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— Established 1890 —

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Compromise? Not Where Sidewalks Are Concerned

By DAVID GIALANELLA
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

Two weeks ago, at the Westfield Board of Adjustment meeting, board members and residents alike gave mention more than once to the idea of "compromise."

"Would you want a parking lot right next to your house?" a friend's parent had asked me regarding the board's latest conundrum. I responded truthfully that I really wouldn't care one way or the other (I'm more irked that there is only one public house downtown at which to wet my whistle).

At not quite 23 years of age, I do not own any property, thus I am not subject to the substantial property taxes. Subsequently I am fairly easy going at this stage, and would probably be willing to compromise on anything, but knowing what I know about how much it costs to reside here, I don't blame Westfielders for wanting things their way.

I don't want to focus on a particular case heard by the Board of Adjustment assuming all aforementioned admissions of indifference don't invalidate my opinions altogether. One issue does indeed come to mind about which there ought to be no compromise whatsoever.

Sidewalks are a very simple concept, but are an essential element to any community and any family-oriented neighborhood. And neither I nor anyone else in town has to travel far from his doorstep to encounter a neighborhood lacking sidewalks.

Westfield lies in one of the most densely populated counties of the most densely populated state. It is within a few minutes drive of almost every major highway in northeast New Jersey. And since Sam Goody came along to the delight of most of my fellow fifth graders (and to the dismay of the owners of stores like The Music Hall, Hills Ice Cream Parlor and Video Village), Westfield has become a

hotbed of all things commercial.

They say you cannot fight progress, and I don't intend to battle it with words here, but given all of these factors, traffic has become astronomical throughout Westfield. There is no good excuse for the absence of sidewalks on any of Westfield's streets, certainly not streets so oft traversed as Hillside Avenue, Scotch Plains Avenue and Central Avenue.

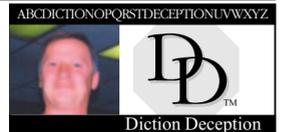
Then there are neighborhoods meant to have more of a "country" feel, such as those in the Wychwood area, where sidewalks look out of place, some say. But the fact is that traffic is becoming as bad in those neighborhoods as any other. What degree of remoteness can one reasonably expect in Union County, New Jersey anyway? We're lucky there isn't a stop for the Path here yet.

To me, any community without sidewalks lacks integrity, lacks that one unifying element that strings the neighborhood together.

It is also a matter of safety. Children today are even more mollycoddled than my generation was, (and we were not to be outdone, mind you). But parents simply must be increasingly wary and yes, at times, quite protective, because there are more cars than ever on the road traveling at faster rates of speed than ever. Their expectations for installment of safe footpaths are not unreasonable.

Adults too are at risk — jogging on Mountain Avenue near the North Chestnut Street outlet or on Hillside Avenue around rush hour always gives me an extra blast of adrenaline as ironclad SUV's come barreling by at what seems like 80 miles per hour.

"Are you crazy? Running on Hillside Avenue during rush hour?" you might ask me. "Run somewhere else," you might tell me. But why should I have to? I must be growing up. I'm not willing to compromise.



Below are four arcane words, each with four definitions — only one is correct. The others are made up. Are you sharp enough to discern this deception of diction?

If you can guess one correctly — good guess. If you get two — well-read individual. If you get three — word expert. If you get all four — You must have a lot of free time!

All words and correct definitions come from the board game Diction Deception.

Answers to last week's arcane words.

1. Lachrymal — Producing tears
2. Valetudinarianism — A state of feeble health
3. Debouch — In military usage, to march out of a confined place into open country
4. Imbroglia — A confusing situation

HOLCAD

1. A water wheel with buckets
2. Calcium tungstate
3. An ancient Greek merchant ship
4. An early stage or beginning

TORGOCH

1. The red-bellied lake trout
2. A Turkish dish consisting of boiled rice, mutton or fish and spices
3. A friend; comrade
4. To desert a cause

RURIGENOUS

1. Responding slowly to an external stimulus
2. Devotion to the greedy pursuit of riches
3. Born in the country
4. Relating to pigs; swine

INTERNECINE

1. Of an alien or foreign nature
2. An enzyme that assists a bee in making honey
3. An illustration for a book
4. Deadly to both sides; great slaughter

Are We Unduly Alarmed About Traffic and Pedestrian Safety?

Most of us feel that rising automobile traffic and pedestrian safety are items of great concern for our local towns. In Westfield, meetings are being held in many neighborhoods to discuss the matter. The BRAKES Group has been trying to improve matters for years.

It's interesting that some of us feel that we are the cause of the problem — such as not walking much anymore, even if it's just a few blocks.

People will drive to locations within six blocks, then look for a parking space that may take them within two blocks of their destination. Is it our culture, or programmed response from advertisers? Must we always be near our car with immediate access to our cell phone?

One mother suggests in a letter to the editor this week that perhaps the solution to traffic and safety is "us" — such as don't drive kids to school, let them walk. The decrease in traffic alone as a result of this would be substantial, as evident by anyone observing the drop off zones at schools. She also suggests that smaller cars other than SUVs would help.

Perhaps she has a point. If we all walk more and drive smaller vehicles, would the problem implode? Walking has its practical limits and so does

carpooling. At which point should one consider walking? Within eight blocks? Within four?

If we're going out to dinner with friends, should we stop saying, "We'll meet you there about 7:30?" Instead, should we say, "We'll pick you up at 7." If our child has soccer practice to get exercise, wouldn't walking be an appropriate part of that exercise — rather than parents dropping them off and picking them up?

According to the New Jersey Sustainable State Institute (NJSSI), the total number of fatalities has declined in New Jersey from 1,352 in 1968 to 747 in 2001, a decrease of almost 50 percent. The number of pedestrian fatalities dropped from 358 in 1968 to 132 in 2001, a decrease of more than 60 percent.

NJSSI notes, these decreases occurred despite a 20 percent increase in population and more than a 60 percent increase in vehicle miles traveled per person. If the NJSSI statistics are correct, are we unduly alarmed about traffic and pedestrian safety? Do we need all these new laws about crosswalks?

Is walking part of the solution to parking? To obesity? To gasoline prices?

We agree in part with Pogo, "We have met the enemy... and he is us."

What Terminology Applies To School Budget Presentations?

There are differences in terminology used by government, including boards of education, and taxpayers. School boards say they slash budgets and reduce the rate of increase. Taxpayers simply say taxes and spending are being increased.

School boards, such as Westfield that had budget defeats at the polls, refer to the resolution process as "budget cuts." Whereas, the taxpayers think of the situation as "limiting the increase in spending."

Whatever happens in Westfield during the resolution process of the school budget over the next week, the amount of spending for schools and the amount of property taxes to be paid will increase over last year. It's only a matter of how much the increase will be.

The school board asked for an increase in spend-

ing over last year by an amount of approximately 5 percent with a budget request of about \$77 million. The voters said "no." The town council now has the task of proposing what the spending will be by May 19 — and the school board can appeal to the state commissioner of education if they do not agree with the town council.

If the town council determines that the spending shall only increase by 3 percent over last year, will the board of education say that the council slashed the budget by \$1.4 million? Or will the board accept the council's proposal, which in this example, recommends an increase in spending for schools by \$2.1 million over that of last year?

It's all the same thing, only what will the terminology be?

Westfielder Says There Should Be Less Cars on the Road, More Kids Walking to Schools for Their Own Benefit

As a Westfield resident for almost three years, I enjoy very much this town. But, one of the things that would make it even more enjoyable is less cars on the roads. We do have the infrastructure for pedestrians sidewalks everywhere compared to other suburbs. We only need to change old habits.

Lately, several meetings were held regarding traffic solutions. While I totally agree and support the proposals, the main issue was not addressed: how do we reduce traffic volume?

As a mother, I am mostly concerned with children's safety. When the Franklin School area was discussed at the May 4 traffic meeting, introducing Walking School Buses was last on the improvement list. The idea animated the public and we talked about the many benefits these buses would bring to the community. But, it stopped here.

Will the town engage in a campaign and work with the school principals and PTOs and educate the parents to stop driving their kids to school on a daily

basis? Or will it leave it up to us — and as a BRAKES member, I must admit that all our efforts to decrease traffic at drop-off and pick up areas did not show any improvement.

There are now around 200 cars (of which more than half are SUVs) dropping off every morning at the Newton Place curb when school starts. More than half arrive within 10 minutes. Around 8:30 a.m., the waiting line to drop off stretches past the intersection of Sinclair Place and Elm Street.

One hundred cars driving or idling means pollution levels 10 times higher than what is considered safe. Do we want that for our children daily? Do we really think it has no impact on their health in the long run? Besides the fact, they are half asleep when they get out of the car.

Action was taken immediately following the April 15 accident at Lawrence and Dudley Avenues. Thanks again for reinstating the two crossing guards on Dudley Avenue. But why do we need to wait until something dramatic happens instead of

being proactive?

At the meetings, parents with kids in three different schools (elementary, middle and high) admitted they have to speed through town in order to pick them up in time. Is it really necessary to pick each of them up at the door, speeding and putting other kids at risk? Is it not possible for today's children to walk a distance and be picked at another location away from school, if walking home is not an option?

This is just an example showing that, unfortunately, most attendants at these meetings were concerned with how the measures will impact their own situation, their own driving time, parking possibilities and so on — but much less public safety and community benefits.

I can only hope that parents who drive daily to school will at least consider the benefits of walking for their own children if not for the community.

Rodica Ursu
Westfield

Letters to the Editor

Neighbors Ask Board to Consider Proposed Development's Impact

Editor's Note: This letter was sent to the members of the Scotch Plains Planning Board on May 3.

We are deeply concerned about the limited scope currently being used to review the plans of the proposed development of 2229 Morse Avenue. My family lives in the Morse neighborhood and we are concerned about the effect this development will have on the drainage of our neighborhood.

Our neighborhood tends to flood easily. The extreme proposed development at 2229 Morse must manage water in the context of the entire neighborhood, not just the new, six-house cul-de-sac.

Current zoning allows large

"McMansions" to replace smaller homes on a single lot. This lot is being subdivided, so where one home once stood, now there will be six. We ask the planning board to consider the older infrastructure in place within our neighborhood; resources that were built to handle the smaller homes here seem to be already overwhelmed.

On behalf of my family, my neighbors, my community, we petition the members of the Scotch Plains Planning Board to safeguard our entire neighborhood as you review the drainage, building and landscaping plans of the development at 2229 Morse Avenue.

Michael and Donna Spangler
Scotch Plains

Superintendent Thanks SP-F Voters For Supporting School Budget

It is with great pride that I thank the voters of Scotch Plains and Fanwood for their support of the 2005-2006 school budget that was proposed in the recent school election. I am proud and also grateful because the majority of voters continued to support the work of our students and said "Yes" to quality schools despite the fact that these are uncertain financial times for many people in our communities.

The Board of Education and the administration developed the budget judiciously, giving paramount consideration to the instructional needs of all students as well as the severely escalating costs in some areas of the budget and the financial

constraints placed on school districts by the state.

Now that the voters have approved the local spending plan, we in the Scotch Plains-Fanwood Public Schools will work just as judiciously to implement the budget, always focusing spending as close to the classroom as possible and in the best interests of students.

It is gratifying to me that the citizens of Scotch Plains and Fanwood place such a high value on the education of the district's young people and continue to be supportive partners in their learning, their development and their success.

Superintendent Carol Choye
Scotch Plains-Fanwood Schools

Westfield BOE President Comments On Budget Resolution by Town Council

As President of the Westfield Board of Education, I want to update the community on the steps we've taken since April 19, when the school budget for next year was voted down by a margin of 65 votes (1463 "yes" to 1528 "no" votes). Since that time, the district has focused on two key objectives: working amicably with the Town Council as it determines the total amount and specific items to be cut from the budget and continuing our efforts to better understand the voting result.

We've held several meetings to assist the Town Council in its review of the school budget, which must be completed by May 19 according to state law. These sessions were productive and positive, and I appreciated the Town Council's willingness to learn about the school district's priorities and the potential impact of cuts being considered. I'm also optimistic that the town and school district will emerge from this process with a more positive working relationship, enabling new joint efforts that benefit all Westfield taxpayers.

At this point, the Town Council plans to vote on the school budget reductions at its May 17 meeting, which will begin at 8 p.m. The next evening, on May 18, the Board of Education will hold a special meeting at 8 p.m. at 302 Elm Street in order to approve the Town's

resolution. If the Board cannot agree to the reduction amount, the Board could appeal to the Commissioner of Education. I am extremely hopeful, however, that we can resolve this issue without an appeal.

We've also been reaching out to parents and the community at large to gain insight into the reasons behind the budget defeat. I'd like to thank the many residents who've already sent e-mails and offered comments in person. We're carefully reviewing these observations, which will help us improve our budget process in the future. We will also report on the types of responses that we've received. As always, we continue to welcome input at boe@westfieldnj.com.

We will continue to keep the public informed about this budget review process. Details about the recommended cuts will be shared as soon as the information becomes available. The public is welcome to attend both the Town Council meeting on May 17 and the Board of Education meeting on May 18.

Anne Riegel
President, Westfield BOE

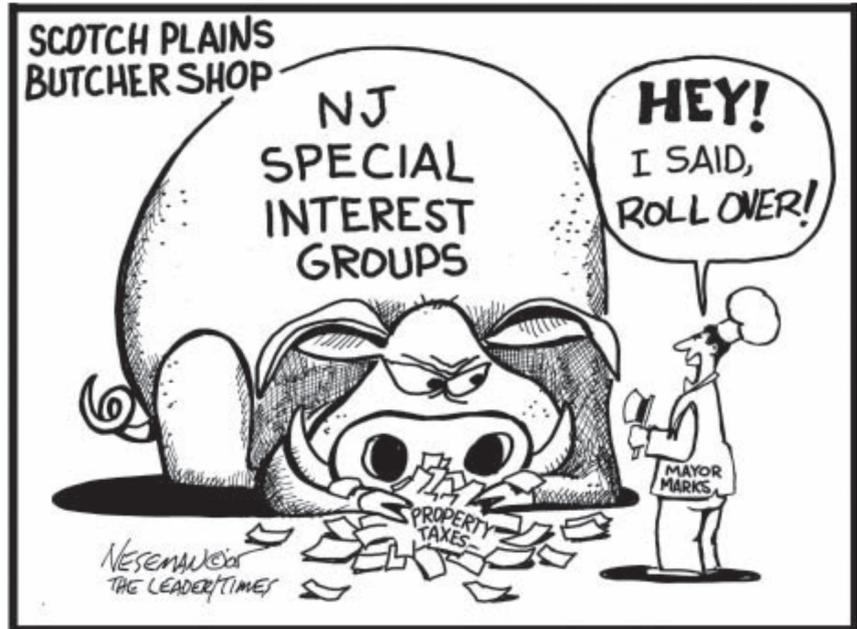
Fanwood Committee Thanks Volunteers

The Fanwood Clean Community Committee would like to extend their thanks to the 60 hearty volunteers who participated in the April 23 Clean Community Day. Thanks also go to the Bagel Shop for providing delicious bagels and New Jersey Transit for providing two flagmen while litter was removed from the train track areas. Approximately two and a half tons of litter was removed from Fanwood's public areas.

The morning began with Mayor Colleen Mahr welcoming and thanking the volunteers and proclaiming that it was "Clean Community Day."

Environmental education material was given to the Scotch Plains-Fanwood school system and the libraries of both Fanwood and Scotch Plains.

Fanwood Clean Community Committee Ray Manfra, Chairman
Bob McCarthy
Linda Talcott
Greg Cummings
Dean Talcott
Pam Sayles



Editor's Note

Last week we wrote that we were having difficulty obtaining budget documents from the county, town and school system. We thank Union County Clerk of the Board Nicole Tedeschi and Westfield Town Clerk Claire Gray for since providing us with copies of the budgets. The county also provided last year's budget for comparison.

The Westfield school system also provided us with a budget summary.

By Friday, those interested can review these documents at: www.goleader.com/features

Albert Muller
Scotch Plains

Justin Schack
Westfield