

WF-BOE Sets \$79.5 Million Budget Tackles Wilson School Redistricting

By MEGHAN GILL
Specialty Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD—The board of education adopted a tentative 2006-2007 school budget of \$79,491,415 Tuesday night. The proposed school tax levy is \$68,772,526.

"This budget is the maximum allowable amount," Superintendent Dr. William Foley said.

"There is nothing official regarding state aid, we will not know anything for certain until the end of March, but we are assuming that aid will be frozen," Dr. Foley explained.

Over the course of the next couple of weeks, the board can re-arrange where funding will be allocated, Board President Anne Riegel said. The total budget reflects a 4.06 percent increase over last year's budget or \$1,579,003 over last year's adopted budget. The tax levy is up \$2,202,777 over last year's adopted school levy. The tax levy was defeated by voters and subsequently lowered \$714,543 by the town council and approved by the BOE.

A group of concerned parents addressed the board regarding plans to re-district 40 kindergarten students from Wilson to Franklin School. Sue Case of North Euclid Street said, "I am requesting that the Jefferson school trailer stay in the budget. I understand that it is a band aid...we have teachers in closets and hallways. It is unacceptable."

Dr. Foley responded, "I see no need to ask taxpayers to pay for this. We need a classroom at Wilson, not a trailer at Jefferson. We need to get a grip and realize that during major changes in enrollment, these things happen. A trailer can not replace a classroom."

Dr. Foley hinted that there might be a possibility of additional classrooms, and board member Beth Cassie ex-

plained, "How will we do this? We will have to go to the public for money. We will have to vote on it and present it to the public. (The funding) will have to come from a bond."

Chris Dombalis, a Wychwood Road parent, addressed the board regarding the letter he received notifying him that his soon to be kindergarten daughter was "de-selected" from attending Wilson School.

"This is not redistricting, this is segregation. I am from Richmond, Virginia, as you are Mrs. Riegel, and am very aware of segregation," he said. Mr. Dombalis offered the board alternative solutions to this process, such as having voluntary redistricting, using a lottery system of selec-

tion, or using seniority, so that people who are new to the neighborhood would have to move their children to Wilson.

In December, Dr. Foley gave school principals a letter that they were to distribute at kindergarten registration, explaining that students may be transferred to other schools. That letter was never put forth by school Principal Dr. Andrew Perry to parents of the Wilson School district.

The board will continue to discuss this year's proposed budget at its Tuesday, March 21, meeting. A public hearing on the spending plan will be held on Tuesday, March 28. All meetings are held in the board's meeting room in the Elm Street administrative building.

MS Mayor Frustrated Over Budget Formulation

By KIMBERLY A. BROADWELL
Specialty Written for The Westfield Leader

MOUNTAINSIDE - Mayor Robert Vigilanti expressed frustration Tuesday evening over the formation of this year's budget during the borough council agenda setting meeting.

The mayor stated that the borough cannot formally put together the budget as of yet because officials still do not know how much state aid the borough will receive. He also said he was frustrated with all the state mandated increases that he estimates will bring a local tax increase of 12 points.

The mayor noted there were major increases to the Rahway Valley Sewerage Authority (RVSA), as well as state mandated money going to the Mountainside Public Library. Mr. Vigilanti said that every year since 2001, funds designated for the library from the municipal budget have gone up dramatically as the value of

Mountainside homes has increased. Because of a 1945 law, money to libraries are based on home values.

This year is the biggest library increase of \$62,651. Mayor Vigilanti observed that the total increases - which had not been requested by library trustees or personnel - have cost each Mountainside taxpayer an average of \$72 to \$100 per year. In 2005, the library received \$496,000 from what he termed as an "ill-written law."

The mayor stated he was frustrated with what he described as the uncooperative attitude from the library. He said that other libraries, such as Westfield's, were working with town officials to solve the problem, whereas Mountainside's library has not.

Councilman Glenn Mortimer, who serves as a council liaison to the library board of trustees, said, as of yet, "the committee has not been forthcoming in any cost savings for the borough." He stated, "they have formed a committee to discuss the issue."

Other major areas of concern involving budget increases include police salaries, health insurance costs, pensions, utilities and gas. During the past year, investments for the borough are "down," while there also is "no surplus this year."

In January, the mayor said this year is "the worst set of budget circumstances facing the borough in my 26 years of involvement with the budget."

He had stated that increases from the state and other agencies exceeds \$400,000, including added state pension costs, increases from the RVSA, increases in the cost of the State Health Benefit Plan and the state-mandated increases for the library.

He had stated that Mountainside was "entering a new era" because of having to decide, "do I recommend a tax increase or recommend a reduction of services, or worst scenario - do I recommend a tax increase with a reduction in services?"

In other business, the council unanimously appointed Westfield architect Barbara Vincentsen as an alternate to the borough's Construction Board of Appeals. Last month, the governing body unanimously appointed James Ruban, a Mountainside resident and architect to the borough's Construction Board, to replace another member who had to abruptly resign.

Lobbyist Arraigned Today On Stalking Charges

By PAUL J. PEYTON
Specialty Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

ELIZABETH - A woman charged with stalking State Democratic Committee Chairman, Union County Assemblyman and county under-sheriff Joseph Cryan will be arraigned today in State Superior Court in Union County.

Executive Assistant Prosecutor Robert O'Leary said Karen Golding, 36, who was arrested at a statehouse-parking garage on February 6, will appear before Judge Joan Robinson Gross. Ms. Golding has been charged with third-degree burglary and fourth-degree stalking, which "covers multiple victims," Mr. O'Leary said.

If convicted, she faces five years for the burglary charge or a probation and 18 months on the stalking allegation. The case is still under investigation.

Mr. O'Leary said the stalking charges involved a "series of threatening letters and phone calls to several different victims," including newly sworn in head of state Democratic Committee, Union County Undersheriff and State Assemblyman



PIPING HOT... Union County Police and Fire Pipes and Drums march down Morris Avenue, leading the 10th annual Union County St. Patrick's Day Parade on March 11 in Union.

Resident Fears Central, Myrtle Will Become 'Throughway'

By MICHAEL J. POLLACK
Specialty Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD - Tuesday's Westfield council meeting featured a discussion on new approved zoning on Central Avenue and its impact on the residents of Myrtle Avenue. Also, the council formally recommended to the planning board a repeal of the redevelopment plan and the re-adoption of the 1998 town-zoning map.

Resident Virginia Cosenza of Myrtle Avenue came to Tuesday's meeting to draw the council's attention to further development in the Myrtle Avenue area. Ms. Cosenza addressed the board back in November concerning Jeff's Landscaping and the noise and traffic impact his business had on the Myrtle Avenue community.

She remained concerned about new development - this time on the corner of Myrtle and Central Avenues. Initially, referencing the follow-up on Jeff's Landscaping, Town Attorney Robert Cockren said he and Zoning Officer Kathleen Neville met five weeks ago approximately to "track down the relative of the former property owners." The three had a conference call in late January and interviewed the relative.

Mr. Cockren said Ms. Neville has prepared a document to send to her to reconfirm the facts in writing. This would be the basis the zoning officer, according to Mr. Cockren, could take action on the landscaping business's alleged expansion of the use of its property. Mr. Cockren indicated the business has two choices - "compliance or apply with the board of adjustment for a variance."

On the Central Avenue matter, the builder is proposing a three-story building, according to Ms. Cosenza, which will boast "85 percent lot coverage instead of 70 (percent)." The facility will also feature a bank on the first floor. She is concerned, along with fellow residents, about increased traffic flow and safety issues, in addition to what the area receives because of Jeff's landscaping, fearing the area

will become a "throughway."

The application for 751 Central Avenue, which was "acted upon favorably by the planning board," will be memorialized in writing at the next meeting, as reported by Mr. Cockren. Ms. Cosenza asked what actions could be taken to stop the zoning and construction.

Fourth Ward Councilman Jim Foerst said, "There was a lot of opposition to that application - somewhere in the range of a dozen to two dozen people showed up and objected to it. That would've been the first time opportunity to show opposition. The board will meet again on the first Monday in April." Mr. Foerst sits on the board as council liaison.

Mr. Cockren said the case "is an appeal able result by the interested parties to the New Jersey Superior Court. You have 45 days following adoption to act." When asked, he said the affected party would be effectively filing a lawsuit against the applicant and the board itself. "It would

require litigation to the New Jersey Superior Court."

Fourth Ward Councilman Tom Bigosinski asked what the town is required to do to put "impacted neighbors on notice." Mr. Cockren answered that neighbors within 200 feet of the affected property must be notified by mail. The notice must be published in the newspaper as a legal notice 10 days in advance of the hearing date as well, he noted.

Third Ward Councilman Dave Haas asked if there is an opportunity to address the board before memorialization "if they believe they have new evidence." The town attorney indicated there is an opportunity but it is a "pretty high standard for the board to reopen an application once it's been heard and the hearing is closed. I've done this for a long time before the board of adjustment and in my experience there were only one or two occasions where it occurred. If there's a mistake in law and some-

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Planning Bd. Approves Floor On Central Avenue Building

By KEREN SCHULTZ
Specialty Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD - The planning board last Thursday approved an application by a developer to add a third floor to a professional building at 751 Central Avenue. The applicant, 751 Central Avenue, L.L.C., plans to construct retail on the first floor, professional offices on the second floor and residential apartments on the third floor.

The structure will contain a bank with two drive-up lanes on the first floor, professional offices on the second floor and three residential apartments on the third floor. The applicant requested permits to construct the third story at the rear of the existing building, which requires the demolition of an existing detached garage.

About 20 Central Avenue residents and business owners attended the meeting to voice their questions and concerns over the additions to the existing two-story structure.

The applicant did not revise numerous points to correspond with ordinance requirement. In his testimony, Victor Vinegra, professional engineer for the applicant, stated that the reason for not revising the plan was to keep the same kind of structure as the existing building and to stay in keeping with other commercial buildings on Central Avenue.

A main point of disparity with the ordinance was parking. The ordinance requires the proposed development provide at least 37, 40 or 42 off-street parking. The applicant proposed 28

parking spaces. In addition, the ordinance prohibits parking in the street side yard; the applicant proposed four parking spaces. Also, the ordinance requires driveways and parking areas be located 10 feet from any property located in a residential zone - the applicant proposed 6.55 feet.

"Almost every commercial building (on Central Avenue) has vehicles parked all the way to the road," said Mr. Vinegra. "The parking situation is a pre-existing condition in area."

In addition, Mr. Vinegra stressed that his client does not want to disturb any of the existing landscaping and wants to ensure that the building is "lease-able" by having an adequate number of parking available.

Numerous residents and business-owners on Central Avenue questioned the parking spaces and the amount of traffic the additional building will instigate on Central Avenue and the intersecting Myrtle Street.

Carey Dean, an expert in traffic engineering testifying for the applicant, said that the three building components should lend themselves nicely to shared parking.

"Parking can self-sustain without any effect on the street at all," Mr. Dean testified.

He said that in today's age, with the advent of online banking and widespread ATMs, banks do not need a great deal of parking. Besides, he said, the multiple-lane facility will allow for cars to stagger.

"The ordinance does not distin-

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AMERICAN HEROINE...Marjorie Goldman, an actress with the American Historical Theatre, offers "A Visit with Susan B. Anthony" during the Woman's Club of Westfield's 110th Anniversary-Federation Day brunch Monday at B.G. Fields Restaurant in Westfield. Among the attendees were representatives from the State Federation of Women's Clubs and the Sixth District.



PRAISE...Mountainside Teachers of the Year, Susan Brost (left) and Megan Rose were honored at Tuesday evening's BOE meeting. Ms. Brost teaches 4th grade at Deerfield School and Ms. Rose teaches 2nd grade at Beechwood School.

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