

Westfield Council News As Parking Improves, So Will Pedestrian Safety

By Andrew Skibitsky
Westfield Councilman, Ward 3

There are many communities in New Jersey, like Westfield, which have a vibrant downtown shopping district, and are looking to improve their parking services. The decisions that communities make regarding parking can significantly impact traffic and pedestrian safety.

The Town Council's Public Safety, Transportation and Parking Committee (PSTP) has had numerous meetings this year to review traffic safety issues, as well as extensive meetings focused on downtown parking.

Fortunately, these subjects are complementary. As we improve the availability of downtown parking, downtown traffic and pedestrian safety will also improve.

The PSTP committee recently announced a multi-faceted downtown parking plan that will add approximately 80 to 110 parking spaces. This plan, in conjunction with enhanced meter enforcement, to discourage meter-feeding, will have a positive impact on traffic and pedestrian safety.

When few spaces are available, drivers are more likely to circle a particular route until a space opens. This is known as "cycling." Cycling leads to traffic congestion and driver frustration making our downtown less safe for both drivers and pedestrians. We are working to encourage downtown employees to park in employee designated areas, at long-term meters and at the south-side train station where there is free parking after noon Monday through Friday and all day on weekends.

Additionally, some of the plan's proposed engineering changes will also improve downtown traffic safety. Since the year 2000, there have been over 70 accidents at the Lenox/Central Avenue, Lenox/North Avenue intersections.

One of the proposals that is under review would be to close Lenox Avenue between Central and North Avenues.

Closing this section of Lenox will not only significantly reduce the accident rate at those intersections, but will also generate approximately 25 parking spaces. Another area of growing concern is the traffic flow in and out of the North Avenue train station. We can reconfigure this parking lot to gain approximately 11 additional spaces while at the same time improving traffic flow and safety.

The plan also reconfigures several of our municipal parking lots. These reconfigurations will not only provide additional parking spaces, but will also include various lighting, pedestrian and handicap-access safety elements. These actions will improve overall safety and enhance the downtown Westfield experience for shoppers, diners, downtown employees and residents.

We are taking a fresh look at our parking problems and we have started with a review of all ideas. We have begun to review every available parking asset in our downtown and are committed to improving our parking by utilizing low-cost solutions. One example is to reconfigure the 100 block of Prospect Street for angled parking. This will add about seven additional parking spaces without the need for costly improvements. This type of solution has already been installed on Westfield Avenue and is also under consideration on Lenox Avenue near the post office.

The PSTP committee does not consider this plan the final product. Instead, it is a work in progress sensitive to the input from the community. We will continuously work with the Downtown Westfield Corporation, the Chamber of Commerce, our parking professionals, and residents to improve downtown parking and pedestrian safety. Please remember to use our Traffic Safety Hotline (908) 789-6039 to report your traffic safety concerns.

Despite Pleas, Freeholders Closing Skeet Shooting Range

By PAUL J. PEYTON
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

COUNTY — Despite pleas of users last Thursday night, the Union County Board of Chosen Freeholders closed the county's trap and skeet range in Cranford on May 2. Officials said the issues raised by the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) as well as a 65 percent decline in use of the 25-acre facility since the change from lead to steel shot in December were reasons factored in its decision.

Users of the 78-year-old facility told freeholders that given adverse weather conditions and the change from lead to steel shot, more time should have been taken by the board before deciding to close the facility.

"Sometimes government is not the solution, it's the problem," said Ralph Lossman of West Orange, in quoting former President Ronald Reagan. "You asked (shooters) to change (shot), we changed. We are here to preserve a legacy of tradition," he said.

County Counsel Robert Barry said the EPA first contacted the county 13 months ago regarding the use of lead shot at the range. He said last spring the EPA issued a "cease and desist" order. The facility was to have closed on September 30, 2004, said Mr. Barry. That decision was delayed after the switch to non-lead shot. The county reevaluated matters in early March and decided to close the range for good.

The county counsel said the cost to remove the lead in the soil would be around \$2.3 million.

Freeholder Daniel Sullivan said that since he joined the freeholder board 11 years ago, the trap and skeet range has been "a facility that every year was close to closing."

He said the range is located in a flood zone and that "there were no takers" per the county's attempts to relocate the facility. He said it was only a matter of time before the state or federal governments ordered the county to close the range.

A representative of the Union County Federation of Sportsmen took issue with declining attendance at the range as a reason to close the facility.

"It's been a pretty poor winter so I'm sure attendance was down," he said. He and other speakers, noted that steel shot is about a third more costly. Some speakers said steel shot should have been sold at the range to ensure that shooters were not turned away, thus maintaining a higher attendance.

He said programs to introduce residents to shooting sports attract many new users to the facility. He said it is the urban setting of the facility that make it a unique range.

Martin Vitale, 82, of Cranford, told the freeholder board that there is "nothing wrong with that range."

"It's a shame that our county wants to close the place down," he said, adding that goose droppings, deer, and wild turkeys are more of a health hazard to the public than lead shot at the trap and skeet range.

William Bretz of Clark noted, "Losing the range would be very difficult for me. I beg you to give it (steel shot) a chance."

Peter O'Halloran of Linden said the board needed to "keep an open mind. I don't understand what the problem is."

Roger Michael Furness of Union said he was dying of cancer but wanted to attend the meeting to support the range. A champion shooter, Mr. Furness noted that he qualified for the 1976 Olympics.

"Why close a facility that is so steep in tradition?" he questioned.

Larry McDermott of Livingston disputed reports that trap and skeet shooters are bringing lead to the facility since the ban was initiated.

"We love that facility. We want to keep it open," said Mr. McDermott.

Cindy Kuenster, a biologist with the New Jersey Division of Game and Wild Life, said that the trap and skeet range has "a great value" to its users and the county.

She said shooting sports are among the top five growing recreation outdoor sports in the nation. She suggested the county consider fundraisers, using volunteers and holding annual cleanup days at the facility and applying for grants to support the range.



IRAQ MORALE... The 250th Signal Battalion, with which the Westfield Army New Jersey National Guardsmen are attached, has been away from home for a year. This can be grinding on morale. First Sergeant Lester and Executive Officer, Lieutenant Simeon, cope with the situation with a little camaraderie.

Open Government Group Honors Cranford Activist

NEW BRUNSWICK — The New Jersey Foundation for Open Government (NJFOG) honored Tina Renna, a resident of Cranford, during its recent statewide conference at Rutgers.

Mrs. Renna was presented with the foundation's Lift Award, which recognizes significant contributions to the cause of open government. During the award ceremony, Mrs. Renna was cited for her long-standing commitment to open government in New Jersey, and her willingness to put herself on the line to ensure that public officials uphold the law.

Mrs. Renna is a civic activist who believes politicians should be held responsible for their actions. Concentrating on the Board of Chosen Freeholders of Union County, Mrs. Renna said she relies mostly on the Open Public Records Act to "...try and pry information out of..." a single party controlled board.

Mrs. Renna, like most advocates of open government throughout the state, is accustomed to traveling a bumpy road. She encountered an immovable force on December 16, 2004. While speaking during the public portion of a meeting of the freeholders, two deputies of the county's sheriff's department pinned her arms behind her and removed her from the meeting room. She was not, however, arrested.

Ferguson Receives NJ State VFW Award

WASHINGTON — Citing his support for increased veterans funding and legislation to aid U.S. troops in the field in the global war on terrorism, the New Jersey Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) selected Rep. Mike Ferguson (R-NJ, District 7) as its "Outstanding Legislator of the Year."

"My crime was that I went one minute and six seconds over the allotted five-minute time limit, which the government of Union County gives its citizens to address them," Mrs. Renna explained. "I have been trying to draw attention to the Union County Detention Center. A 17-year-old died while detained there. The State's Office of the Child Advocate investigated and released a report, which blamed the county for setting the stage for the boy's death."

"The Advocate cited deplorable and dangerous conditions," Mrs. Renna said, "and stated that the county had a fundamental disregard for basic human rights. The county steadfastly denies they had any responsibility for the deplorable conditions at their facility, and insist that the boy was solely responsible for his demise. I have been trying to remind the public that juvenile detention is a basic service of county government. When we allow our government to treat citizens in an inhumane way, it is a reflection on us all and we are ultimately all responsible for it."

Mrs. Renna is an active member of NJFOG, a non-partisan statewide coalition with the sole mission of protecting and expanding public access to government records and meetings.

NJFOG supported passage of the state's Open Public Records Act in 2002, and the law has led to the dismantling of barriers to public documents that previously.

"There's still work to be done smoothing out the process of OPRA," said Martin O'Shea, who is chairman of the foundation's open public meetings compliance committee, "but it is not too soon for NJFOG to turn its attention to improving the open meetings act, too."



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TWO CONCERTS IN MAY

SUNDAY, MAY 15, 2005

Ani Kavafian Carter Brey
and Many Good Friends

Bach: Brandenburg Concerto #3
Barber: Adagio for Strings
Dvořák: Serenade

TWO LOCATIONS:

Regular admission: \$25, Senior: \$22

MAPLEWOOD • 3:00 P.M.
Morrow Church • 600 Ridgewood Road

WESTFIELD • 7:30 P.M.
Temple Emanu-El • 756 East Broad Street
Westfield only: Students aged 10-21, \$1.00

THURSDAY, MAY 19, 2005

WESTFIELD ONLY • 7:30 P.M.

Temple Emanu-El • 756 East Broad Street

Ani Kavafian Carter Brey
Cynthia Phelps Rebecca Young Michelle Kim

Mozart: String Quintet in D
Dvořák: String Quintet in E flat

Regular admission: \$25, Senior: \$22, Students aged 10-21, \$1.00

This concert was scheduled for January 23 but was cancelled due to snow

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For best handicapped access, please attend in Westfield

Program subject to change

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