

Foley Proposes Centralized Kindergarten to Replace Hillcrest

By MEGHAN GILL
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD — Superintendent of Schools William Foley presented a plan to the board of education (BOE) Tuesday night to convert the former Lincoln School facility on Westfield Avenue to a centralized kindergarten. Multiple parents expressed support for the option at the meeting.

More than 100 residents attended a standing-room-only meeting the previous night, Monday, with BOE and Union County Education Services (UCEDC) officials over ongoing neighborhood safety concerns for UCESC-operated Hillcrest Academy which leases the Lincoln building from the BOE. The meeting followed the arrest of four Hillcrest students for allegedly vandalizing a home in the neighborhood and stealing a car at the train station last month.

Mr. Foley said Tuesday, "I see no future for Hillcrest Academy at the Westfield Avenue location."

"Yes I think that we need to put an end to this, and I think that this is going to go from bad to worse. It is unconscionable to evict these kids without giving the UCESC an oppor-

tunity to find alternative facilities. We will have to give them one year to find another facility," he said.

Lisa Stern and neighbors said the board should terminate the lease immediately and give the school a 90-day notice of vacancy, rather than a



CONCERNED CITIZENS...More than 100 residents listen as officials discuss Hillcrest Academy on Monday night.

one-year notice of non-renewal.

UCESC Superintendent Ed Hartnett and his staff, Westfield Police Captain David Wayman, councilmen Dave Haas and Mark Ciarrocca and BOE member Alice Hunnicutt attended Monday's meeting. BOE President Anne Riegel and Business Administrator Robert Berman were not present; Mr. Foley

attended but left early.

"It is a disgrace the Mr. Foley has left," said Sue Hopper, one of the residents who organized the meeting.

Mr. Hartnett told residents about the function of the UCESC and the composition of all of the students who are serviced by this commission.

"I would like people to leave here with the understanding of what the UCESC is, the programs that have been housed here and an overview of staffing, programs and corrective measures that have been put in place after the incident (recent arrest of Hillcrest students) and to provide members of the community with a chance to offer questions and a plan for a communication system between the community and the UCESC," he said.

A member of the audience interrupted him, saying that there was no need to go into a formal presentation about the UCESC functions and services. Mr. Hartnett said that students currently attending Hillcrest are from two programs, the interim alternative education program and the Hillcrest Academy south campus program.

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Cassie Lo for The Westfield Leader

LINE UP...Luke Ricci, Jennifer Zhu, Jesse Cohn, Matt Carvel, Rachel Charatan, Kayla McDermott, Sam Coulson, Annie Peyton, Alex Kao, Carrie Palumbo, Kevin McAlister, Jenn Metz and Matt Colon pose at Jesse Cohn's pre-prom party. Westfield High School held its prom at the Woodbridge Sheraton on Saturday night.

BOE Votes to Swap Leaders at Wilson, Washington Schools

By MEGHAN GILL
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD — The board of education (BOE) voted unanimously Tuesday night in favor of Schools Superintendent William Foley's decision to transfer the Washington and Wilson School principals, effective July 1.

The board held its meeting at

Westfield High School due to the large number of parents and faculty predicted to attend the meeting in opposition to the superintendent's decision.

Mr. Foley addressed the assembly and board at the beginning of the meeting regarding his decision. "I have been considering a move at Wilson for at least four years. Since I was going to place a vice principal in the building, I thought that it would be appropriate to make this change."

The plan involves moving current Washington School Principal Joseph Malanga to Wilson School. Cheryl Dunkiel Berkowitz, the coordinator of the gifted and talented program, will work as a half-time vice principal. Wilson Principal Andrew Perry will move to Washington.

In an e-mail he sent to parents, Mr. Foley stated, "I believe that school leaders grow and schools improve when there is a change in leadership...the

second issue I have to address is the size of Wilson School and the need for additional supervision."

Board Vice President Ginny Leiz limited public comment on this topic to one hour. Parents addressed the board, citing different reasons why they disapprove of a change of leadership and asking the board to shelve the agenda item.

Parent Christina Bangs said: "It is fair to say that the predominant feeling of the community is outrage. What initially looked like some kind of a new policy now seems to be your reasoned attempt at dealing with overcrowding at Wilson school."

"We do not have any objection to change; in fact we have been waiting for change to Wilson School. We respectfully, but strongly, urge you to stop this from happening, at least until next year," she said.

Wilson parent Sean Reilly said, "limiting the time to one hour is wrong. You did not limit it to an hour when discussing the budget."

"I don't think anyone here questions your authority or decision-making process. As parents and intelligent people, we believe that this is a wrong decision. I have not yet heard anyone express their opinion in favor of this," he said.

Deborah Montick, a parent of four children who attended Wilson, addressed the board. "Before turning the long-established traditions of Wilson and Washington Schools on their head, I urge this board to table the ratifica-

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Plainfield Woman to Serve Eight Years for Robbery

WESTFIELD — A 41-year-old Plainfield woman was sentenced to an eight-year state prison term Friday for a robbery that netted her \$165 last July in Westfield.

Union County Prosecutor Theodore J. Romankow said Lorretta Turnage, 41, of Plainfield will have to serve at least 85 percent of her sentence before she is released because the violent nature of the crime falls under New Jersey's No Early Release statute.

Turnage was convicted in a robbery from July 15, 2005, in which she put a Woodmere Drive, Westfield, resident in a headlock inside his apartment and removed his wallet containing \$165 after he refused to give her money.

She was arrested on Thursday, October 6, 2005, when Westfield officers spotted her on the corner of East Broad

and North Streets, said Westfield Police Sergeant Scott Rodger. She was held in lieu of \$100,000 bail and transported to the Union County jail. After the sentencing, she was sent back to the Union County jail to await transfer to state prison.

In a press release issued by the Union County Prosecutor's Office, State Superior Court Judge John Triarsi, at the Union County courthouse in Elizabeth, said, "The defendant's prior criminal record was substantial and that she has graduated from drug possession convictions to more serious offenses and that she learned nothing from being on probation and parole."

"There is a heavy price to pay when there is street violence against innocent citizens," Mr. Romankow said.



Chrissy Hamway for The Westfield Leader and The Times

EVERY VOTE COUNTS...State Senator Tom Kean, Jr. casts his vote Tuesday with his wife, Rhonda, (not shown) and daughters by his side at the Westfield Memorial Library. Mr. Kean won a primary Tuesday to officially win the Republican nomination for U.S. Senate.

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Town Council Discusses Town Attorney Compensation, Repeals South Avenue, Elm Street Redevelopment Plans

By MICHAEL J. POLLACK
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD — At Tuesday's public meeting, the Westfield council further discussed lowering legal expenses, passed on second reading the capital improvement program, amended the zoning map to revert to its status prior to redevelopment plans and passed on first reading an ordinance fixing salaries for the mayor, council and certain officers of the town.

During the public comment segment of the meeting, Jim Baker of Lincoln Road, citing a *Westfield Leader* article, asked First Ward Councilman Peter Echausse, "Why did the town raise the rate (it compensated its town attorney) by 50 percent (after the 2004 budget cycle)?"

"The town deserves to have this put before competitive bid," Mr. Baker said. "The article mentions Mr. Cockren belongs to a national firm. Maybe there are other national attorneys who could suffice and do an excellent job for the Town of Westfield at a lower rate."

Councilman Echausse asked Mr. Baker, "Are you here as a citizen, as a member of the Westfield Democratic Committee, as WE CARE? You wear many masks every time you come up."

Mr. Baker said, "Every time this council is criticized, Mr. Echausse turns red, huffs and puffs and says

this is a political ploy. This is the third time you've had an outburst. Why are we not looking at the legal expenses with the same microscope as the rest of the expenses in town? I'm here as a citizen."

Councilman Echausse said he told Fourth Ward Councilman Tom Bigosinski, who introduced the issue of legal expenses, that he "would delay the vote on the budget if he (Bigosinski) could provide factual evidence that what he's saying is true in terms of other towns (paying a lesser rate). He said he 'didn't think he could do it.'"

He said, "Shame on you, Mr. Baker, for believing everything that *The Westfield Leader* writes. Mr. Pollack knows I sat with him for an hour and gave him a breakdown of everything the town attorney had done in 2004 and 2005. I can't control what anyone in the newspaper said. There's more to the story. There (are) some people on this dais who are talking out of both sides of their mouth."

Mayor Andrew Skibitsky said Mr. Baker "embellished what really happened" by describing the jump in compensation as a "50 percent increase." The mayor said Mr. Baker "strongly suggested the town has poor legal service. The town receives great legal service from Mr. Cockren and his firm."

During introduction of an ordinance to fix the annual salaries for the mayor,

council members and certain officers, Third Ward Councilman David Haas said he would introduce next week a model ordinance to put all professional services out to bid and have an oversight committee. Councilmen Haas and Bigosinski voted no on the ordinance to set salaries. The measure passed 6-2, with Fourth Ward Councilman Jim Foerst absent.

Councilman Echausse presented on second reading an ordinance that approves the annual capital improvement program at \$3,770,000. The program funds work involving "streets, sidewalks, drainage issues, DPW (Department of Public Works) and police upgrades," the councilman said.

The council approved demolitions to 658 Tremont Avenue, 218 Sunset Avenue, 224 Orchard Street, 825 Summit Avenue, 819 Embree Crescent, 218 West Dudley Avenue and 500-512 and 430 Central Avenue.

The town also completed the final portion of repealing the South Avenue and Elm Street redevelopment plans, which had involved the ultimately unsuccessful parking deck



Don Williams for The Westfield Leader

IT'S ELECTRIC...An electrician works on the wiring for a new traffic signal at the intersection of East Broad Street and Mountain Avenue while a policeman directs traffic. The town expects the signal, along with one being installed at East Broad Street and Central Avenue, to be operational by the end of this summer.

Michael Chemidlin Court Hearing Begins; Proceedings 'Unclear' to Family Members

SCOTCH PLAINS — The court hearing for Michael Chemidlin of Scotch Plains has been postponed to today, June 8, in Sierra Leone, Africa, according to family spokesman Anthony Cinelli of Los Angeles, Mr. Chemidlin's nephew.

Mr. Cinelli of Los Angeles said Monday that after speaking with family members this past weekend, "it is unclear what is going on."

According to an email dated June 2 to the family from the United States Consulate's office in Sierra Leone, last Friday's hearing was delayed because the "director of public prosecutions is contemplating an action, but needs to get the attorney general's approval first."

Mr. Cinelli said that the family has

heard that the hearing had been originally postponed to June 5 because officials were asking for more money from the family. "With suspicion, doubt and confusion growing, the family is beginning to become more fearful," Mr. Cinelli said.

Chemidlin's son, Andrew Chemidlin of Scotch Plains, said his father is in "good spirits, joking while on a break from the hearing, walking around outside the courthouse." He told his father to make sure to "put away his camera."

Michael Chemidlin is a 58-year-old veteran of the Vietnam and Iraq wars, an Army National Guard staff sergeant, a Scotch Plains resident and father of three sons. He is being held by authorities in Sierra Leone, charged with pho-

tographing a United Nations courthouse in the country, an act considered illegal in the West African nation.

After his recent tour of duty in Iraq, Mr. Chemidlin said he went to Sierra Leone looking "to spread goodwill, charity and God's love to those less fortunate." Upon arriving in Sierra Leone, he took pictures of a United Nations courthouse and on May 5, he and three Sierra Leoneans accompanying him were imprisoned for picture taking.

The family is in contact with the state department and local authorities to help defend their father and provide financial support. Regular status reports are provided on a website setup by Mr. Cinelli, freeunclemike.com.