

Housing Committee to Push For Enactment of Housing Reform Bills

By FRED T. ROSSI
Specially Written for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times

SCOTCH PLAINS – The affordable-housing advisory committee plans to focus its efforts on promoting four bills currently being considered by the State Legislature that could ease affordable-housing obligations on municipalities.

At its monthly meeting on May 8, the committee reviewed the quartet of legislative proposals before agreeing to endorse them and make plans to partner with other towns in order to strengthen the level of support. The aim of the committee since its inception at the start of this year has been to identify ways for the affordable-housing issue to be moved from the courts to the Legislature.

The first bill, A-4471, would end the Council on Affordable Housing (COAH) and establish a legislative subcommittee on affordable-housing needs that would evaluate and determine present and prospective needs for affordable housing at the state and regional levels. The second bill, A-1648, would establish additional factors—such as impacts on infrastructure, local schools, first responders—when calculating a town's affordable-housing obligations and also provide a population-based cap for those obligations. Mayor Alexander Smith called this bill "one of the biggest ones in terms of impact."

The third bill, A-1649, would prohibit affordable-housing obligation

exemptions for urban aid municipalities and allow for such housing requirements in those cities. Prior regulations excluded such municipalities, which include Elizabeth, Plainfield, Linden and Rahway, from providing any contribution toward a region's affordable-housing needs. Those exemptions have led to a greater housing burden being imposed on other, primarily suburban towns. Committee member Bill Picard pointed out that enactment of A-1649 could help lower-income people from being forced to move out of cities that are gentrifying and making adequate housing unaffordable to those with lower incomes.

The fourth piece of legislation, A-1644, would allow municipalities to establish an affordable-housing preference for their own residents, so that long-time residents who may be downsizing in retirement or can not afford to live in their homes any longer can remain in their town.

Mayor Smith said the reason the committee wants to push these bills is, "it's election time" and "we want to get [legislators'] attention." The committee plans to invite local legislators to a future meeting to gauge their support for the four bills and to see where they stand on affordable-housing issues in general.

During the discussion of the legislation, committee member Amy Jones said she was concerned that some of the legislative proposals amounted to a form of "legislative redlining" and were aimed at "keeping Elizabeth, Linden and Plainfield in those towns and keeping Scotch Plains white and affluent." She called Union County "a very racialized county," saying that areas of the county east of the Park-

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Garwood Mayor, Council Support Ladder Truck

By MICHAEL BONACCORSO
Specially Written for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times

GARWOOD – Mayor Sara Todisco and the borough council on Thursday unanimously supported the Garwood Fire Department acquiring a ladder truck. The cost of the truck is estimated at \$1.3 million.

Over the last month, Garwood Fire Chief Allan Tweedle and Assistant Chief John Scalzadonna discussed the ladder truck's specifics at two public town-hall-style meetings. The council opined on the ladder truck acquisition thus avoiding a referendum vote by residents.

It was revealed during these meetings that the existing ladder truck cannot reach 20 buildings on the north side and 18 buildings on the south side of the borough.

At Thursday's council meeting, former councilwoman Ileen Cuccaro said considering the truck's cost "the truck should be up for public vote."

"You cannot put public safety on a ballot," Mayor Todisco responded.

The mayor said the governing body is elected to lead, protect, and make "tough, yet beneficial" decisions for Garwood. Mayor Todisco said the governing body funds the police and fire departments, "ensuring they are properly equipped" to serve the borough.

Mayor Todisco said the council unanimously decided "to do what we have always done" which is "listen, discuss, text and email concerned residents." She said the town-hall-style meetings engage residents, allowing leadership to hear "what the community wants or respond to resident concerns."

"I could not fault it at all," said Ms. Cuccaro, complementing the fire chief's two presentations.

Councilman Russell Graham said he was apprehensive of the "ladder



A SCOTCH PLAINS LANDMARK...John's Meat Market celebrated its 80th anniversary in grand style last Saturday in Scotch Plains. Nick and Vincent Losavio, owners of John's Meat Market, hosted family, friends and hundreds of patrons.

Planning Board Backs New Zones for Possible Housing

By FRED T. ROSSI
Specially Written for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times

SCOTCH PLAINS – The planning board on Monday gave its backing to two zoning ordinances that will create an overlay zone district along several streets that have been designated for potential housing developments.

Last week, the township council introduced the two ordinances that will create overlay zones for properties along Jerusalem Road and on Waldheim Avenue and Beryllium Road. Providing details of the proposed zones, Michael Mistretta, the

board's planner, emphasized that no builders have yet proposed any developments and also pointed out that the current zoning on the affected streets will remain.

The overlay is, in effect, placed on top of the existing zones. If a developer were to put forth a proposal and met the requirements of the overlay ordinance, they then could build a multi-family housing development, Mr. Mistretta explained.

Eighteen properties along Jerusalem Road, encompassing about 15 acres, will be included in one overlay zone. The density for that area will be 12 units per acre, meaning that if the zone were built out to the maximum, there would be 182 housing units, with between 27 and 36 of them being tabbed as affordable units as part of the township's obligations in that regard. Along Waldheim Avenue and Beryllium Road, 23 properties totaling 7.2 acres will be included. Nine units per acre will be permitted, meaning 65 units could be built, with 10 to 13 being set aside as affordable.

The council will hold public hearings on the two ordinances at its Tuesday, May 21 meeting.

There was a brief discussion at Monday's planning board meeting about possibly increasing the percentage of affordable-housing units within any new development from

the existing 15 to 20 percent included in the township's legal settlement reached with builders last year, but Mr. Mistretta said attempting to do so would require returning to the court for approval, which he predicted would reject any such idea.

The township is facing a June 30 court deadline to put forth plans for the various properties in town for possible housing developments. The final two properties that will be subject to overlay ordinances — the Lamberts Mill Road property where the Amberg garden center is now located and a tract of land on North Avenue next to the Charlie Brown's restaurant — are expected to be addressed in the next few weeks.

In other business, the board approved a 60-day extension for T-Mobile Northeast LLC to keep its temporary cell towers in place on the south side of town, while it completes the reattachment of its permanent antenna on PSE&G transmission towers that run along Terrill Road.

Mayor Alexander Smith told the board that the Downtown Redevelopment Committee will soon get its first look at developers' plans for the first phase of downtown redevelopment. Describing them as "pretty good plans," the mayor said township officials currently are examining

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HAPPY 80TH ANNIVERSARY...Live Doo Wop by the Jersey Jukebox helped John's Meat Market in Scotch Plains celebrate its 80th anniversary on Saturday.

Downtown Redevelop. Plans Close to Being Unveiled

By FRED T. ROSSI
Specially Written for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times

SCOTCH PLAINS – Mayor Alexander Smith last week said that he was "very encouraged" by the "excellent" proposals he is seeing from two companies being considered to redevelop the public properties in the downtown business district.

At the downtown redevelopment committee's meeting on May 8, the mayor said he expects the two developers — Advance Realty Investors, a Bedminster-based developer that has been involved in similar-type redevelopment projects in Harrison and Bridgewater, and A. Gonsosa Development from Springfield — to meet with committee members privately in June to provide details about their proposals and to get input from the members.

The first phase of downtown redevelopment centers on the township-owned properties where the municipal building, the firehouse and the library are located as well as the parking lots adjacent to the municipal building and library, behind the stores that front Park Avenue and the park-

ing lot behind the row of businesses on East Second Street adjacent to the CVS drug store. Redevelopment of these properties is expected to result in about 48,000 square feet of new retail and office space, more than 1,400 new parking spots and 177 new housing units, 35 of which will be set aside as affordable-housing units.

Redevelopment Coordinator Thomas Stowe said last week that it is likely the meetings with the developers will be held on two separate nights before the proposals are made available to the public after the summer.

The mayor said the key to whatever is going to be proposed is that it be "financially sound." Noting that the police and fire departments and the library will be moved to different locations, the mayor said, "We've got a heavy lift here." The challenge, he said, is how to stage the various points of redevelopment so that parking in the downtown is not heavily affected and that first responders and the library do not experience too much of a disruption to their operations as their facilities are moved.

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A LESSON IN GOVERNMENT...Fanwood Mayor Colleen Mahr hosts Girl Scout Troop 40111 for a tour of Fanwood Borough Hall on May 1. Pictured with the mayor, from left to right, are: Troop members Lola Martinson, Helena Biendon, Abby Perrault, Amanda Stanley, Molly Boyle, Alexa Birnbaum, Diane Jane Ngumah and Maria Thomas.



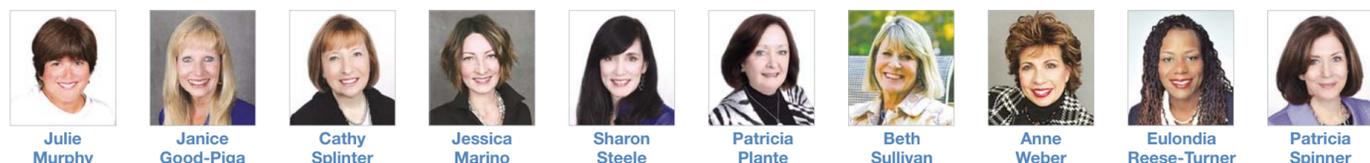
FARMERS' MARKET SEASON...The Scotch Plains Farmers' Market welcomed customers as it opened its 27th season under sunny skies last Saturday. The market runs weekly from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. through November and is held at the municipal parking lot at 430 Park Avenue.

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