

Committee Releases Report Examining DPW's Efficiency

By PAUL J. PEYTON
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD -- A volunteer citizen's committee report reviewing the operations of the maintenance and construction division of the department of public works (DPW) includes 14 recommendations on enhancing division productivity, communication and customer service. The report was presented to the mayor and town council Tuesday night.

The committee recommends the use of a new standardized computer-based work management and reporting system for routing all incoming requests, prioritizing work loads, notification of work plans and timing and follow-ups on completed work with residents and businesses.

The three-member panel also recommends the creation of an administrative assistant position solely for

the division, a redesign of the DPW's North Avenue facility's front entry to include a receptionist area for the division and a change in the phone system to properly direct calls to the administrative assistant. E-mail via the town's website for work orders is also recommended.

Customer service training programs for all employees, establishment of performance schedules for completion of work on trees, roads, parks and fields, etc., and the installation of a tracking system in the DPW are all recommended, as well.

The panel said the "field hotline" phone number should include current conditions of the 16 fields within town parks with updates as conditions change along with a map of all fields on the town's website.

Better use of local newspapers and TV-36, seasonal brochures, and town-

wide mailings, and an annual report would enhance the division's efforts, the report states. Regular reports to the town council and a division name are also encouraged, as are weekly staff meetings to discuss work priorities and monthly meetings with user groups including town sports leagues, the board of education, Westfield Area Chamber of Commerce, Downtown Westfield Corporation and the recreation department are recommended to better plan for future DPW projects.

Mayor Andrew Skibitsky said the White Paper report is part of a concept he initiated last year as chairman of town council's public works committee. The mayor intends to complete similar analysis for all municipal operations.

The committee looked at utilizing technology to aid staff scheduling

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DWC Approves Facade Grants; Discusses Parking Improvements

By BETSEY BURG DORF
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD - The Downtown Westfield Corporation (DWC) approved two facade grants at their regularly scheduled monthly meeting held Monday night. The board also discussed parking improvements and the search for a downtown business owner to fill the vacant seat on the board.

The first grant approved by the DWC was for the building formerly utilized by Randall's Shoes. Randall's has recently downsized and has leased the left side of the store to Bluemercury, a high-end cosmetic retailer.

The building housing the two retailers is considered to be a "very significant building within the Special Improvement District (SID)," Executive Director Sherry Cronin

said. Ms. Cronin stated that when the SID was originally created several years ago, the building was "one of the first buildings in our district to get a facelift."

The facade grant will help the business owner offset the cost of restoring the retractable awning, as well as replace and install light fixtures. It will also be used for signage for Bluemercury.

"Westfield is pretty fortunate to have them," Ms. Cronin said about the addition of Bluemercury to the downtown.

The board questioned whether or not Randall's would be seeking a facade grant for the side of the building they will now occupy. The board is hopeful Randall's will be interested in applying for a grant to spruce up their storefront, which is located

in a prime area of the downtown. "It would make sense to go to him (owner of Randall's) proactively," Frank Arena said. "He (the owner) has a lot on his mind. He is trying to keep his business going in a smaller area," board member Dominic Verdic commented. The actual owner of the building was confirmed to be Allison Tamofsky.

The second facade grant approved was for the building located at 241 North Avenue. The DWC has been working with the property owners for months to come up with a rendering both parties could agree upon. This building is owned by Robert Saunders and Richard Parness.

"While we've abandoned some of the (original) ideas, we have kept some," Ms. Cronin said.

It was reported that the board used one of the two facade designs it is entitled to, free of charge, for being a Main Street Community for the project. The property owners initially rejected the architectural rendering by Margaret Westfield.

"It's a long time coming for this building," Mr. Verdic said. "We are basically giving back his (property owner's) money that he gave to the DWC for the year."

Property owners whose buildings are located in the SID are required to pay an assessment to the DWC on a yearly basis.

Special Officer John Morgan reported on the parking improvements that have been taking place in the downtown area over the past months. Mr. Morgan stated that all pay stations have been installed. Those that are not currently activated will be in the next few weeks.

Ms. Cronin announced that the next edition of the *Destination Westfield* magazine would be coming out in November. The project is part of a partnership the DWC has with *The*

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GIVING SPEECHES...Candidates listen good-naturedly to each other as all Westfield office-seekers gathered Monday night at Commerce Bank on North Avenue to meet local business leaders in the affair sponsored by the Chamber of Commerce and the Downtown Westfield Corporation. Pictured, left to right, are candidates Frank Fusaro for Council Ward 2, former Mayor Tom Jardim for Mayor, Audrey Fisch for Council Ward 1 and Mayor Andy Skibitsky for Mayor.

Town Council 'Heightens' Discussion on McMansions

By MICHAEL J. POLLACK
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD — The town council's Tuesday agenda meeting focused on new height ordinances to restrict McMansions, improvements to the Conrail line on Rahway Avenue, updating specifications for implementation on the 1996 downtown development plan and plans to ask the state to allow specific funds for the tree preservation and recreation user fee funds.

Under the Code Review and Town Property Committee's report, despite the absence of committee chairman and Fourth Ward Councilman Jim

Foerst, Town Administrator Jim Gildea explained that the committee met and recommended to the town council new maximum building heights.

As per the committee's discussions, effective January 1, 2006, the new maximum height will be reduced from 38 to 35 feet, which will require the master plan to be amended.

"Where is the height measured from - from the foundation?" asked Fourth Ward Councilman Larry Goldman. "In the case of a teardown, the new height requirements only address part of the problem. The other part of the problem, not only are we

getting a taller structure, but the grade is higher, so besides being taller, it's causing inconvenience to adjoining property owners. That's something we should be addressing."

Town Engineer Ken Marsh said that independent surveys are conducted checking the proposed grades before any demos or construction begin.

"Usually, it's no more than a foot change because of construction code," Mr. Marsh said.

Mr. Marsh said that the net gain, after raising the elevation, could only reach 35 feet; meaning, that if one

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Westfield FestiFall to Offer Fun, Food, Philanthropy

By BETSEY BURG DORF
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD — The Westfield Area Chamber of Commerce (WACC) will host the 16th annual FestiFall this Sunday, September 25. The event, which claims a major section of the downtown for the day, will take place from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m.

This year's venue will host over 220 vendors, ranging from specialty foods to handmade items. In past years, the event drew participants from across the state, who flock to the area looking for unique items, food and entertainment.

Several local businesses will also be participating in the street fair, setting up booths in front of their stores. Area businesses that are not located in the downtown area will also be participating.

"Participants who are outside the downtown area are able to come down to prime real estate," WACC Executive Director Allison O'Hara told *The Leader*. Approximately 70 members of the chamber will be involved in the event.

Ms. O'Hara also reported that the

event would host the National Comedy Theatre, a traveling comedy troupe based all over the United States.

"What's exciting about them is that they improvise. They take cues from the audience," she said.

The WACC has also booked two bands. The Westfield based Pick An Exit, specializing in modern, popular music, will perform from 11:45 a.m. to 12:45 p.m. The Agave Brothers, described by Ms. O'Hara as playing cover band music, will perform from 4 to 5 p.m.

"They are very rock and roll," she said.

Other performers include Kelly School of Irish Dance, Make You Wanna Dance - TV Show and Dance School and Drazy Hoops. All performances will take place on the main stage located on Elm Street adjacent to Smith and Hawkins.

This year, in light of the recent tragedy in the Gulf Coast region, Norman Greco, owner of Jersey Mike's Subs on East Broad Street, will be participating in the event with something other than profits on his mind. The sub shop owner will be

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DOWNTOWN PROGRESS...Members of the Downtown Westfield Corporation (DWC) look over facade renderings for the building located at 241 North Avenue. The board has been working with property owners to enhance the downtown. Pictured, left to right; Hans Winberg, Chairman of the Westfield Area Chamber of Commerce, DWC Treasurer David Capodanno, Board member Lee Hale, Councilman Larry Goldman, Board member Dominic Verdic, Parking Director John Morgan, Liaison to the Mayor Frank Arena, Executive Director Sherry Cronin and DWC Chairman David Martone.

National Guard Heads Back to United States

WESTFIELD — *The Westfield Leader* learned that the New Jersey Army National Guard's B Company of the 250 Signal Battalion, headquartered at the National Guard Armory in Westfield, will be leaving Iraq for the United States possibly as early as October, officials said last week.

The unit has been in Iraq since last November. It was the first overseas deployment for the unit since World War II.

Although no date for the unit's return has been announced, the office of Congressman Mike Ferguson (R-7th) has confirmed that the unit will be returning home soon. Rep. Ferguson's spokesperson, Abby Bird, said that once a date has been set, a welcome home celebration would be planned.

Officials requested that community members no longer send gifts and other items to B Company.

Neighbors Say Landscaping Bus Disrupting Myrtle Neighborhood

By MEGHAN GILL
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD — Residents of the Myrtle Avenue area brought forth a formal complaint to the town council last week regarding the neighborhood disruption of Jeff Scotti's commercial landscaping company, Jeff's Landscape Design and Construction, which operates out of a garage and lot on 125-127 Myrtle Avenue.

Residents claim that the company is involved in large landscaping projects and uses dump trucks, trucks with trailers carrying excavators, and numerous employee vehicles, exceeding the usage level considered acceptable for the neighborhood.

A letter written to the council by residents points out dangers that are posed to the neighborhood, including safety threats for children riding on bikes and playing in the street, noise ordinance violations, dust, a port-a-john that is adjacent to a brook and posing a health risk, and potholes in the road that have emerged due to the heavy traffic.

The letter also says, "The significant amount of heavy commercial activity is degrading the character of our otherwise quiet residential street." The letter continues stating that the residents recognize the "grandfather clause" regarding the property's commercial use status. However, they point out that the original intention was for the garage to be used as a storage area for a small operation.

Councilman Mark Ciarrocca, representing the Third Ward where Myrtle Avenue is located, explained that the council took action regarding this issue in three ways. They filled the potholes in the street, asked the police department to designate the neighborhood as an "area of consistent enforcement," and asked the town attorney to investigate the appropriateness of property's current usage.

Mr. Ciarrocca confirmed with some residents the noticeable increase in police presence in the area since the issue was first presented to the council in July.

He explained that the complaint has been referred to the Town Council Code Review Committee, which is chaired by Fourth Ward Councilman Jim Foerst. The committee will

be holding a working meeting regarding this matter on Tuesday, October 11.

Mr. Ciarrocca said that the issue would be on the council's Tuesday, October 18, agenda. He said, "First and foremost, the landscaper should act as a much better neighbor."

"It is amazing to us, because the building has been used as a landscaping company for years and years," said Gerry Grillo, manager of Jeff's Landscape and Design. Mr. Grillo also clarified that they are willing to work with the neighbors and the town council to resolve the issue.

He confirmed that the company grew over the last five years, but the number of trucks never increased. He also said that only one or two trucks return to the facility during the day.

"I find it very interesting that one of the neighbors is operating a landscaping company out of their residence, and they are unhappy about our company," he added.

Marilyn Tammaro, a lifelong resident of Westfield who has lived on Myrtle Avenue for 18 years and also runs a landscaping business from her residence, said that neighbors tried to

talk to Jeff Scotti, but to no avail. Ms. Tammaro said that since 2000, when Jeff's Landscaping took over the space, the activity level increased.

"We do operate a small-scale landscaping business here, but the amount of traffic and level of activity is of no comparison to Jeff's," Ms. Tammaro said.

She added that it was, "surprising that the afternoon after the council meeting on July 28, the town filled the potholes in the road." She also mentioned that "the parking issue is also becoming a problem for homeowners and renters, since Jeff's Landscape and Design employees are parking their vehicles on the street."

The DiFrancesco family previously owned the property from the 1930's until 2000. It was traditionally used for storage of equipment inside the garage.

At one time, Jeff's Landscape and Design was sharing the facility with two other companies.

Residents feel that if the current operation is allowed to continue, they will demand a decrease in property taxes.



BUSINESS OR RESIDENTIAL?...A Myrtle Avenue landscaping business is the site of controversy with residential neighbors.

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