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## Scotch Plains Residents Deserve Answers On Legal Roles of Zoning, Planning Bds.

There is growing animosity in Scotch Plains toward the local Board of Adjustment and Planning Board by residents who feel that the decisions made by these boards have adversely affected their neighborhoods. Many residents have said they feel betrayed by the boards for what they perceive is an indifference to their community concerns. The residents feel a disparity exists in how these boards make decisions that affect neighborhoods, based on what they believe are socio-economic and racial factors.

Residents in several local communities have expressed a perception that a "north-side/south-side" bias on the part of boards exists, which unfairly dumps undesirable projects on their side of town, and that their side does not merit the same consideration given the other side of town. The goal of the Master Plan — to protect and preserve quality and prevent over-development and urban sprawl — only seems to be applicable to the more affluent neighborhoods, they believe. This perceived bias, adamantly denied by board members, has been raised as an issue at many local municipal meetings.

The boards claim that they are in the difficult position, bound by certain legal restrictions to uphold the rights of developers as well as property owners; they maintain that their hands are tied by certain decision-making criteria, which governs whether they must approve or deny an application.

The public, often unaware of these legal constraints, seems to perceive that those decisions are arbitrary and capricious, or worse, biased and prejudicial. Residents have expressed that they are never given an adequate explanation as to why the boards are restricted to follow certain criteria when making their decisions.

The perception is that the lower middle-class neighborhoods get dumped on and overdeveloped, while the wealthier neighborhoods are protected, due to their contribution to the tax coffers — neighborhoods with \$500,000 homes get passive parks, while the lower middle-class neighborhoods get warehouses and gas stations.

Why does the board deny a nursing home in one residential neighborhood on the grounds that it will adversely affect the quality of life of the abutting neighbors, while approving a warehouse, which will clearly adversely affect another abutting residential neighborhood? The residents feel that these disparities are never adequately explained.

Several of the local municipal boards have attempted to explain this apparent disparity in develop-

ment trends in terms of land values, economics and zoning ordinances — explanations which seem to fall on deaf ears. The cursory explanations are hastily and inadequately rushed in the heat of the moment at the end of long application meetings.

Is there, in fact, a disparity in the way in which municipal boards make decisions which affect the quality of life in different neighborhoods and zones? Are residents' rights and quality of life being protected in a biased manner depending on the socio-economic status of the neighborhood? Why can't every abutting piece of property be converted into a passive park? Why can't developers be told to go somewhere else?

These questions are repeatedly raised every time a new development threatens to compromise the peace and tranquility of a residential neighborhood, a frequent occurrence wherever a residential neighborhood borders a commercial zone. It never seems to be the appropriate time during the application process for residents to raise these questions. Questions regarding the procedures, legal constraints, decision-making criteria, zoning ordinances and Master Plan goals are usually dismissed as irrelevant or too general to the specific testimony at each meeting. Often, lawyers for the applicant object to these general questions as irrelevant to the testimony at hand.

The question arises, when is the appropriate time for residents to get answers to these questions? Residents do not understand why their questions regarding what seems to them to be very relevant issues are considered irrelevant and inappropriate during the application process.

It would be extremely conducive to community relations if these municipal boards would conduct informational meetings to educate the public regarding their procedures, responsibilities, legal restrictions, overall goals, and especially the different zones and variance requirements for each zone. The public needs to understand the legal constraints that govern board decisions when they are dealing with variance applications in different zones and their legal responsibility to uphold the rights of developers.

Perhaps, these boards need to make an appropriate time to address these issues, in order to ease some of the misconceptions that have plagued these meetings, to bring about a greater community understanding. If the public is intelligent enough to ask the questions, then they are capable and deserving of getting adequate and thorough explanations.

## Westfield Needs to Add Stickers on Meters To Define Parking Fees, Operation Hours

Last week, Westfield's new hourly short-term meter rates went into effect for municipal parking lots, with on-street parking increases still to come. Those persons not reading *The Westfield Leader* and *The Times of Scotch Plains-Fanwood* last week would never have known until they noticed their quarter only buys a half hour of time now.

While officials say new signs will be coming, we strongly recommend that all the new meters include the revised hourly rates. The meters currently only tell users whether the meter is long-term (green sticker, eight hours or longer) or short-term (red sticker, two hours). The town also warns individuals not to meter feed. This is the practice of putting in change after the two-hour limit has expired.

Once the last of the on-street automatic meters have been replaced by new electronic devices, we suggest the town install signs that are clearly visible. In addition, stickers placed on some meters could include the two-hour restriction with the "no meter feeding" message removed. The new hours of operation (Monday to Saturday, 8 a.m. to 8 p.m.) should also be marked. Maybe a "Shop Westfield" sticker could also be included.

On the positive side, a plan to initiate a commuter jitney in town is on the horizon. A new taxi service is now up and running. Also, this spring, most of the downtown municipal lots will be paved and re-stripped.

In terms of the downtown parking crunch, the town's long-range plan is to increase parking capacity by constructing a two-to-three-story deck on lots 1 and 8 (Elm and Prospect Streets). But a deck would not be available until November 2002 at the earliest if, in fact, it is built. The Town Council last year only chose a site — they did not sign any contracts to build a parking facility. A lot more discussion on the design of the deck, not to mention hard numbers on con-

struction costs, is still to come.

To offset cost of construction and to compensate for the loss of spaces at lots 1 and 8 for over 10 months, the Town Council took action to raise both short-term meter fees, as well as the cost of commuter and downtown employee permits.

With this in mind, Westfield needs to create a "customer friendly" environment for people who park in town — whether they be commuters, employees or shoppers. Persons paying these fees should not be looked upon as second-class citizens but as contributing to the future viability of the business district and life in general in Westfield.

## Journalists, Doctors Treat 'Open Wounds' Differently

By DEBORAH MADISON

The media is frequently faulted for dragging agencies and public officials through the mud, exposing their faults, mistakes and misdemeanors, insinuating that the motivation is self-serving sensationalism; an unethical and cheap trick to sell more papers, without serving the overall good.

Responsible journalism, some say, would not make a flagrant display of exposing the seemingly underside of community problems, social inequities and moral ineptitudes. Why can't the news focus more on the positive good, many wonder?

Is a doctor ever criticized for opening up a wound and cleaning it out? Even when this obviously causes short-term pain, common sense dictates that it is a necessary discomfort for a long-term healing process. Are social wounds any different than medical abscesses? Are doctors called unethical, unprofessional, sensation-seekers for expos-

ing a splinter, quartering a burn or flushing out an infection? Is the meticulous examination of a cancerous tumor ever considered to be morbidly voyeuristic?

The Hippocratic Oath's foundation, "Do No Harm" obviously doesn't mean, never cause any pain or never expose any dirt. Sometimes, good medicine hurts. If you needed an antibiotic, would you prefer that your doctor gave you some make-up instead?

Even leeches, used to draw out poisons, are sometimes the most efficacious solution. Neither profession is shameful nor for the squeamish.

The long-term goals of both professions are admirable, even if the processes may be littered with hazardous waste.

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*Debbie Madison covers general news assignments for The Westfield Leader and The Times of Scotch Plains-Fanwood.*



**DIBS**  
Dibs not digs - We recently corrected a relative at a holiday gathering who erroneously inserted the word digs for dibs in the expression, "I have dibs on that." When correctly used this colloquialism asserts a person's claim or right to a certain object or privilege.

No one really knows the age of this enduring and essentially child's expression, but it undoubtedly has been in use for a long time. Its longevity is due to generations of children who have readily endorsed and then passed it on to succeeding generations.

Dibs is a condensed version of dibstones, a nickname for the knucklebones of sheep, used in a game which is described as being similar to Jacks. Dibs was also used in England as a slang word for fists, which, after all, are composed of knuckles.

We do not mind that the relative in question claimed the particular cut of meat that we had our eye on. Perhaps, being a musician, he really did dig it.

## Letters to the Editor

### County Taxpayers Were Saddled With Costs for D.C. Train Trip

The 64th annual New Jersey Chamber of Commerce train ride to Washington D.C. may have been a big hit with the politicians who went, but it sure was a big miss with the taxpayers who are saddled with the expenses incurred by those same politicians.

Take the nine-member Board of Chosen Freeholders, for example. The train ride's vouchers for them, the County Manager, Deputy County Manager, head of Public Information and three others cost us \$8,480. Their stay at the luxurious Marriott/Wardman Park costs \$3,297.60. Then there was the 64th

annual Walk to Washington.

Why would a walk to our nation's capitol cost so much? Because it includes a reception, dinner and train ride. The cost for the seven of those Union County employees, which included the new Governor's uncle, is \$3,297.60. Their stay at the Marriott came to \$1,734. Add it all up and the train ride cost the Union County taxpayers \$17,221.60.

I'd say that the taxpayers were the ones taken for a ride.

Vincent Lehotsky  
Elizabeth

### Resident Questions Hike in County Tax, 'Abysmal' Performance by Recycling Firm

We were recently informed that the Union County tax will be raised for the first time in years and the reason for this was the cost incurred by the county because of the prison situation.

An article in the *Star-Ledger* about the county receiving \$2.5 million from the state for housing prisoners does not state that as a result, the tax increase will be rescinded or reduced. How come the tax payers will still have to suffer another tax increase?

On another matter, the article on page 1 of last week's *Westfield Leader* regarding the abysmal performance by the new recycling pick up firm states that they gave as an excuse that the materials were buried under snow. Here in the Wychwood section of Westfield the materials were not retrieved until four days after the fact, and only as a result of constant phone calls to the recycler by both the residents and the Town Hall managers. Furthermore, the stuff was not buried under snow but any snow which had covered some of the

materials came as a result of snow fall on the weekend, after the stuff was supposed to be picked up on the preceding Friday.

The change to a new recycling firm was a farewell present from the old administration. The old system, using two days for the pick ups, made better sense since it seems obvious that the town is too large to handle this in a single day.

On February 2, our stuff was picked up in a timely manner but I noticed that they threw everything together in one truck. So much for separating the various items to be recycled.

Max J. Kalm  
Westfield

### Angry Commuter Questions Ticket When Lack of Parking Exist In Town

*Editor's Note: The following letter was addressed to the Westfield Police Department and the Mayor.*

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I am a six-year resident of Westfield, and user of NJ Transit to work for the last three months.

I am on the five-year waiting list for the train station lot, and as a result have the choice of walking over a mile to the train station, or trying to find street parking on a very limited number of blocks that do not have two-hour parking limits.

I am physically unable to walk the mile plus because of a painful disc problem in my spine, and although I am not qualified, nor am I asking for handicapped parking, the waking is too far for me to tolerate.

Last week I parked on Carleton Street near the station, at least two cars from the corner, and was shocked to see I had received a \$44 ticket for parking within 50 feet of the stop sign.

Is the ticket legally correct? I suppose, but do the enforcement agents or their directors consider how absurd this is? I did not park near a fire hydrant, a significant offense, or in a driveway, or

### Reader In Europe Finds Story Through Search On Newspaper Web Site

*Editor's Note: The following e-mail was sent from a person in Europe who reads The Westfield Leader and The Times of Scotch Plains-Fanwood on the Internet.*

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I'm searching the Internet for sometimes funny things, especially related to my family name, and with the search for "Riepe" I discovered an article in your newspaper about an 40-year anniversary from Mrs. Riepe in Scotch Plains.

I think it's a while ago, but it was nice to read about it.  
Thank you, for your attempt to give all information free to the Internet.

A. Riepe  
Holland

#### Deadlines

General News - Friday 4pm  
Weekend Sports - Monday 12pm  
Classifieds - Tuesday 2pm

#### How To Reach Us

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#### Submission Formats

Photos - B/W and Color  
No Panoramic or Polaroid  
Typed, not handwritten  
Upper and lower case  
Need name & daytime phone  
For our complete editorial policies request a copy of our Policy Guide

See it all on the Web!  
[www.goleader.com](http://www.goleader.com)

### Washington State Student Looking For Info. on Jersey

*Editor's Note: The writer's last name in the following letter has not been published.*

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Each member of our class is working on a project called "Parade of States." We are gathering information about our state to "sell" the state.

I have chosen New Jersey for my presentation. If any of your readers would help by sending pictures, postcards, used license plates, facts, products, etc., from your state, it would be greatly appreciated.

Please send them to Matt N., 8414 121 Street, East, Puyallup, WA 98373

Matthew N.  
Puyallup, WA

## SP-F Teachers Receive Grants From Foundation

SCOTCH PLAINS - Public support and generosity has enabled The Education Enrichment Foundation of Scotch Plains-Fanwood, Inc. to award 10 grants to teachers at elementary, middle and high school levels for the 2000-2001 school year.

Grant recipients include:  
• **Brunner Elementary School**, Bernadette Hoyer - "Building Bridges Between School and Home."  
• **Coles Elementary School**, Joy A. Oquayen and Mary Gosmanian - "What's Under the Microscope?" and Eileen Raszka - "Battle of the Books," and Joan Rosen and Cynthia Armstrong - "Writing Process with Assistive Technology."  
• **Evergreen Elementary School**, Barbara Prestridge - "Theater Workshop."  
• **McGinn Elementary School**, Joan Costello - "Learning to Learn" and Jane Lawlor - "Charlie Brown and the Gang Teach."  
• **School One Elementary**, Joan Miller, Terene Labrecque and Suzanne Lannin - "Survival During the Revolutionary War and Today."  
• **Terrill Middle School/Park**

*Middle School*, Nancy Lubarsky - "Poetry Alive."

• **Terrill School, Park School, and Scotch Plains-Fanwood High School**, Nancy Lubarsky - "Partner With a Poet."

The Foundation is a non-profit community organization. The mission is to foster education as a total community enterprise by augmenting programs offered to the students of the local communities.

In the past six years, 45 grants have been awarded to local educators ranging between \$125 and \$1,000. A total of \$20,000 in grants has been allocated to projects that have supported over 5,000 youngsters since 1992.

Through these grants, the Foundation has been able to enhance academic programs and enrich core curriculum.

Tax deductible donations may be mailed to: The Enrichment Foundation of Scotch Plains-Fanwood, Inc., P.O. Box 621, Scotch Plains, 07076.

For more information, please call Foundation President Sally Hogan at (908) 889-4361.

