

Council Passes Eight Ordinances, Increases Multiple Municipal Fees

By DON WILLIAMS
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD - At its meeting Tuesday night, the town council approved ordinances to install stop signs and designate two-hour parking zones, regulate the height of fences on residential properties, require six-

foot fencing to surround construction sites, vacate a public right-of-way and set new fees for filming in town, holding a limousine license and operating a sidewalk café.

First Ward Councilman Peter Echausse stood in as acting mayor, as Mayor Andy Skibitsky was away on

business and the alternate mayor, Third Ward Councilman Mark Ciarrocca, was on vacation.

An ordinance was approved unanimously to add stop signs at the intersection of Sherman and Harding Streets, with signs stopping traffic on Harding Street, and at Hyslip Avenue and Edgar Road, stopping traffic on Edgar Road. The ordinance adds two-hour parking zones on both sides of Walnut Street between Elm Street and Mountain Avenue and on both sides of Kimball Avenue between Elm Street and Lawrence Avenue.

The council approved new fees for filming in Westfield, requiring an initial filming permit to be purchased for \$100, with an expedited permit set at \$225. Additionally, daily filming fees have increased from \$500 to \$1,000. Non-profit organizations filming educational documentaries or public television programs can obtain filming permits for \$25 with no daily filming fee. There is no fee for student applicants filming for educational or public television purposes.

The limousine license fee has risen from \$10 to \$50. Restaurants operating sidewalk cafés will now be charged based upon the amount of outdoor seating available, where the fee is \$100 for organizations with between one and ten seats outside and no more than two tables. The fees for additional outdoor seating are \$250 for 11 to 25 seats, \$350 for 26 to 50 seats and \$425

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CAR SHOW SUNDAY...Having fun Tuesday night during the Night, Naomi McElynn and Jenny Subjack of the Westfield Chamber of Commerce let onlookers know of the car show this coming Sunday from noon until 5 p.m. The Fire Department provided the driver, and use of the car was donated by John Russitano.

Fanwood Delays Tax Bills Awaiting State Aid Figures

By TED RITTER
Specially Written for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times

FANWOOD - Mayor Colleen Mahr and the borough council held a public hearing on a proposed municipal budget Tuesday evening.

No action was taken on the nearly \$7.7 million spending plan, which was introduced in late March, because officials are still waiting for word from the state on the borough's application for extraordinary municipal aid, as well as other state funding.

Mayor Mahr said the borough decided to go ahead with Tuesday evening's previously scheduled (and legally-required) hearing, wait for the final numbers from the state on all state funding levels and then adjust the proposed budget as needed.

"I would rather the residents be patient...as we try our hardest to get property tax relief here," Mayor Mahr told *The Leader*. "If it means that the tax bills go out a little late, the municipality will extend the grace period so that we won't penalize anyone."

The mayor and council approved a resolution Tuesday night to formally extend the August 1 tax payments.

Chief Financial Officer Fred Tomkins said the borough had expected a final decision on its aid application and other municipal funding levels by now, but the state's recent budget controversy resulted in delays.

Mr. Tomkins said the borough would likely have the numbers it needs by the end of this week or early next week. He suggested scheduling a budget amendment meeting for July 19, then a public hearing on the amended spending plan on July 25, at which time the budget could be formally adopted.

The state Department of Community Affairs' extraordinary municipal aid program is designed to provide local property tax relief; it provided \$250,000 for Fanwood's budget two years ago. Mayor Mahr said this year the borough hopes for more than \$500,000.

If any such aid materializes, it would "go a long way" toward reducing the impending property tax increase, the mayor said. The municipal portion of the property tax increase is estimated somewhere in the \$200 range for the average Fanwood homeowner. The municipal portion of the property tax comprises about 20 percent of the total tax assessment.

"No one was comfortable with that increase," the mayor told *The Times*, referring back to a series of budget-crafting meetings held this past spring.



SEVENTY-NINE YEARS YOUNG...Westfield residents Jon Holt and John Falzon partake in free Slurpees at 7-Eleven on South Avenue in Westfield on Tuesday, July 11. The company, founded in 1927, celebrates its "birthday" every July 11.



ENDORSEMENT...The Service Employee International Union (SEIU) endorsed Senator Robert Menendez on Monday, July 10, at the Westfield Community Center. Mr. Menendez toured the nursing home and was "glad to be in Westfield." When asked by *The Westfield Leader* why he visited the town, Mr. Menendez said, "Tom Kean Jr. invited us here today to come to Westfield, so we did."

Local Officials Respond to State Shutdown, Discuss Impact

By RACHEL LEOPOLD
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

UNION COUNTY - The New Jersey government is running again after an approximately weeklong shutdown that halted all nonessential state services. Local officials discussed the impact on area towns with

The Westfield Leader.

Westfield Administrator James Gildea said, "The state shutdown has had very little impact on Westfield," and officials from Scotch Plains, Fanwood and Mountainside echoed his sentiments about their respective towns.

A commonly cited problem was getting tax bills sent out on time, due to the fact that the amount of state aid given to each town must be printed on the front of each bill. The towns have not yet received their state aid figures because of the shutdown and thus cannot yet print the tax bills. While the date that towns will be notified is unknown, Mr. Gildea predicted that verification will come "within a day or two."

Fanwood Mayor Colleen Mahr said that because of the length of the shutdown and the fact that it occurred over a holiday weekend in the summertime, its effects "didn't really trickle down" to municipalities like Fanwood. She said had it gone on longer, Fanwood could have experienced a "cash flow problem."

"We have no state parks or major road projects; we're a lucky municipality in that residents didn't really feel it in Fanwood," said Mayor Mahr.

Mountainside Mayor Robert Vigilanti said the brevity of the shutdown helped to mute its effects. He said Mountainside is now feeling a "burden" of having its tax bills delayed and is set back about two weeks in the tax collecting department. Had

the shutdown persisted, he said, the town would have run out of sufficient monies around August and been forced to use its reserves.

While all the officials interviewed placed emphasis on tax bills, Scotch Plains Mayor Martin Marks also expressed concern about the impact of Governor Jon Corzine's resolution.

"The governor has crafted a budget that calls for an increase in the sales tax, where essentially half will go to property tax rebates...Ideally, what should have been done for true reform was to send the money back to municipal aid to lower everyone's property tax bills," Mayor Marks said. He said that with Governor Corzine's system, "a selected few" may have increased property tax rebates, but generally, "it is not really property tax reform and has done nothing."

Addressing the resolution, Assemblyman Jon Bramnick told *The Leader*, "I am unhappy with the resolution because the issue discussed was which taxes to raise as opposed to which cuts to make."

Scotch Plains Township Manager Thomas Atkins also posed questions about the future. While he said that a few Scotch Plains residents may have been affected by the shutdown of services like the Department of Motor Vehicles, he said, "I'm more concerned, long-range, with what these policy decisions mean and how they're going to be handled."

"I didn't get any details on how they're going to make up the \$550 million they're dedicating to property taxes," he said. He noted that the details had not been worked out as of Friday, July 7, but said they may have been settled after press deadline.

According to Mr. Atkins, more important is "what the dedication of 50 percent of the budget to property taxes means" and how this will be enacted.

"Where are they getting the money to balance the rest of the budget; how is the money going to be applied to property taxes to help residents?" he asked.

Residents, Visitors Respond to Gov. Shutdown

AREA - In the wake of Governor Corzine's shutdown of nonessential state agencies in order to resolve the state budget, *The Westfield Leader* interviewed people in our downtowns to gauge local reactions to the process. See page 10 for interviews.

Sierra Leone Releases SP Resident; Man Returns Home

By CHRISSEY HAMWAY
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

SCOTCH PLAINS - Michael Chemidlin, the Scotch Plains resident arrested for conspiracy and detained in Sierra Leone, Africa since April, was released and returned home on Sunday, July 10.

Mr. Chemidlin, 58, was given his passport last Friday, July 7, and the State Department of the United States provided his flights to London and then to New York JFK airport.

The missionary and former National Guard staff sergeant was arrested on April 29 for conspiracy while taking pictures of the United Nations court complex. Mr. Chemidlin was concluding a two-week tour of Liberia, Ghana and Sierra Leone, when he took a picture of two Sierra Leoneans in front of the court, located in the nation's capital, Freetown.

During the more-than-two-month

ordeal, Mr. Chemidlin was first arrested for conspiracy and released. He was then rearrested for espionage and encountered multiple court delays.

Mr. Chemidlin is a Vietnam veteran who spent last year in Iraq with the New Jersey Army National Guard.

He faced 15 years in jail if convicted of the charges. He spent 21 days in Pademba Road Prison and was then released but not allowed to leave Freetown. A judge ruled he was innocent on July 4, but it was not until July 7 that his passport was returned to him.

"We're thrilled that he's back on American soil and we can't wait to welcome him home the right way," Mr. Chemidlin's sister, Emmy Salerno, told *The Westfield Leader* and *Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times*.

FreeUncleMike.com reported on Monday that Mr. Chemidlin is currently staying with family in New York after an overnight stay with friends in London.

MS Council Discusses Library Funding Bill

By KIMBERLY A. BROADWELL
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

MOUNTAINSIDE - During the July agenda-setting council meeting Tuesday evening, Mayor Robert F. Vigilanti and council members discussed their support of a bill put together by Assemblyman, Eric Munoz regarding libraries and their tax rate.

According to bill A3133, sponsored by the assemblyman and introduced in May to amend a 1945 law, local municipal boards of library commissioners would be permitted to reduce the library tax rate when a municipality acquires new ratables.

According to the bill, permission could be granted through library boards for a municipal governing body to reduce the amount of taxes assessed for library purposes. This reduction would be for any year in which it determines it requires less funding.

An example used by the bill noted that if a new mall is built within a town it increases tax revenues going to that town, but it does not increase the amount of persons living in that town. Thus, the bill states that even though tax revenue is increased, people using the library have not.

During the discussion, the mayor said that there has been a drastic increase in monies going to the library in recent years. He said that "since 2001, money going to the library from the municipal budget every year has gone up dramatically as the value of Mountainside homes has increased."

This past spring, as he was preparing to introduce the budget, the mayor had said that because of a law dating back to 1945, which automatically

allocates money to libraries based on tax revenues, the library has received increases from the last three years totaling \$172,764. He further said that the biggest increase, \$62,651, has been for the 2006 budget.

The mayor said that in 2001 the library received \$356,000 from the municipal budget with a steady rise every year.

He said that the law had been written to automatically provide monies for libraries as new people were coming into the town. It was meant to provide the library with adequate materials for the amount of people living in any given municipality, he said.

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PAVING THE WAY...A crew repaves a section of North Avenue. Total efforts will repave the street from the East Broad Street intersection in Westfield to Terrill Road in Scotch Plains. This work has caused traffic snarls for the past week.

WSA Addresses Field Allocation, Pool Renovation

By SARA MAGNOLA
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD - Three board members from the Westfield Soccer Association (WSA) attended the Westfield Recreation Commission meeting on July 10 to tell commis-

sioners about a newly created field planning committee that will deal with the field allocation issues that have arisen regarding Houlihan and Sid Fay fields.

Robert Clancy, vice president of operations for the WSA, said, "The WSA has recognized the need for a change and the (committee) includes representatives from Intercounty, Recreation and Travel."

Scott Faktor, vice president of intercounty, said that there has been an "informal monopoly" of the turf fields but that they will be "re-working" the process to ensure they are more equally shared in the future.

Chairman Jim Marvin commended the WSA on its "rapid response" to the concerns the commission heard in June from then Vice President of Intercounty Soccer Bob Oberlander. Mr. Marvin said the creation of the committee seems to address the issues of "openness and input" during the scheduling process.

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CAMPAIGN PARTY...Ann and Larry Carey of Westfield hold a fundraiser at their home last Sunday evening for Asw. Linda Stender of Fanwood who is the Democrat Candidate for Congress (District 7) in this November's election. Pictured, left to right, are: Mrs. Carey, Mrs. Stender and Mr. Carey.

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