

TAXES TO RISE \$105 FOR AVERAGE HOMEOWNER

Council to Introduce Budget on March 1

By PAUL PEYTON
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD — The Town Council is set to introduce a municipal budget in March that calls for a \$105 hike for the average homeowner in town, or roughly half of last year's increase, Town Administrator Jim Gildea revealed Tuesday night.

The \$32.3 million budget represents a \$2.3 million, or 7.8 percent, spending increase over 2004. A total of \$17.7 million in taxes will be raised to support the budget. The finance committee shaved 1.5 cents off the proposed municipal tax rate over the past week, Mr. Gildea said. In addition, the appropriations side of the budget was reduced by around \$100,000.

"The finance policy committee feels pretty good about where we are with this recommendation (to introduce the budget)," Councilman and committee Chairman Peter Echausse said.

Mr. Gildea said the increase in the budget this year was mostly due to a 17 percent hike in statutory expenditures led by a \$248,000 increase in the annual cost in sewerage fees to the Rahway Valley Sewerage Authority.

Other increases include a \$188,000 hike in the town's allocation to the Westfield Memorial Library; \$257,000 for pension costs and a \$35,000 hike in Social Security expenses.

Another big expense this year is group insurance, which has risen \$415,000, or nearly 15 percent, since last year and nearly \$900,000

over the past two years. Legal expenses for ongoing litigation have gone up \$62,000 in the proposed budget.

Salaries and wages are up \$752,701, or 5 percent over last year, including a \$393,000 hike for the police department, due in part to increased costs for retirement buyouts.

In terms of revenue, in an effort to lower the amount of money to be raised through taxes, Mr. Gildea said the Finance Committee reduced the amount of money to the line item for reserve for uncollected taxes. The finance committee has anticipated a 98.3 percent collection rate in 2005, instead of a 98.1 percent rate, saving the town \$80,000 in the amount to be raised in taxes.

Officials also are anticipating that state aid will remain flat at \$4.3 million. Last year, aid was up around \$94,000, Mr. Gildea said.

Mr. Gildea noted that the town will utilize \$4.2 million of its \$5.6 million surplus this year as a revenue item to lower property taxes, an increase of \$750,000 over what was used in last year's budget.

"It (2004) was our best year to date in 15 years in the generating of surplus," said Mr. Gildea.

One item not in the best budgets is revenue from the town's sales of assets account. The money, mostly from the sale of town-owned land over the years, currently stands at \$3.8 million. Mr. Gildea said the governing body opted to no longer use the fund for operating expenses

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Newpointe Realty Files Lawsuit Against Town Over Age-Restricted Plan Devel.

By PAUL PEYTON
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD — Newpointe Realty, LLC has filed a lawsuit against the Town of Westfield and Ward & O'Donnell Property Development Co., Inc., challenging the town's master plan and ordinances that favor a 50-dwelling, age restricted residential development on the Ward property located at 111, 112 and 129 Prospect Street, the former home of Statistical Research. The Town Council passed a resolution

on February 1 terminating its contract of sale with Newpointe for town-owned property on New Street. The town was to have sold the property to Newpointe for \$330,000. The town contends the developer failed to obtain Westfield Board of Adjustment approval of a proposed mixed-use development for the site, thus terminating the agreement with the town.

The plaintiff is seeking to have changes to the town's zoning code, approved late last year by the town's

planning board and town council, reversed in that the changes favor the Ward development, according to the litigation that was filed in Superior Court of Union County on January 28.

Newpointe owns property located at 115, 113 and 110 South Avenue and 402 and 404 South Elmer Street, which is a quarter of a mile from the Ward property.

The lawsuit stated that prior to December 14, 2004, the town's master plan land use ordinance provided

that the central business district should encourage retail sales and personal services for pedestrian shopping on the ground floor and commercial and residential use on the upper floors. In addition, Newpointe argues that the Ward development exceeds the maximum density of any zone in Westfield, prior to the master plan amendment, at 50 dwelling units per acre and a height exceeding 50 feet.

According to the litigation, the

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Nextel Seeks Variance To Erect Cell Tower On Elk's Club Property

By BETSEY BURGDORF
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

MOUNTAINSIDE — Nextel Communications submitted an application on December 13, 2004 to erect a 140-foot cell tower on a piece of private property located at 1193 Route 22, East, in Mountainside. The Mountainside Chapter of the Elks Club owns the property.

This would be the first cell tower to be located on private property in the borough. All other towers are located behind Borough Hall on municipal property. AT&T, Verizon and Cingular currently have antennae at that site.

An unidentified source told *The Westfield Leader* that the current towers have room to accommodate another carrier, but Nextel was dissatisfied with the "terms and conditions" put forth by the borough.

According to the application, the proposed wireless communications monopole will stand unmaned and will be maintained once a month. It is not anticipated to generate any additional noise, fumes, vibrations, dust, odors or traffic. The exterior lighting will consist of a 150-watt incandescent light with a motion sensor.

The tower will be located behind the Elks Club in the existing parking lot where it will occupy two parking spots.

The Mountainside Indoor Tennis Club will be situated approximately 20 feet from the proposed tower. There are also a few residences within 500 feet of the proposed location.

Given the lack of research in this area, health officials find it impossible to reach any objective conclusion as to whether or not exposure to radio-frequency radiation from cell towers presents a health hazard and, if so, what the risks might be.

According to a report published by the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences, an arm of the

National Institutes of Health, research has shown that radiation emitted by cell phones may pose a health hazard. However, the health risks, if any, due to exposure to radio-frequency radiation from cell towers are not clear.

Bob Farley, the Director of Public Works as well as an Elks member, stated that Nextel approached the club late last year in regards to erecting the tower.

"I haven't been directly involved but they (the Elks) were evidently ap-

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NEXTEL LOOKS TO EXPAND...The Elk's Club, as seen from Route 22 West, could be the location of the first cell tower in Mountainside to be located on private property. Nextel Communications is hoping to get the variance needed to erect the 140-foot mon tower behind The Elk's Club located at 1193 Route 22 East.

Ziff and Dorry File Candidacies For Westfield School Bd. Election

By BETSEY BURGDORF
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD — Incumbent William Ziff and newcomer Steven Dorry officially submitted their petitions for candidacy to the Board of Education (BOE) last week for the three seats on the board that are up for election in April.

Mr. Dorry has lived in Westfield for nine years and New Jersey his entire life. He and his wife, Sharon, a registered nurse who now works as a homemaker, have three daughters age nine, seven and five. All three girls attend Tamaques Elementary School.

Mr. Dorry graduated from Boston College with a bachelor's degree in economics and philosophy. He then achieved a law degree from Seton Hall University. He is currently employed as general counsel for Net2Phone Global Services, a telecommunications firm in Newark.

Mr. Dorry told *The Westfield Leader* he is a "first timer" when it comes to running for a position on the board, but feels he could bring skill to the

table. He has experience dealing with operating within a budget, a yearly issue for the BOE. He said his biggest motivation for pursuing a seat on the board is having children in the schools.

"People want to live in a town that has a good school district," he said.

He has a "sense of wanting to be involved" and noted he has been attending school board meetings in order to stay abreast of issues.

Increased enrollment is one issue that is of great concern to the Town of Westfield, with enrollment rising 30 percent in the last 10 years.

"Westfield is a town that attracts families with children. We want to maintain the student/teacher ratio to a reasonable size," Mr. Dorry said. He continued by saying that this requires planning.

"Focus and a continued investment in our schools" along with "forecasting and anticipation" are a few of the ways he said he would suggest for dealing with rising enrollment.

He also stated that a few schools are over 50 years old and in need of renovation, a factor that can play a big role in school budgets, and can lead to increased property taxes.

Mr. Dorry feels that there is a "large disparity where funding comes from" in the area of state funding.

Of the approximately \$69 million Westfield school budget, only 7 percent comes from state aid. He told

The Leader that he feels the school district is over reliant on property taxes for budget needs.

"Increasing state funding is an uphill battle," he said. "But it is important that it is an issue. It is the lawmakers in Trenton who oversee the money that goes to the BOE."

He suggested that residents write letters to local legislators and that educating resi-

dents on facts and figures is vital. According to Mr. Dorry, 93 percent, or \$65,000,000, of the budget is supported by property taxes. He feels that by soliciting state funding, that burden can be reduced.

By "understanding the problem," and "planning ahead," Mr. Dorry feels that, if elected, he can contribute in helping the BOE solve some of the issues that have become the problems of local taxpayers.

Mr. Ziff told *The Leader* that Westfield has a "phenomenal administration and staff who are open to thinking outside the box."

He and his wife, Heidi, have lived in Westfield since 1994, and he currently serves on the town's planning board as well as the BOE. Mr. Ziff works as an attorney whose practice is located in downtown Westfield, specializing in the representation of insurance companies and self-insureds.

Mrs. Ziff works as a mental health

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COMING DOWN...The demolition of 552 Elm Street began on Monday. The home, owned by Robert Ball, will be replaced by a modern residence by its owner. Plans for the new home have been approved for engineering aspects and are now being reviewed by the Westfield Building Department.

Chief Technology Officer Discusses Purchase Of Several New Computers, Budget Initiatives

By ED COONEY
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD — The Westfield Board of Education met on Tuesday to discuss the technology portion of the proposed 2005-2006 school year budget.

The budget presented to the board by Chief Technology Officer Hal Johnson totals \$1,761,638, which represents an increase of \$45,243, or 2.64 percent, over the 2004-2005 technology budget.

"We've been aggressive in building our technology infrastructure," said board member and Finance Committee Chairman Richard Solomon. "We seem to have a better handle on what needs to be done."

Of the \$1,761,638 in the budget proposal, salaries and stipends account for \$692,711, a decrease of 2.64 percent from this year's operating budget.

The decrease, an anomaly in a budget that has seen increases almost

across the board, was accomplished through the elimination of a redundant clerical position.

In addition to this, the proposed budget also saves money by lowering the amount of money put into training and outside services. The level of user knowledge in instructors utilizing the district's technology is higher than previously expected, allowing for a savings of \$43,260 in staff training and \$10,900 in technician training.

A decision to reduce dependency

on outside services to correct technical problems will also save a projected \$60,360.

Major new initiatives proposed in the budget include the purchase of 75 computers for the district's second grade classes. Westfield currently has 25 sections of second grade, so each class would be given three computers. This would mark the first time a significant dollar amount is invested in computers at the second grade level.

The proposed budget also calls for new administration computers at the elementary and intermediate level, the purchase of a wireless cart and 16 accompanying computers at Westfield High School (WHS), and replacement computers for the district's libraries.

"Our libraries should be in good shape by the end of the summer," said Mr. Johnson.

Mr. Johnson's presentation continued with a detailed breakdown of proposed new expenditures at the elementary, intermediate and high school levels.

All hardware and software listed will be paid off over a four-year lease period.

In addition to the previously mentioned computers for the district's

Mabel Young Good Neighbor Award Presented to Mountainside Couple

By KIMBERLY BROADWELL
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

MOUNTAINSIDE — Honored for their volunteer work within the borough and their help to neighbors with their beekeeping expertise, Ron and Betty Glenn were presented with the Mabel Young Good Neighbor Award at the beginning of Tuesday evening's Mountainside Borough Council meeting.

According to Bill Biunno, who represents the Mabel Young Award Committee, the Glens have helped many neighbors with bee problems over the past 27 years including a family on Central Avenue who had a

wasp nest hanging over their wheelchair ramp and at a later time had a yellow jacket infestation in a gutter near their back door.

Mr. Biunno also noted that the couple volunteered their time to help Children's Specialized Hospital eliminate wasps and hornets from their property as well as scores of other neighbors who have had bee problems.

The couple started their beekeeping training in 1978 at the Westfield Agricultural Office. The Glens also keep a colony of bees at the Watchung Reservation for children to learn from and have 60 other bee colonies spread out over five different farms in New Jersey.

In addition, Mr. Biunno stated that the couple donates fresh baked goods to food pantries in Plainfield and Elizabeth and mows the lawn and maintains the general upkeep of property located at the corner of Route 22 and New Providence Road.

It was also noted that Betty served on the borough's Rescue Squad 30 years ago.

According to Mr. Biunno, the award

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MEETING OF POLITICAL MINDS...Senator Tom Kean, Jr. (R-21), left; Westfield Councilman Andy Skibitsky, center, and Congressman Mike Ferguson (R-7th) had the chance to discuss business during the annual Lincoln Day Reception held last week in Mountainside.