

Town Permit Fees Lowered; Parking Restrictions OK'd

By MICHAEL J. POLLACK
Specialty Writer for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD — Town council members passed new parking permit fees, approved parking restrictions on Lenape Trail and Watchung Fork, amended the land use ordinance to redefine lot specifications and heard a presentation on recommendations to the Public Works department's division of maintenance and construction during the Tuesday, September 27 regular meeting of the town council.

The council passed on second reading an ordinance that will reduce permit parking fees for employees and commuters in lots three, eight and nine. In lot three, the South Avenue lot, the fee will be reduced from \$58.50 to \$48 per month. In addition, annually, the rate commuters and employees pay at the north side, south

side and Trader Joe's lots will drop from \$702 to \$576.

Night hour parking will cost \$120, and Watterson Street parking will remain at \$360 for a year. Night hour parking changes will go into effect immediately, while all other permit parking changes are effective January 6, 2006.

A new wrinkle in the same ordinance is the prohibition of parking on Watchung Fork along the inner curb line of the circular portion and on Lenape Trail along the northeasterly inner curb line of the lower portion. Other areas of Lenape Trail and Watchung Fork will be impacted and parking will be prohibited during times that correlate to high amounts of school traffic. Residents will not be allowed to park between 8:30 and 9:30 a.m. and 2:30 and 3:30 p.m. on school days.

Paul Tice of Breeze Knoll said there is a problem with aggressive driving and parking issues around Franklin School, but maintained that the times when children are going to school represents "less than one percent annually."

"I can't park in front of my house 24/7. This negatively impacts my property value. It's draconian to eliminate parking in front of the house," Mr. Tice said.

First Ward Councilman Peter Echausse said, "In any kind of potential parking restriction, all residents are sent a petition. A large majority signed the petition. This is no different than the restrictions in Stoneleigh Park. There's no change in the consistency."

Councilman Echausse said the board errs on the side of safety always and said that emergency vehicles, under the current arrangement, cannot get through to residents. The councilman cited an incident this past weekend where, because people didn't park adjacent to the inner curb, "the rescue squad was able to come in and save an elderly resident."

Mr. Tice still asked, "Why the inner circle is disproportionately impacted? There are many instances of bottlenecks in town. You'd have to look at the entire town if that's your standard (for setting new policy)."

Fire Chief Dan Kelly responded to Mr. Tice, by saying, "safety is the utmost concern of residents near Franklin School. With vehicles packed on both sides of the street, we won't be able to get trucks to negotiate the turns."

New acting Police Chief John Parizeau gave an update on an incident that occurred on September 21. Chief Parizeau said that a seven-year-old boy, who was taking piano lessons on St. Marks Street, was told to get in a New York license plated BMW. Chief Parizeau said a countywide broadcast was issued in response. He said the Washington School principal was informed, but acknowledged that it "could be completely innocent."

Acting Mayor Andy Skibitsky gave an update on Westfield's finest and bravest helping in the hurricane-stricken regions in the south. Firefighters Michael Brennan and Tom Ryan, along with Policeman Robert Bartkus, Jr. "have returned safely. It's good to have them back."

Mayor Skibitsky also updated the residents that now 300 on-street

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FESTIVITY...Town residents and gatherers enjoy the afternoon at Festfall in Westfield on Sunday, September 25. While children examine color spinners, the smells of kettle corn and roasted nuts fill East Broad Street. *Horace Corbin for The Westfield Leader and The Times*

BOE Discusses Tech Updates, New Websites

By JAMES HALLERAN
Specialty Writer for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD — At Tuesday night's Westfield Board of Education meeting, Chief Technology Officer Hal Johnson reviewed his department's summer projects. He also recommended an overhaul of the technology infrastructure throughout the Westfield public school system.

Barbara Mammen, the Supervisor of Instructional Technology, gave an update on the district's website and teacher training.

Mr. Johnson said summer projects included the completion of an upgrade to the student record keeping system. His department also installed a new program on all administration computers, high school laptops and all staff workstations in the faculty lounges. Two devices, one for filtering spy ware, pop-ups and inappropriate websites, and the other which filters e-mails for computer viruses and e-mail spam, were also installed and district computers.

Board President Ann Riegel was pleased with the progress of the technology department. She stated that there have been very little issues with the computer network.

"Amazing that thus far there seems to be very little problems with our e-mails and servers. It is great to see that all of the efforts paid off," she said.

3COM, the company that supplies the district with their switches for Internet service, has agreed to continue technical support of the equipment for one more year. Next year, the district will have to pay for any repairs on the equipment, which officials said could be costly.

"The switches are six years old and 3COM has only agreed to support the product for one more year. After that we are on our own in terms of repair," added Mr. Johnson.

Because of the 3COM switching issue and the growing school e-mail system, the system has been overwhelmed at times. Mr. Johnson, along with Superintendent of Schools Dr. William Foley, will be pushing for the board to budget for an all fiber optic network.

According to Mr. Johnson, the schools which have heavy Internet traffic will be replaced with a one gig (1,000 megs) modem, which is 1,000 times faster than the current system. According to Mr. Johnson,

the cost of the system will pay for itself in 10 years.

Ms. Mammen updated the board on the new website system. Each school now has its own home page. Everything including activities, clubs and lunch menus can be found on each individual school's home page.

School will be closed on Monday, October 10, in observance of Columbus Day. Teachers will report to school that day to attend a training session to develop their individual websites.

"We are looking to train all of our teachers to develop their own webpage for their class. For instance, a home page, a calendar and a scheduling page. This will allow the parents to view their student's homework assignments and project due dates on line," Ms. Mammen said.

This year, teachers will be encouraged to create their own websites. According to Dr. Foley, next year it will be mandatory.

"This year will be a learning process. However, next year we will make it mandatory," he said.

The next meeting of the Westfield Board of Education is scheduled for Tuesday, October 11 at 8 p.m. in the office located on 302 Elm Street.

Echausse, Jardim Differ On Parking Rate Rollback

By MICHAEL J. POLLACK
Specialty Writer for The Westfield Leader and The Times

WESTFIELD — Privately, after the September 27 meeting, when asked if, during the election season, Democrats will look to fault the Republican-controlled town council for not doing more to refund taxpayer money from the failed parking deck, First Ward Councilman Peter Echausse said to refer to Democrat mayoral candidate Tom Jardim's last act in office — special ordinance 1770.

Councilman Echausse stressed that he didn't want to be political or sarcastic, but said that ordinance 1770, which passed in December of 2000, "raised long-term parking rates not once but twice, doubling parking rates to their current \$58.50 level. Mayor Jardim doubled parking rates without one study being completed whether a parking deck was feasible. Rates were

doubled without an environmental study, traffic impact study or engineering study being completed. This is called 'putting the cart in front of the horse'; or 'front-running' an issue."

Councilman Echausse continued that Mr. Jardim "is now looking to pull the wool over the eyes of Westfield residents and Downtown employees who paid those fees. I respectfully ask him to stop with these distorted statements."

Councilman Echausse said it was necessary to examine the economics of adjusting parking fees, so as to avoid people losing incentive to long-term parking and turning to meter feeding.

Former Mayor Tom Jardim said that his council had unanimous consensus on building a parking deck. Mr. Jardim told the *Westfield Leader* that "it makes sense to increase parking fees if you have a deck. That was what the council decided. That money now should be given back to those who paid additional money to get relief from parking problems in town."

"This current administration made a compact with them (townspeople) that rates would be increased, but a deck would be built. They should give that money back that they took in. They've increased fees to do nothing but conduct endless studies," Mr. Jardim added.

Mr. Jardim said Mr. Echausse's comments are "just as fair as anyone's comments who'd seek to rewrite history. I agreed on a moderately sized deck without the ancillary features (retail, residential) that this council, including my opponent and Mr. Echausse, approved. That plan was rightly defeated. There are plenty of other ways to solve the problem. I realize this is the political season, but what people like Mr. Echausse are doing is trying to rewrite history."

MS BOE Presents Long-Range Facility Plan; Clashes Over Substitute Nurse Rate

By BETSEY BURGENDORF
Specialty Writer for The Westfield Leader

MOUNTAINSIDE — At the Tuesday night meeting of the Mountainside Board of Education (BOE), members listened to a presentation regarding the five-year long-range facility plan and were introduced to the Berkeley Heights superintendent of schools.

Members also discussed at length the salary for substitute nurses and the removal of the playground at Deerfield School.

Frank Messineo, a representative from USA Architects, the firm hired by the governing body to assist and consult in the creation of the five-year long-range facility plan, presented the board with a summary.

The report, which was mandated by the state in 2000, is the first in what will now be a requirement every five years. By law, the district must submit the plan to the state by October 1.

"We are the lucky recipient to be able to put this together from scratch," Mr. Messineo said.

He stated that the firm began with an assessment of the facilities (Beechwood and Deerfield Schools) to determine the student per square footage capacity.

At the elementary level, the ratio must be less than 125 square feet per

student. Middle schools must have 134 square feet per student.

Beechwood School, housing students in grades kindergarten through second, was determined to be functioning at below capacity with 214 students attending. The school is capable of handling 284 students within the guidelines.

Deerfield School, with a student body comprised of third through eighth graders, has a capacity of 566 students and has a current enrollment of 502. These results indicate that an enrollment increase of 70 and 64 students respectively could be handled without the need for any additional space.

"What it means to us is that in the event of student influx, you have some capacity left," Mr. Messineo said.

Capital improvements are also part of the long-range plan. Projects include the installation of a HVAC unit and roof and window replacements. The scope of work is estimated at \$3.6 million.

The board questioned Mr. Messineo on the demographics report submitted by Sara Weissman, which projected kindergarten enrollment last year at 96 students. Actual enrollment was 68 students.

"Projections are not an exact science," Mr. Messineo replied.

The board was concerned that if

the projection was so far off last year, there is the possibility it could be off again. The apprehension stemmed from the fact that projected enrollment could fall well below actual enrollment.

Mr. Messineo suggested looking at the demographics report annually as opposed to every five years in order to keep abreast of head count.

Judith Rattner, Superintendent of the Berkeley Heights School District, introduced herself to the board. Ms. Rattner and Mountainside Chief School Administrator (CSA) Dr. Richard O'Malley have been working closely to ensure that the transition of Mountainside eighth graders to Governor Livingston High School runs smoothly.

She reported that Berkeley Heights is also working on a five-year strategic plan, which will result in major renovations at the high school. The BOE was given a copy of the plan for review.

"I know the volume is large, but we're looking forward to implementing that," she said.

BOE President John Perrin stated that the board "unanimously agreed to execute the proposed (send/receive) agreement" with Berkeley Heights through 2017.

The contract was sent to the Berkeley

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Mayoral Candidates Go on Internet With Plans for Future of Westfield

By BETSEY BURGENDORF
Specialty Writer for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD — Westfield mayoral candidates Andy Skibitsky and Tom Jardim address their constituents using Internet videos in taped sessions conducted by reporter Betsy Burgdorf at *The Westfield Leader's* office. The 20-minute interviews for each are available on *The Leader's* website, goleader.com/video.

Topics discussed were traffic-calming methods, the White Paper report to improve efficiency of the Department of Public Works (DPW), knock/down teardowns, parking and the appointment of a new police chief. The appointment is made by the town administrator with the consent of the mayor and town council.

On Wednesday, September 21, Mr. Jardim joined staff in the offices of *The Leader* to re-introduce himself and talk about his vision for Westfield.



Tom Jardim

"I have a good perspective from having been in municipal government. Now, having been out of it and watching it from afar — it's a little bit like the electric utility — they (voters) just want the electric to work. When it doesn't work they get very upset," Mr. Jardim said.

Mr. Jardim stated that he feels Westfield "is basically well-run" but feels there is room for improvement. He stated that he has been hearing

a common theme from residents concerning the condition of roads and the lack of paving throughout town.

"What I am hearing is a few things — there is a great dissatisfaction of how our town is maintained overall," he said.

Mr. Jardim acknowledged that while he was serving as mayor from 1996 through 2000, he shared the responsibility for the conception of the ill-fated parking deck.

"I share a lot of credit for getting the ball rolling on the parking deck," he said. "However, the voters have spoken. I believe in democracy."

He stated that any public servant who neglects to listen to what the voters are saying "doesn't deserve to be elected or stay in office."

He noted "certain regret while formerly serving as mayor about bipartisan bickering. 'People are people,' Mr. Jardim said. He blamed group dynamics for most of the conflict.

"This time I will make sure I work with every person on town council to push this town forward," he said.

With this mind, Mr. Jardim confirmed he would maintain a working bipartisan relationship with Republican Doug Forrester in the event he is elected governor in order to reduce the tax burden on residents by claiming state aid.

On Saturday, September 24, Mayor Skibitsky had an opportunity to talk about himself and his impending campaign.

Mayor Skibitsky outlined his future plans for the next four years and conveyed his accomplishments since his appointment June 21 following

the resignation of former Mayor Greg McDermott.

"It's going extremely well," Mayor Skibitsky replied when asked how his experience has been thus far. "I set a pretty aggressive agenda in June; working on teardown issues, traffic issues. It's been a privilege."

Since his appointment, Mayor



Andy Skibitsky

Skibitsky established Saturday hours to give Westfield residents an opportunity to speak one-on-one with him about their concerns.

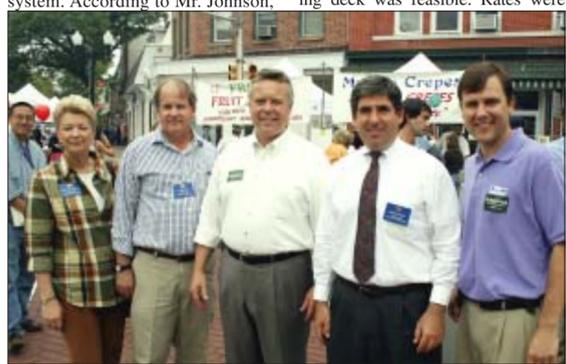
His desire to improve communication between departments is one of the main focuses of his agenda. He would also like to establish "E alerts" on the town website in which residents could write in about anything they feel is important.

Mayor Skibitsky has also taken an aggressive approach to traffic concerns in town, which was his main platform topic when he ran for town council from the third ward.

"Last year was the lowest rate in five years of the number of accidents and injuries," Mayor Skibitsky reported.

Mayor Skibitsky has also been

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FALL CAMPAIGN...At Festfall, last Sunday, Republican Freholder candidates Patricia Quattrocchi, Al Dill, and Stuart Kline rally around Governor candidate Doug Forrester, center, and State Senator Tom Kean, Jr (R-21), right. *Horace Corbin for The Westfield Leader and The Times*

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