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SIXTY CENTS



PARK BEAUTY AND SERENITY...A couple on the bench last Sunday enjoy the moment now that spring has sprung in Mindowaskin Park in Westfield. Gorgeous magnolia trees in full bloom, along with other flora and fauna, with a back splash of the flowing fountain in the center of the pond, bedazzle residents and passersby.

Council to Hear BOE Budget Cut Proposal Tuesday Night

By PAUL J. PEYTON
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader
WESTFIELD — The chairman of the town council's Finance Policy Committee, Peter Echausse, said Tuesday night that he anticipates the committee making a detailed recommendation on a proposed reduction in the school tax levy at the council's Tuesday, May 10 conference meeting. Voters narrowly rejected the Westfield Board of Education (BOE) proposed \$66 million tax levy on April 19 by a margin of 1,528 to 1,463. It was the first time a town school budget had been defeated since 1994. The defeated budget is now before the council for review and consideration.

The governing body has until Thursday, May 19, to make a final determination on what, if anything, will be cut from the \$77 million school spending plan. Councilman Echausse said the committee has met three times on the school budget issue. The first was a kick off meeting attended by Mayor Greg McDermott, Councilman Echausse, BOE President Anne Riegel, Superintendent of Schools Dr. William Foley, and BOE Business Administrator and Board Secretary Robert Berman. The finance committee also met separately with the town's auditor. On Monday, the council and BOE finance

committees held a joint meeting. "I would say the process has been extremely open. It has been detailed. It has been amicable," said Councilman Echausse. "At this juncture, we do not have a final recommendation in which I can expand on right now." He said that once the council's finance committee receives final information from Dr. Foley and Mr. Berman, "we will have a detailed recommendation" to present to the full council. The proposal, he said, will be made at the May 10 meeting. Councilman Echausse told The Westfield Leader that BOE officials should make a recommendation on what the new tax levy should be which can be presented to the council's finance committee. "It's their budget," said Councilman Echausse. He said the committee will then present a "recommendation to lower the tax levy" to the full council.

In other business, the suspension of Westfield Police Detective Sandra Chambers for allegedly fixing a parking ticket drew an angry response from one resident. "In my opinion, the Westfield Police Department has reached an all-time low. To suspend an officer of Detective Chambers' caliber over a parking summons is reprehensible," said Cyriese Downer of Tamaquos. "CONTINUED ON PAGE 12"

Police Officer Suspended Over Voided Ticket

By ANNA GITHENS
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader
WESTFIELD— Westfield police officer Sandra Chambers has been suspended for allegedly "fixing" a \$20 parking ticket. Westfield Police Chief Bernard Tracy confirmed, "The matter was received by the police department. It was investigated and appropriate measures will be taken."

Officer Chambers was suspended with pay, which is the normal process in matters such as these, according to Westfield Town Administrator Jim Gildea. "She (Chambers) has been charged internally and has elected to fight those charges," said Mr. Gildea. He further reported that there would be an examination with a hearing officer, prosecutor and an attorney.

Attorney Hassen Abdellah is representing Officer Chambers. The firm of Appuzzo, McDermott, Mastro and Murphy will provide counsel for the police department. "Determination by the hearing officer will be based on the evidence presented. All I can say is that I hope the results are fair and honest," added Mr. Gildea. The hearing will take place on Wednesday, May 11.

The irony of the situation, according to Mr. Abdellah, is that the allegations arose when Officer Chambers went to the chief to tell him about a situation she had been advised of. "Someone came to her complaining because they were uncomfortable with another situation," he said.

"The position they are seeking is removal, primarily because of the parking ticket," her lawyer said. According to Mr. Abdellah, her son was driving the car, but the parking ticket shows that the car ticketed is registered to Ms. Chambers. A veteran police officer appointed on April 16, 1995, Ms. Chambers was the first woman to join the Westfield Police Department, having attended the John H. Stamler Police Academy in Scotch Plains. Ms. Chambers was originally assigned to the Patrol Division.

In January 1999, she was assigned to the Union County Narcotics Strike Force for six months and served as an undercover officer as well. In November 2001, Ms. Chambers was promoted to detective, 1/G, and assigned to the department's juvenile bureau.

Mr. Abdellah believes that Ms. Chambers has been singled out for discrimination because she is an African-American as well as a woman. The person who dismissed Officer Chambers' citation is still working at the police department. "At this point, a hostile working

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Seneca Place Subdivision Unanimously Denied By Planning Bd. After Months of Testimony

By KIMBERLY BROADWELL
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader
WESTFIELD — After four long meetings and hours of testimony, the Westfield Planning Board unanimously denied the proposed subdivision at 254 Seneca Place during its regularly scheduled monthly meeting, held Monday evening. According to Russell Fineststein, attorney for the board, Jay Boyle and Matt Nilsen dismissed themselves from voting on the application on his advice. Mr. Fineststein stated that because the applicant, Joseph Buontempo, had contacted both men

by telephone outside of the meeting proceedings, he advised them to not be involved with the voting. Applicants Mr. Buontempo and Jean Genievich were seeking approval for a major subdivision, which would create two new building lots from an existing single lot. The applicants were seeking to demolish the house at 254 Seneca Place to construct two new, single-family homes. The applicant was also seeking to build a right of way (ROW) for the houses. Many neighbors, who were present at all four meetings in November, December and April, as well as Mon-

day evening, expressed their opposition to the application. Those opposing the application were concerned with drainage issues and expressed an interest in protecting the character of the neighborhood. Many neighbors expressed concern over losing trees. Attorney Tom Walsh, who is legally representing his neighborhood, addressed the board asking why

Westfield would want to set a precedent by granting the applicant permission to put a rural street within the town. He stated, "This is not a typical subdivision. It doesn't benefit the neighbors or the town. The town would have one more street to maintain and plow." He stated that the only one that would benefit from having this new

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Board Okays Temple Lot Despite Wide Neighborhood Opposition

By DAVID GIALANELLA
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader
WESTFIELD — Despite a formidable showing by residents opposed to the proposal, the Westfield Board of Adjustment last Thursday night unanimously approved Temple Emanu-El's application to construct a parking lot on an adjacent property. The board's denial of a similar application in December of 2003 was followed by a lawsuit by the temple against the Town of Westfield. The plans call for a 121-space parking lot with 63.8 percent coverage, as opposed to 50 percent prescribed by ordinances. A side-yard shed will also be allowed, contrary to ordinances. The board came to look more favorably upon the application because of an amended list of conditions with which the temple agrees, should the board deem them necessary.

Attorney John Schmidt, who represents Temple Emanu-El, explained the conditions: that rear kitchen doors would remain closed during evening events and that garbage would not be taken out until the morning after such an event. The temple also agreed that garbage collection would be prohibited before 8 a.m., which the temple's waste company has agreed to in writing. Also, non-religious events will be limited to 12 per year and will not be allowed to extend past midnight. The temple would determine the necessity of police presence for events of any nature. The temple agreed that it will turn off as many parking lot lights as possible after hours, except as deemed necessary by the police, and that the lights will use low-intensity bulbs. The board added the condition that

these bulbs could not be replaced by higher wattage bulbs in the future. The temple also agreed to work with Town Engineer Kenneth Marsh, his landscaping expert, and Town Planner Blaise Brancheau to come up with a suitable landscaping plan as soon as possible to shield neighboring lots from headlights, and a suitable drainage plan as well. The new, one-way entrance driveway would be 16 feet in width, as opposed to the 20 feet originally proposed. Snow piled from plowing would only be on the pavement of the parking lot. The board stipulated that such piles be located as far away from the rear yard as possible due to drainage problems in that area of the property. The temple agreed that on January 15 of every year, a self-certification must be submitted evaluating the temple's continued compliance with conditions of the application. They also agreed to maintain the caretaker's house on the property for a period of 10 years, and cannot seek to demolish the house within that time period. The board agreed to recommend to the town council that more widespread parking restrictions be instituted on both sides of East Broad Street in the temple's vicinity to allow greater visibility to drivers enter-

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ENJOYING THE RIDE... Westfield High School (WHS) boys tennis Head Coach George Kapner smiles as he watches the efforts of his second doubles team of Andrew Levy and Jack Trimble in the finals of the Union County Tournament on April 29. Westfield won the team title. On April 26, Mr. Kapner got career win No. 740 (soccer, tennis, swimming) to break the WHS all-time record of 739 set by the legendary Gary Kehler.

Chamber Chairman Richard Fromkin Closing South Avenue Store and Moving to Maine

By CHRISTIE STORMS
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader
WESTFIELD — A myriad of factors have reportedly contributed to Westfield Area Chamber of Commerce (WACC) Chairman Richard Fromkin's decision to close his South Avenue home furnishings store, Westfield Interiors, and move to Maine. Mr. Fromkin, who described himself as formerly being the most visible, vocal proponent of building parking garages in Westfield, cited spending more time with his twin grandsons, who live out of state, as the main reason for relocating. However, when asked whether such issues as the defeat of the town's parking deck referendum, skyrocketing costs for renting retail space and ever increasing property taxes also influenced his decision, he replied, "Absolutely. But, I don't want this to sound like sour grapes." Mr. Fromkin is also a board member of the Downtown Westfield Corporation, and his family has been in the home furnishings business in Huntington, Long Island, since 1964. When Mr. Fromkin first visited Westfield several years ago as a sales representative for Lexington Furniture, he fell in love with the "main street" community atmosphere, noting similarities to his hometown in Long Island. In 2001, he opened Westfield Interiors on South Avenue in Westfield and joined the WACC. "I wanted to help revitalize the Chamber of Commerce and become an advocate for local merchants," Mr. Fromkin stated. He reported that local merchants like himself face a host of challenges,



CHAMBER CHAIRMAN MOVING...Richard Fromkin, Chairman of the Westfield Area Chamber of Commerce, is closing his Westfield Interiors store on South Avenue and moving to Maine.

citing competition from the Internet and "big box" stores such as Home Goods and Marshalls which sell similar merchandise at discounted prices. He also speculated that many local residents pay such high mortgages and property taxes that there is little money left for big spending. Mr. Fromkin believes the lack of ample parking areas greatly affect businesses, lamenting that the South Avenue merchants in particular have little shopper traffic. "No one walks down South Av-

enue," he remarked. And while he had hoped Westfield's original two parking deck plan would have helped bring more shoppers into south side businesses, he believes other tasks could have been undertaken to help alleviate the parking problem, such as posting "Free Parking After 12 Noon" signs in the lot across from his store. "When you're paying \$40 or \$50 per square foot for retail space, you have to bring in a certain amount of people daily who are spending money just to cover that cost," Mr. Fromkin explained. "Then there's your electric bill, paying your employees, plus making a profit." While Mr. Fromkin stated that his business was not currently in jeopardy due to the aforementioned factors, he said he might have stayed if things had turned out differently. What was most disappointing, in Mr. Fromkin's opinion, wasn't the defeat of the parking deck plans themselves, but the mean-spirited behavior of some of those involved. Mr. Fromkin is currently vacating

all merchandise in his store at reduced prices, while the WACC's nominating committee is working to select worthy candidates to run for... "CONTINUED ON PAGE 12"

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BOE Recognizes Mary Dura; Hears About New Curriculum

By ED COONEY
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader
WESTFIELD — The Westfield Board of Education (BOE) honored Mary Dura, a first grade teacher at Wilson Elementary School, with the prestigious Phillower Award during a special ceremony held at Wilson Tuesday night. At the end of the meeting, Board President Anne Riegel took time to thank parents for their feedback regarding the recent defeat of the BOE's proposed 2005-2006 budget. She said the board would, "summarize the feedback in a meaningful way" sometime in the future. Mrs. Dura is the 13th recipient of the award, sponsored by the Rotary Club of Westfield and named after Charles Phillower, who was principal at Wilson when the school opened its doors in 1934. The award is given each year to an outstanding elementary school teacher in the Westfield school district. Many of Mrs. Dura's students and their parents, as well as many of her colleagues, attended the ceremony. Wilson Principal, Dr. Andrew Perry, began the proceedings by commending Mrs. Dura on "the special way she combines so many fine qualities" that

are found in other Westfield teachers. A number of Mrs. Dura's colleagues and students read letters of nomination for the award received on Mrs. Dura's behalf. Letters from students described her as "the best teacher ever" and recalled how "she always made me laugh." One letter said, "I wish I had Mrs. Dura every year." A letter from a

parent noted her ability to "inspire and affect" her students. Mrs. Dura then addressed the crowd, stressing a need for family traditions and recounting stories from her years as a teacher. Mrs. Riegel presented Mrs. Dura with a resolution marking the occasion. Following the award ceremony, the

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OUT WITH THE OLD...The older home at 114 Nelson Place in Westfield is removed Tuesday to make way for a new home to be built by Villani Construction.

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