

# School Tax Levy Reduced \$714,543 by Panel; Lights, Turf at Houlihan/Sid Faye Progressing

**By PAUL J. PEYTON**  
*Specialty Written for The Westfield Leader*

WESTFIELD — The town council's finance policy committee Tuesday night recommended a reduction in the Westfield school tax levy of \$714,543, which would reduce school taxes for the average homeowner by \$70.

The overall tax levy increase will drop four cents per \$100 of assessed valuation to 14 cents or an average of \$254.

The proposed cuts contained some 28 different areas hitting all aspects of the town's public school system, explained Finance and Policy Chairman Peter Echausse, who represents the First Ward.

He said the only area not included in the budget axe would be mandated special education programs. The councilman said the committee did not want to cut existing programs. Instead they focused on new programs in the 2005-2006 school budget, re-

classification of positions, not filling several slots left open due to retirements and eliminating some new purchases and new programs for the 2005-2006 school year.

Of the total reductions, \$403,235 will come through not filling budgeted staff vacancies due to retirements, \$72,446 in classroom technology, and \$25,032 in fine arts technology and \$71,450 in equipment, uniforms and textbook purchases.

"This is new equipment. We are not taking anything away from the students," Town Administrator Jim Gildea said.

Voters rejected the \$66 million school tax levy by a tally of 1,528 to

1,463 on April 19. School officials had originally sought to reduce the levy by around \$360,000 or four tax points for an average reduction in the tax levy of \$36.

Councilman Echausse said the revised tax levy would still provide "a thorough and efficient education" for Westfield children. He said the council was unable to examine contractual obligations such as recently ratified teachers contract. However, the committee was able to achieve a \$6,500 savings by working with the board to revise its projected interest on investments.

In terms of positions, two elementary school positions will be cut from the budget due to fewer sections ex-

pected next year for a \$202,852 cost reduction.

Dr. Margaret Dolan will move to Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction, a vacant position previously held by Dr. Jamie Edmonds. Dr. Dolan's previous position as Assistant Superintendent of Human Resources will be reclassified as a director position, saving the district another \$35,460.

A physical education teacher at the intermediate grade level will be eliminated to save \$94,000, and an administrative secretarial position paying \$42,079 will not be filled following a retirement. An unfilled gifted and tal-



**COLOR GALORE...**Mindowaskin Park was the scene of an explosion of color on Tuesday afternoon as local nursery schools gathered there for the annual Balloon Parade hosted by the Presbyterian Nursery School. This year, the parade was a celebration of the Month of the Young Child. Approximately 600 children, along with their parents, participated in the parade each carrying a balloon in one of nine different colors signifying their specific school.

## 'Walking School Bus' Among Plans Recommended at Traffic Hit Spots

**By ANNA GITHENS AND DAVID GIALANELLA**  
*Specialty Written for The Westfield Leader*

WESTFIELD — Traffic calming and pedestrian safety measures were presented this week to help solve safety issues at eight designated traffic hot spots in town.

"Tonight's the night we start to see some possible resolutions to some of the issues that we've discussed," Mark Ciarocca, Chairman of the Town Council's Public Safety, Transportation and Parking Committee said during last Wednesday's meeting.

High speed on North Avenue, congestion, right of way confusion, poor lighting and a high accident rate — 38 in six years — are some of the primary concerns at the intersection of North Avenue and Tuttle Parkway, said Gor-

don Meth of Keller and Kirkpatrick, the town's traffic consultant.

One solution Mr. Meth suggested is to make Tuttle Parkway one-way southbound from North to South Avenue. "Elimination of the conflicts should enhance the safety and improve the efficiency," said Mr. Meth in reference to the potential for cut-through traffic going into Tuttle Parkway.

Additional suggestions are to request the county to install a traffic signal at North Avenue and Crossway Place and flashing school crossing signs to North Avenue. South Avenue would be split into two lanes to avoid congestion while a driver is turning left. Street lights would also be upgraded.

The draft work in progress for the Franklin School area involves curb extensions on Newton Place, a col-

ored pavement parking lane along Newton Place and Prospect Street for school drop-off, two new crosswalks on Newton and one at Prospect and Effingham Place, school zone warning markings and flashing school warning signs.

The traffic light on Dudley Avenue and Elm Street would also be retimed to provide gaps at this intersection. Upgraded lighting on Prospect Street and Stanmore Place would be provided as well, said Mr. Gordon.

Safety concerns near Franklin School center around the drop off and pick up of nearly 600 students, high speed on Prospect Street, cars parked by intersections obstructing sight distance, a 90-degree bend on Elm Street to Newton Place, and delay and safety issues at Dudley and Prospect.

In addition to school traffic, a concern with the safety of the No. 59 NJ Transit bus passing through this area warrants an investigation to alternative bus routes.

Mr. Meth offered the idea of instituting a "Walking School Bus" program, wherein children are "picked up" by a group of volunteer parents and walked to school to reduce vehicular traffic.

"This concept might be a very good thing for us in terms of reducing traffic and promoting safety," noted First Ward Councilman Sal Caruana. "We can develop a PTO or a community-based effort to try to make walking to school more friendly and safer."

East Dudley Avenue resident Jackie Cash inquired about the ability of the Westfield Y bus and special education bus to continue parking in their usual spot on Prospect Street after the improvements are made. Discussion also centered on handicapped parking areas and waiting time in front of Franklin.

Mr. Meth also proposed the walking bus for the McKinley School area.

"Most of this stuff can be done in-house," by the Department of Public Works, said Fourth Ward Councilman Jim Foerst during Monday's meeting, since no major construction is proposed in the McKinley School area.

At Central Avenue and Clover Street, Mr. Meth has proposed a pedestrian traffic light which would only be activated by pedestrians, particularly Jefferson School students.

"I think this is an excellent idea," said Steven Lee of Roger Avenue and

## Proposed Policy Aims To Stop Construction Of McMansions in Town

**By PAUL J. PEYTON**  
*Specialty Written for The Westfield Leader*

WESTFIELD — In an effort to combat the increase of McMansions in residential neighborhoods zoned for smaller homes, the town council is looking to overhaul its zoning code to eliminate loop holes.

Fourth Ward Councilman Jim Foerst, Chairman of the council's Code Review and Town Property Committee met with *The Westfield Leader* last Thursday to review a three phase proposal that would address over-development in town.

The proposal followed a Policy of Controlled Growth, which was unveiled last year by the council. Mr. Foerst said the proposed policy addresses what the committee defined as "a mature community with a danger of over-development."

Under the first phase of the proposal, the maximum height of homes will be curtailed from 38 to 35 feet. Habitable floor area as part of the floor area ratio would be changed to gross floor area to give a "more realistic" view of a home.

The new code will require developers to list things such as cathedral ceilings, high-pitched attic roofs, unfinished third floors and finished basements as livable space when figuring the square footage of a new home.

Councilman Foerst said developers in applications have excluded

Councilman Foerst said he hopes that to accommodate for detached garages, developers will increase the side yards from the current 10-yard setback requirement to add wider driveways.

In addition, the committee is also recommending increasing the size of corner lots to eliminate the construction of oddly shaped homes.

Councilman Foerst said the committee is asking that the planning and zoning boards strictly enforce the new ordinance once it is adopted sometime this summer.

"(The goal of the new code is to) encourage strict enforcement without being over burdensome to existing homeowners," said Councilman Foerst.

He said the committee's goal was to allow homeowners to increase the size of their homes for the needs of their family while at the same time eliminating the ability of developers "to come in and totally wipe out the character of an existing neighborhood."

Councilman Foerst said the town needs a new policy that can be successfully defended in court. The committee looked at height, lot coverage and floor to area ratio to see what was the biggest reason oversized homes are built on small lots.

Currently, the maximum residential height restriction in town is 38

### Westfield School Bd. Meeting Rescheduled For Budget Discussion

WESTFIELD — The Westfield Board of Education's regularly scheduled meeting of Tuesday, May 17, will be postponed until Wednesday, May 18, in consideration of the Town Council's meeting on May 17.

The council will vote on its Finance Committee's recommendations regarding a proposed reduction in the school tax levy.

The committee and the town auditor have met several times with the Finance Committee of the Westfield Board of Education, Superintendent of Schools Dr. William Foley and Business Administrator/Board Secretary Robert Berman to review the school district's budget and discuss possible reductions.

The council has until Thursday, May 19, to make a final determination on what, if anything, will be cut from the 2005-2006 school budget. The school board will meet on May 18, to vote on the town's proposal.

"Our meetings with the town have been constructive," stated Dr. Foley. "Both governing bodies understand that while the budget must be cut, the board of education is in the best position to determine where those cuts have to be made. The council is trying to be responsive to the entire community as it weighs an amount to be cut while keeping in mind the impact a reduction in the school budget can have on the children of Westfield."



**LISTENING INTENTLY...**Town residents listen to possible solutions to traffic safety problems in town during last Wednesday's follow-up community outreach meeting conducted by the Town Council's Public Safety, Transportation, and Parking Committee and the Citizens Traffic Advisory Committee.

## Mtsd. Interim CSA Says Goodbye After Two Yrs. of Service to Boro

**By BETSEY BURGDORF**  
*Specialty Written for The Westfield Leader*

MOUNTAINSIDE — Interim Chief School Administrator (CSA) Walter Rusak said a heartfelt goodbye to Mountainside students, parents and teachers Tuesday night as his duties as CSA came to a close.

"It has been a great ride and I have enjoyed coming here," Mr. Rusak said. "We have had fun and that's the most important thing about this job."

Mr. Rusak commented that in larger districts CSA's do not always get to experience one-on-one relationships with the children. "You get to push

paper and handle money. Here you touch the heads of the children," he said.

"You got us out of choppy water two years ago," BOE President John Perrin replied. "Every year we have had numerous complaints — but this year the complaints have been minimal and I think that is because of you."

In recognition of Mr. Rusak's contribution to the district during his tenure the BOE granted him seven paid vacation days stating, "with the thanks of a grateful school district for his tireless efforts on behalf of the students of Mountainside."

The Board of Education (BOE) hired

Dr. Richard O'Malley in March to fill the position of CSA that sat empty for almost two years. Dr. O'Malley will take the helm on Friday, May 20.

In other news, Mr. Perrin announced that there would be a special meeting of the BOE on Tuesday, May 17, beginning at 7 p.m. to discuss the proposed send-receive agreement that

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## Public Hearing on Boro Budget Planned May 17

**By KIM BROADWELL**  
*Specialty Written for The Westfield Leader*

MOUNTAINSIDE — During the borough council agenda setting meeting held on Tuesday evening, Mayor Robert Vigilanti stated that he was planning to have a hearing for the 2005 municipal budget at next week's council meeting.

He noted that although it was on the agenda for Tuesday, May 17, he was not sure if the budget could be voted on by the governing body at this time. He did not have a definitive statement from the County of Union as to that portion of borough residents' tax bills. He estimated that the county portion would increase by \$206 based on an average accessed home in the borough of \$160,000.

As stated at previous council meetings, Mayor Vigilanti said that the total borough budget for 2005 was \$9,380,799, which is an increase of

\$317,463 from last year. The mayor noted that there were three big increases for the budget which included insurance premiums, worker's compensation insurance and fees for the Rahway Valley Sewerage Authority.

He stated that other increases came from police salary and wages, police and fire retirement funds and public employee retirement.

Mayor Vigilanti also stated that because of mandated increases from the state and from rising insurance costs, the average Mountainside household would see a municipal increase of \$88 in their tax bill. The mayor added that the Mountainside Board of Education portion would increase by \$169 per household.

He concluded that the total estimated increase would equal \$463 per household based on the \$160,000 assessment.

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**ADDRESSING THE ISSUES...**GOP gubernatorial candidates met last week in an informal event hosted by the Mountainside Republican Club to meet the public and share their ideas on how to better New Jersey. Doug Forrester addressed residents, while Bill Sanders, Chairman of the Mountainside Republican Club looked on. Please see story on Page 19.



**MAKING A POINT...**Fourth Ward Councilman Jim Foerst discusses a proposal with *Westfield Leader* Assignment Editor Paul Peyton to revamp the town's zoning codes to eliminate the construction of so-called "McMansions" on small building lots.

these areas before town boards due to loop poles in the current zoning code.

Thus, what is listed as a 3,200-square-foot home would actually be 3,900 square feet in size.

"There is nothing underhanded or illegal and they (developers) weren't doing anything wrong. They were taking the law and using it to the maximum buildings and to maximum profits," said Councilman Foerst.

Also, in an effort to promote a front entrance look on new homes, detached garages will be listed as an accessory structure within the floor area ratio. Attached garages will be permitted, but will be factored into the primary floor area ratio and thus reduce the size of the home.

Homes on 6,000 square foot lots would be increased from 2,100 to 2,400 to include sufficient room for detached garages, Councilman Foerst explained.

feet, with the exception of the central business district, and lot coverage averages 20 percent.

As part of his report, town-planning consultant Blaise Brancheau studied the south east corner of the third ward, which borders Garwood and Clark. The committee determined this area had the most number of demolition permits and tear-downs by builders.

"It was an area that was under assault at the time," said Councilman Foerst.

The town used its tax map, an aerial view of the area and its Global Information System, which outlined all the buildings and accessory structures. Mr. Brancheau surveyed over 1,000 homes on the ground in the area to see what the actual size and style of each home was.

From that study the committee

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