

GW Residents Question Future of School Property

By KATHY MARQUES
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

GARWOOD—As the year draws to a close, Garwood residents are concerned about the future of St. Anne's School property on Second Avenue. Multiple residents asked the borough council at Tuesday's night meeting for new information about the status of the school and developer James Ward. Mr. Ward had proposed the lot be transformed into a 55-and-over housing community or that the school be leased to Hillcrest Academy, which is operated by the Union County Educational Services Commission and serves Elizabeth students who require "a structured learning environment."

(See related story on page 1). Mayor Dennis McCarthy said, "As of this moment, we've heard that Mr. Ward has backed down from leasing the school to Hillcrest Academy and will try to develop housing property on the site. Currently, he is not on the agenda for the next planning board meeting."

Members of the Garwood Boy Scouts Troop 75 attended the meeting. The mayor addressed the "full crowd" and thanked the scouts for cleaning up the North Avenue bus stop.

"The boy scouts worked very hard refurbishing the bus stop at North Avenue and Walnut Streets and I would like to acknowledge them and thank them for their efforts. On behalf of [myself], the council members and residents of Garwood, we thank you for your work. You are being awarded a certificate of accomplishment and the Citizenship and

Community Merit Badge," he said. Councilman Damien Mitchell thanked the Garwood Public Celebrations Committee, comprised of 14 mayoral appointed volunteers, for their "great work" on the tree-lighting ceremony Saturday.

"The committee did a great job preparing the event. It was well attended and everyone had a good time," he said.

Bruce Paterson, a committee member, said the committee would sell luminary kits with sand for \$6 on Saturday and Sunday from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the Little League Field house on Myrtle Street. "We are always looking for volunteers," he said.

The committee will hold a holiday house-decorating contest; judging will be the weekend before Christmas.

Santa Claus will ride on the Garwood fire truck starting at noon on Sunday. "He'll ride from the North Side of town, from Willow Avenue to the Park, and there will be Santa Stops along the way so the kids can stop and see him," Fire Chief Rich Bonfanti said.

Mayor McCarthy thanked Mr. Mitchell for his "many years of service to the community."

"You've been a councilman from January 1, 2001 to December 31, 2006. You will be missed and I would like to commend you on your years of service to the residents of Garwood. Best wishes to you and your family," the mayor said.

Mr. Mitchell did not run for reelection and will be replaced in January by Councilman-elect Keith Sluka.

"Garwood is a great small town to live and raise a family and my daughter received a great education here. Thank you to everyone for your support," Mr. Mitchell said.

The council's last meeting of the year is Tuesday, December 19, at 7 p.m. at Borough Hall.



'TIS THE SEASON...Left, Garwood Mayor Dennis McCarthy smiles with Santa Claus in front of the borough's Christmas tree, lit at Garwood's annual tree-lighting on Saturday. Right, the Yuletide Carolers from Far Hills sing songs of the season.

WF Planning Board

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Trail expressed doubt about the plan, saying it would "create an additional non-conforming lot."

Mr. Lanzafama said the new lots would be consistent with the majority of the area's lots and would comply with rear-yard setback requirements, which the current property does not. He said, "I don't think the burden on the neighborhood outweighs the benefit of having the additional setback."

Elizabeth Perdek of 11 Mohawk trail voiced concerns about the aesthetic impact two new houses would have on the neighborhood. She called the building of some taller houses in the area "harassment to these people who own these ranch houses" and said she disliked the "disjointed, ugly look of Mohawk and other areas."

Kim McGowan of 13 Mohawk Trail said of new construction, "It is destroying the character of our neighborhood." Drainage and flooding, proximity

to a sewer line and lag time between demolition and rebuilding were also among neighbors' concerns.

Rudy Daunno, an owner of Duanno Development Company, said he would be happy to go through the Architectural Review board, the Site Plan Review board and the Tree Preservation board to alleviate some of the neighbors' concerns.

The second appeal of the night came from Michael Mahoney, who sought approval to demolish the houses on the lots at 649 and 655 Fourth Avenue and subdivide the combined lots into four new lots. Each would have a single family home, forming a cul-de-sac. Mr. Mahoney said he intends to name the new street in honor of the late town attorney Charlie Brandt.

Mr. Mahoney also sought exemptions from three New Jersey Residential Site Improvement Standards. The standards require a 50-foot right-of-way as well as a 30-foot cartway. At the suggestion of Town Planner Judy Thornton, Mr. Mahoney proposed a 40-foot right-of-way and a 23-foot cartway width in order to create bigger lots and use less pavement and concrete.

Standards require that sidewalks be constructed; however, as there are no connecting sidewalks that lead up to the lots in question, Mr. Mahoney proposed no sidewalks be constructed.

James Watson, a surveyor and planner with EKA Associates in Scotch Plains, presented the subdivision plans.

When the floor opened to questions, Karen Fishman of 23 Cornwall Drive asked, "Have you taken into consideration that the Gumbert Fields are right there, and people may be parking on both sides?" She said she worried that emergency vehicles might not be able to fit through in these cases.

Board members said the town council would likely restrict parking to one side of the street, which would allow room for emergency vehicles to safely pass to the end of the cul-de-sac.

Other neighborhood residents expressed concerns about tree removal, drainage, sewage lines, rodent control and aesthetic consistency of the neighborhood. Mr. Mahoney assured neighbors he was willing to go through the appropriate town boards in order to further address some of their concerns. The board voted unanimously to approve Mr. Maloney's appeal.

POLICE BLOTTER

Westfield Fanwood

Thursday, November 26, a Plainfield resident reported the theft of his motor vehicle, a white, two-door 1994 Mazda, from a municipal lot at the north-side Westfield train station. He told police the vehicle was removed between approximately noon on November 24 and 11 a.m. on November 26. The vehicle had not been recovered.

Monday, November 27, Hugo Araujo, 40, of Westfield was arrested on the 800 block of Summit Avenue on two outstanding Teaneck motor vehicle warrants totaling \$850. He was released after posting bail.

Monday, November 27, Lamar Bracy, 24, of Plainfield was arrested following a motor vehicle stop on the 900 block of West South Avenue on an outstanding Plainfield criminal warrant. Bracy was released after posting \$500 bail.

Tuesday, November 28, Garth Ebanks, 36, of Plainfield was arrested following a motor vehicle stop on the 600 block of West South Avenue on outstanding criminal warrants from Amandale and Elizabeth, each with bail of \$500. Ebanks posted bail on the Amandale warrant and was released on his own recognizance on the Elizabeth warrant.

Wednesday, November 29, David Samsonia, 20, of Scotch Plains was arrested on open motor vehicle warrants from Plainfield, for \$283; Green Brook, for \$300, and Fanwood, for \$81. Unable to post bail, he was turned over to the Green Brook Police Department.

Wednesday, November 29, Brian A. Mundy, 19, of Scotch Plains was arrested in Westfield Municipals Court on an open criminal warrant from Union Township for \$250. He was released after posting bail.

Thursday, November 30, Peter Cacciuto, 18, of Fanwood was arrested at Brightwood Park on Prospect Street during a motor vehicle stop and charged with possession of drug paraphernalia. He was released on his own recognizance.

Thursday, November 30, Steve McIntyre, 22, of Roselle was arrested on a disorderly person charge in a municipal lot to the rear of a Central Avenue business. According to police, McIntyre was part of a group of young people that had congregated around the door to the establishment, blocking the entrance. He allegedly refused multiple requests by a police officer to move away from the door and then pushed the officer with his guitar. McIntyre was released on his own recognizance.

Saturday, December 2, a Mountaineer resident reported the rear view mirror on his motor vehicle was shattered while the vehicle was parked at the south side Westfield train station.

Saturday, December 2, a Westfield resident reported that the windshield on his motor vehicle was cracked while the vehicle was parked at the south side Westfield train station.

Sunday, December 3, Jill Veltri, 23, of Westfield was arrested during a motor vehicle stop at Boulevard and Park Street and charged with possession of less than 50 grams of marijuana. She was released on her own recognizance.

Tuesday, November 28, a resident of O'Donnell Avenue reported a theft. According to police, the front bumper was removed from the victim's car while it was parked in the street.

Tuesday, November 28, a resident of Raritan Road reported a burglary. According to police, the victim's unlocked garage was entered and a snow blower was removed. The value of the snow blower was \$1,600.

Wednesday, November 29, a resident of Westfield Road reported being the victim of identity theft. According to police, someone used the victim's Social Security number to obtain insurance.

Thursday, November 30, an East Second Street resident reported being the victim of harassment. According to police, a former friend called the victim several times and left messages on his answering machine.

Thursday, November 30, an employee of Scotch Plains-Fanwood High School reported being the victim of criminal mischief. According to police, while the victim was at work, someone scratched the side of his vehicle.

Thursday, November 30, Tyler Smith, 21, of Plainfield was arrested and charged with criminal trespassing. According to police, a call was received reporting a suspicious person. Police found the suspect sitting behind the wheel of a car that did not belong to him. Smith was transported to police headquarters where he was processed and released.

WF Leaders to Discuss School Financing

WESTFIELD—Area leaders will meet on Friday, December 8, from 9 to 10:30 a.m. in the Community Room of the Westfield Library, located at 550 East Broad Street, to hear speakers discuss latest developments in Trenton and how potential state funding decisions could affect Westfield schools.

Speakers include Assemblyman Jon Bramnick (LD-21), Lynn Strickland from the Garden State Coalition of Schools and Jefferson School Principal Jeanette Munoz. They will also discuss January 23 Westfield school bond referendum.

Ms. Munoz will give a brief description of a recent visit to an early childhood learning center in Berkeley Heights. A video will describe the rationale for the bond, and there will be a question-and-answer period.

Those invited include Westfield PTO members, current and former board of education members, Westfield Mayor Andrew Skibitsky and town council members.

WF Recreation Commission

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within five years.

"The availability of the turf would allow us to play more games. The fields are run down over the years," he said. "It needs a lot of work, and we are having to book tournaments at other towns' fields."

"There have been expressed concerns over the size of the field drainage, the cost of the turfing—but the complex should be considered in the coming years," Commissioner Debra Judd said.

The last renovations to Gumbert Field were completed eight to 10 years ago, Mr. White said. Two years ago the league spent "a couple hundred dollars" renovating the fields, and they plan to do it again due to drainage.

"Turfing could be years away with contracts. You will need to have some band-aid," Ms. Judd said.

"We have to look at this project along with our other capital projects

like Memorial Park," Commission Chairman Jim Marvin said.

"However, because of the soccer field we have a contractor and we have learned from our mistakes with that, so we do have some experience with turf fields," said Town Councilman Pete Echausse, liaison to the commission. "Realistically you could be considered for the 2008 budget, but you may want to consider legging out the project."

The commission encouraged the league to find sponsorship to expedite the process.

Westfield High School Athletic Director Edward Tranchina has requested the use of the two new turf fields at Houlihan and Sid Faye Fields on Lamberts Mill Road for the WHS lacrosse team. "We will take this request into consideration," Mr. Kauffman said. Also, the commission is considering new playground equipment for installation at Gumbert, Tamaques and Windsor Parks, Mr. Kauffman said.

The Red Cross will host a senior disaster drill this Saturday to help senior citizens better understand how to act in a disaster situation. Volunteers are needed.

Family night will be held on New Year's Eve, Sunday, December 31, at the Westfield National Guard Armory from 6 to 10 p.m.

WF Town Council

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kids." Ultimately, the council voted unanimously to defer the resolution, provided another public meeting be held in two weeks.

William Heinbokel, chairman of the town's land-use task force, said he listened to quality-of-life concerns of various "stakeholders"—concerns included issues such as noise, demolition notification, Porto-John placement and excessive shade-tree removal.

He said he would meet with the building community on Tuesday, December 12, at 7 p.m. in the administrator's conference room. Any inquiries or opinions can be sent to landuse@westfieldnj.gov.

During public comment, former councilman Rafael Betancourt of Golf Edge addressed Fourth Ward Councilman Tom Bigosinski concerning comments made during last week's conference session.

Mr. Betancourt said he "read the

paper last week and noticed there was a lack of civility in the last meeting. Whether it's a Republican or a Democrat, I don't think there's any place for that in our town."

He added, "four-letter words should not be used in our public discussions. Mr. Bigosinski, you are a learned man. I don't think you use those words in court. I don't think you should use them when addressing matters involving our town. I take exception to the words you used."

Mr. Bigosinski apologized, "I greatly regret losing my cool. And to you (Mr. Betancourt) and to the rest of the town and to everyone on the dais, I wanted to apologize and express my profound regret to the way I conducted myself. It's not appropriate...I realize you (Mr. Betancourt) came here for the purpose of slamming me, but I'm grateful to you for doing it. I know you speak for a good percentage of people in this town and I do again want to apologize to you."

WF Board of Education

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of money for fund balance against an \$85-million budget.

Superintendent William Foley presented an enrollment forecast, saying, "Total enrollment has changed remarkably over the last 10 years."

He said enrollment has leveled off but is still increasing, and "pressures are not likely to diminish soon." He said it is difficult to determine kindergarten enrollment because of parents opting for full-time private kindergarten programs.

"Typically, first grade will run 30 percent higher than live births reported from six years ago," Mr. Foley said. Looking at the district's six elementary schools, he said Wilson and Jefferson Schools might experience enrollment problems next year.

Ms. Leiz said it is hard to anticipate house "knock downs" that might rebuild in Westfield and sell to families. Mr. Foley responded that it is "difficult to monitor" houses sold to families entering the district.

Board member Gary McCready said the district needs to consider the age-

restricted housing units to be built on Prospect Street and in Garwood, which might be comprised of people who already live in Westfield and who then might sell their homes to families, potentially increasing enrollment.

"The problems we are facing now will not diminish," Mr. Foley said.

The board approved the final reading of five policies, relating to conflict of interest, use of wireless devices on school property and the passive breath alcohol-sensor device for school proms without discussion.

The board also approved the first reading of the 2007-2008 school calendar, which includes a spring break after Easter, as well as two days off for Rosh Hashanah. "The school calendar is at best a compromise of values," Mr. Foley said.

The board also approved the bid award for natural gas deliveries for January through December 2007 to Woodruff Energy of Brighton for the amount of \$10.81 per dekatherm, reflecting a \$150,000 savings for the district on energy costs over last year.



FAMILY FUN...Father and daughter enjoy music from the Westfield Community Band and Choral Arts Society, along with all the holiday activities at the town's annual Christmas tree-lighting ceremony last weekend.

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HAPPY BIRTHDAY...Washington School students help crossing guard Mildred Moore celebrate her 80th birthday on November 28. Mrs. Moore has been a Washington guard for 50 years. Pictured with her are, left to right, are: Christina and Caroline Seery, Jenna and Matthew Reed and Evan and Olivia McElheny.