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THE SCOTCH PLAINS - FANWOOD

TIMES



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SIXTY CENTS

Council Approves Zoning Change For Hedge Property By 4-1 Vote

By FRED T. ROSSI Specially Written for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times

SCOTCH PLAINS — A splittownship council gave its approval Tuesday night to an ordinance that re-zones the township-owned hedge property next to the Municipal Building for a 9,000-square-foot tract that can be sold to a private developer.

Mayor Martin Marks, saying the property presently serves no purpose, called it "an asset" for taxpayers, adding that its eventual sale will bring money into township coffers and also add a property tax rateable once the site is developed for a mixed-use building.

The mayor cautioned, however, that development of the property would not serve as a magic bullet for the revitalization of the entire downtown business district. Citing comparisons of the comparatively quiet Scotch Plains downtown to thriving downtowns in neighboring Westfield, Cranford and Summit, Mayor Marks said what those towns do "is they continually strive to improve themselves. If there's a lesson there, Scotch Plains should take it."

The ordinance formally changes the designation of the property, which is situated between the municipal parking lot and Park Avenue, from "P-Public" to "B-2-Business," thus allowing it to be sold to a private entity that would then be able to build a mixed-use building containing retail and professional office space, and possibly second-story apartments.

The council's vote was 4-1, with

Councilwoman Nancy Malool voting against the zoning change because of concerns about the effect of a new building on parking as well as her feeling that without a plan for the types of businesses that might locate there, such a re-zoning was premature.

Declaring herself "adamantly opposed" to the re-zoning, Councilwoman Malool said that without some type of development mechanism, such as a special improvement district (SID), in place, there will be no way to control what types of businesses might go into a new building and whether those businesses would be viable.

"Putting up a building for the sake of putting up a building in hopes it will revitalize the downtown," she said, "makes no sense to me." She urged a delay in re-zoning until the township's Master Plan review is completed later this year.

Several residents spoke during the 90-minute public hearing, with former mayor Joan Papen opposing the zoning change.

Without a SID-type entity to oversee management of the downtown, she said, "everything is being done as patchwork."

She also said that several dozen parking spaces in the municipal lot would be eliminated by the new building. But Mayor Marks cited a 1999 parking study that concluded that if the municipal lot were to be reconfigured and merged with adjacent private lots a net gain of about 85 parking spaces would result.

Thomas DeNizio said Councilwoman Malool was the "only one who uses the proper analysis for the opposition in that there is no clear, thoughtful reason" for a zoning change at this time.

Resident Sal Trifiro said changing the zoning before having a development plan in place "seems like putting the cart before the horse." Mayor Marks told Mr. Trifiro that local authorities would be able to have some control over how the site is developed.

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FANWOOD FUN...Residents enjoy the good food at the Fanwood Street Fair last Sunday. Although dodging the rain, there were several breaks in the weather enabling everyone to have a good time.



HATS OFF!...Scotch Plains Fanwood High School Class of 2006 students throw their caps at graduation on June 22nd.

SPFHS Class of 2006 Celebrates Commencement for 318 Grads

By CHRISSY HAMWAY Specially Written for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times

SCOTCH PLAINS — Scotch Plains-Fanwood High School (SPFHS) celebrated the graduation of the 318 members of the Class of 2006 last Thursday, June 22, on Tyson Field.

Several administrators gave speeches at the graduation, including the Board of Education (BOE) President Thomas Russo and Superintendent of Schools Carol Choye. Ms. Choye will retire this summer after 13 years as superintendent.

Following a processional and the national anthem, played by the high school band, SPFHS Principal David Heisey welcomed and thanked the BOE and faculty, as well as graduates and their families and friends.

"You are members of the millennium generation," he said, referencing others' negative views that the current generation is "apathetic."

He said that although some Americans are not hopeful for the millennium generation, studies have shown that current teenagers are more upbeat and display more teamwork, modesty and good conduct than those of their parents' generation. Mr. Heisey said he believes that the millennium generation's "biggest challenge" will be to conquer "extreme capitalism" in other countries, just as previous generations worked to conquer communism.

Mr. Heisey concluded his speech by referring to the Class of 2006 as the "next great generation" before turning over the podium to Class Valedictorian Cleo Chou.

Cleo expressed her fondness and attachment to the Class of 2006, reminiscing on the 13 years she spent in the Scotch Plains-Fanwood school district. Her memories included her fellow classmates dancing in a circle at senior prom.

"These 13 years were the best, and

I love you," Cleo said.

After Cleo's speech, Mr. Heisey introduced Salutatorian Raunaq Palejwala. Raunaq commended his classmates and described the great opportunities that lie before his classmates. He congratulated the Class of 2006 for meeting every requirement needed for graduation, as well as go-



SUCCESS!...One SPFHS student rejoices after receiving his diploma.

ing far beyond them.

"The future is here, and the future is ready — ready for the outstanding Scotch Plains-Fanwood Class of 2006," said Raunaq after wishing Ms. Choye a "merry retirement."

A group of students then sang a selection called "Like an Eagle," which included solos by many of the students.

The performance was followed by a speech by Mr. Russo. Mr. Russo joked that few people would have predicted that the great Fanwood oak would be gone and Alfonso's pizzeria would remain. He then read a description from a magazine critiquing teenagers, later revealing that it was written in the 1920s, and the generation it was describing later went on to become "the greatest generation." He urged the Class of 2006 to try its best to solve world hunger and stop terrorism and global warming.

"Go for it, have fun, but don't forget to call your parents," Mr. Russo said.

After Mr. Russo's speech, Superintendent Choye gave a speech before presenting the Class of 2006. Ms. Choye said that this class holds a "special place" in her heart because she has been working in the school district since the graduates were in kindergarten. She acknowledged her belief that each student has made a difference in his or her own way.



MOMENT OF TRUTH...Scotch Plains Fanwood High School Principal Dr. David Heisey hands out diplomas to the members of the Class of 2006.

Newspaper Office Closed for July 4

The newspaper office will be closed Tuesday, July 4. Please provide submittals as early as possible for consideration in next week's publication. E-mail to: editor@goleader.com.

SP Planning Board Says Hedge Property Re-Zoning Inconsistent

By FRED T. ROSSI Specially Written for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times

SCOTCH PLAINS — The township planning board on Monday reaffirmed its recommendation that the township council not re-zone the hedge property adjacent to the municipal building. It also passed a resolution stating that the rezoning ordinance set to be voted on by the council this week is not consistent with the township's master plan.

Last month, the board voted 5-4 against recommending the zoning change after members expressed concern about changing the property's designation before more specific plans were in place for the lot. Last year, the board ratified the subdivision of the property, which is situated between the municipal parking lot and Park Avenue, about 9,000 square feet in total area. The council then asked the board to look into a rezoning of the property from its present "P"-public to a "B-2"-business designation.

At its meeting on Monday, the board spent more than an hour discussing whether a reaffirmation of its May 22 vote was all that was necessary or whether it also needed to state its opinion on whether a rezoning was consistent with the

township's master plan, which was last revised six years ago and is currently being updated. Without a reaffirmation vote, the board would have had 35 days to discuss the proposed ordinance before the council could take formal action.

Board Attorney Dan Bernstein said a board vote should be taken on whether the ordinance was consistent with the local master plan, claiming such a move was required by municipal land use laws.

Councilwoman Nancy Malool, who has opposed the re-zoning, said she hadn't read the master plan and, therefore, it would be "impossible" for her to make an informed decision on whether the ordinance was consistent or not.

Board Chairwoman Maria Sartor recognized this and said this was the reason why land use boards have expert staff members such as attorneys, planners and engineers to help guide members in their decision-making.

Board member Joseph Doyle said he felt the re-zoning ordinance was not consistent with the existing master plan because any development of the hedge property would necessitate major parking variances for any building to be developed and any busi-

nesses to be housed there. Such variances, he said, were not included in the current master plan.

The board's vote to reaffirm its May 22 recommendation was unanimous. The vote on the resolution stating that the ordinance is "inconsistent" with the master plan was 6-3, with Councilwoman Paulette Coronato, Mrs. Sartor and Marc Ginsberg voting no. Mrs. Malool, Mr. Doyle and fellow board members Susan Judge, Alice Agran, Robert LaCosta and Dominick Bratti voted in favor of the resolution.

At the start of its meeting, the board approved a minor subdivision application from Mark Hampton of Custom Development LLC. A lot on Union Avenue will be split into two 50-foot by 125-foot lots to prepare for the building of two new homes.

The board next meeting will be Monday, July 24.

Search Continues for New FW Recreation Director

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

FANWOOD — The search continues for a new, part-time director of the borough's recreation commission. At the panel's Tuesday night meeting at LaGrande Park building, current director Linda Caminiti indicated that "there's been some good interest" from at least half a dozen prospective local candidates.

In addition, borough Councilman Joseph Higgins, who serves as a liaison to the panel, reported that several resumes have been sent in from out of town, and even one from out of state.

Mrs. Caminiti, who has been director for the past two years, plans to step down September 1 or sooner if a replacement is found before that date. At Tuesday night's meeting, the commission agreed to form a subcommittee that will soon begin screening resumes, which the borough is ac-

cepting until Friday, July 7.

Also at the meeting, Commissioner Bob Budiandy announced that the new Fanwood recreation, visitfanwood.com/recreation, is up and running.

"The site's not complete yet, but information about all the programs is there, and you can download all registration forms," Mr. Budiandy said. He added that plans are in the works to include additional information, relevant links, and possibly a calendar in the near future.

Commissioners highlighted the importance of publicizing the website and plan to pursue a variety of strategies to that end.

In other business, the commission plans to go before Mayor Colleen Mahr and the borough council at the governing body's Wednesday, July 5 agenda meeting to seek approval of a

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FOND FAREWELL...Scotch Plains Police Lieutenant Neal LeStrange, who is retiring from the police department this week, was honored by friends and colleagues at a dinner last Friday evening at Snuffy's Pantagis Renaissance.