for years...don't play the emotional card with me..." Mr. Kash said.

The committee also passed a resolution to hire a new zoning officer, Jason Bottcher. According to his LinkedIn account, he is a GIS Coordinator at Hudson County Division of Planning - Certified Floodplain Manager, and holds a master's degree in urban planning from Hunter College. He is replacing Ron

Johnson who left the position.

The township, in a 4-to-1 vote, with Ms. Dooley voting against, is to have Maser Consulting back as a consulting engineer, to fill the vacancy left by William Masol who was hired as township engineer in June 2017 after the committee voted, 3-to-2, to no longer have a consultant engineer and go back to an in-house engineer. The contract will be for \$25,000 as the township continues to interview candidates for a full-time in-house engineer. Mayor Patrick Giblin said Maser is to step in and fill the void until the township decides if it will hire another employee for the job or go to a consultant.

A shared-service agreement with the County of Union for Emergency Dispatching Services was approved, 4-to-1, with Mr. Hannen voting against. The police and fire departments both had recommended the move, Mayor Giblin said. The move will save the township \$54,000 a year, net, in operating costs, Ms. Dooley said. She said they department has had issues with retaining communications personnel and also filling those jobs. The Cranford First Aid Squad, a volunteer organization, will not be incurring any costs as part of this switch. Ms. Dooley affirmed when asked by members of the First Aid Squad. Also, the fire department and first responder radios need to be upgraded to comply with mandates, and by sharing services with the county the township is able to take part in a program that will save money on purchasing the radios — reducing costs from \$1.8 million to \$1.1 million.

Ice Rink

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Jeff Perella was appointed to fill the unexpired term of Kevin Neelan on the commission. Mr. Perella grew up in Westfield and resides on Coleman Place.

Brian Dwyer and Josh Ettinger asked the commission for permission to hold a charity skateboard demonstration at a town park in the spring. Mr. Fox advised them to investigate potential locations and work with the recreation department.

The commission's next meeting will be on Monday, April 1.



SCOUT'S HONOR... Girl Scout week is March 9 through March 16, as proclaimed at the Cranford Township Committee Meeting on Tuesday. Girl Scouts of Cranford pose with the township committee.