

Scotch Plains Council to Move Forward On SID Deliberations

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

SCOTCH PLAINS — The township council agreed on Tuesday to move forward on a more substantive exploration of establishing a Special Improvement District (SID) for the downtown business district.

Officials said the first step is reconstituting the committee that three years ago crafted a SID ordinance that the council rejected in the face of opposition from a group of business and property owners.

During an hour-long discussion

prior to its regular meeting, the council was unanimous in agreeing on the worthiness of reviving the SID concept as a mechanism for revitalizing the central business district.

Noting that enhancement of the downtown has been on the municipal agenda for three decades, Councilwoman Nancy Malool, who led the effort three years ago to establish a SID, said the "business district has not lived up to its potential."

Prior to the council's discussion on Tuesday, Mrs. Malool outlined the 2003-2004 process, including delib-

erations of the steering committee that was composed mostly of local business and property owners, the anticipated benefits and operations of an SID, how assessments would have been calculated and some of the concerns opponents had raised.

Mrs. Malool, who was the lone council member to vote in favor of the SID ordinance in June 2004, said opponents "did not understand" the SID concept at that time.

Councilwoman Paulette Coronato, who voted against the ordinance that year, explained that "at that time, I was convinced it wouldn't succeed because [opponents] would let it fail." To have voted in favor, she said, "would have been jamming something down their throats."

Mayor Martin Marks again expressed regret for his 2004 vote against the ordinance and said that Sherry Cronin of the Downtown Westfield Corporation, which operates the Westfield SID, had told him there would always be more opponents than proponents at the outset of SID discussions because people are afraid of change. He said Mrs. Cronin said people would also be opposed because they would be asked to contribute their money toward something with which they are unfamiliar.

The mayor said he was hopeful that the present composition of the council — with three Republicans and two Democrats — might make it "easier" to explain than was the case in 2004, when the council was composed of five Republicans.

Councilman Jeffrey Strauss said that "a full-court press" was needed to inform and educate business and property owners about the benefits of a SID.

"We are in crisis. We have to move forward," Councilman Kevin Glover said, adding that there are "clearly a lot of positive things" regarding a SID.

Mrs. Malool told her colleagues to "prepare" for another round of "heated" opposition as the council moves forward in the process.

Mayor Marks recalled the "long, arduous process" in 2003-2004 and said he did not think another long process was needed this time because "much of the legwork" was done by the steering committee three years ago in terms of the goals, structure and operation of a SID.

Instead, he called for further community outreach, starting with contacting the members of the steering committee, as well as any other interested parties, and discussing with them in the next month how to better communicate with downtown businesses and residents in general about the benefits of a SID.

Mr. Strauss said it was important as well to plan how to combat the negative feedback that might arise.

The mayor said he hoped that the process could move forward and lead to an ordinance to establish a SID at some point in the future.

Officials: Viral Meningitis Case Not Health Concern

By GINA LEVINE-LEVY
Specially Written for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times

BERKELEY HEIGHTS — A central office administrator at Governor Livingston High School in Berkeley Heights (BH) has been "preliminarily" diagnosed with viral meningitis, as of Tuesday.

Richard O'Malley, chief school administrator (CSA) of the Mountainside school district, issued a press release last Friday indicating the employee is a borough resident and has a child "enrolled in the Mountainside school district."

The press release said that "there are no known health concerns for the students and staff."

It said the student "has shown no signs or symptoms." (Please see a letter from Mr. O'Malley on page 4.)

Neither school physician Dr. Ronald Frank nor Mr. O'Malley would comment further on the case. The borough is a member of the Westfield Regional Health Department.

Department Health Officer Robert Sherr said parents "should not be concerned." He said viral meningitis is "not a major concern," unlike bacterial meningitis.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website defines meningitis as "an infection of the fluid of a person's spinal cord and the fluid that surrounds the brain."



SWEETHEARTS... Mayor Colleen Mahr used Valentine's Day Eve to honor a Fanwood volunteer couple, Bruce and Melissa Padulsky. Bruce is a lieutenant in the Fanwood Fire Department and Melissa is a lieutenant in the Fanwood Rescue Squad.

Fanwood Residents Speak Out About Potential Zoning Changes

By MICHELLE BUCCOLA
Specially Written for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times

FANWOOD — Residents attended a special planning board meeting on Monday night to hear a presentation on the North Martine Avenue land use study. The study, presented by Paul Ricci of T&M Associates, was conducted to determine whether language in the borough's master plan should be changed to clarify particular zoning issues.

The area in question is currently in the R-75 zone situated between Madison Avenue, Martine Avenue, Paterson Road and Russell Road. Under current R-75 zoning, lots must be a minimum of 7,500 square feet.

In 2004, the master plan was re-evaluated, and lots in this area were deemed compatible with the bordering R-150 zone, which requires 15,000-square-foot lots. Although this change was approved, the language of the Master Plan never clearly stated whether the designation of the area should be officially changed.

Since many of the lots in the current R-75 zone meet the square-footage requirement, Mr. Ricci recommended that the board move to change the language in the borough's master plan.

"One of the goals and objectives presented in the Master Plan in to preserve the character of the area," Mr. Ricci said. "Re-designating this area would help prevent future consolidation of lots and subdivisions."

Board member Jack Molenaar asked Mr. Ricci about all of the lots that would not conform to the new requirements were the change actually made. Mr. Ricci said that language grandfathering in pre-existing lots and

structures would need to be adopted.

Mr. Ricci further explained that property owners would be subject to the R-150 requirements should they wish to build additional structures or make additions to current ones. The R-150 zone rear-yard setback allowance is 30 feet, as opposed to R-75's 25 feet.

Mr. Ricci answered questions from Joseph Murray, an attorney representing Mr. and Mrs. Donald Close, of 243 Midway Avenue. Mr. Murray asked whether a home in this zone that was completely destroyed by fire or tornado would be allowed to be rebuilt the way it was, even though that might be outside of the R-150 allowances. Mr. Ricci said that he believes variances would be granted, since it would

be a pre-existing structure that would have been grandfathered.

Mr. Ricci said in the worst-case scenario, a property owner in this situation might have to contact each adjacent neighbor in writing to ask them to sell off a portion of their land in attempt to conform with the current zoning. If no neighbors agreed, the property owner would make an application to the planning board that would most likely be approved, he said.

"The intention in changing the zoning is not to create a hardship for present property owners," Mr. Ricci said.

John Mulholland of 136 Russell Road, a lot that would be nonconforming if the zoning changes are

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Council Adopts Amendment To Business-Registration Ord.

By WAYNE BAKER
Specially Written for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times

FANWOOD — The borough council, Tuesday night, adopted on second reading an amendment to the business-registration ordinance passed last July. The amendment reduces the burdens on businesses. It was developed based on input from the Fanwood Business and Professional Association.

The amendment keeps the original ordinance's intent, permitting borough officials to contact the business owners in an emergency and understand what occurs at the location. Registration costs \$25 for two years, with renewals costing \$10 and is required by Thursday, March 1.

In other business, the council reviewed a zoning change, affecting a 22-acre, two-block area. The change doubles the requirement for development, switching these properties from an R-75 to an R-150 zone, meaning an increase from 7,500 to 15,000 square feet. The change affects the blocks bounded by Madison and Martine Avenues and Russell and Paterson Roads.

Officials said the change is being made in order to maintain the character of these properties. Most of the 37 properties impacted are deep lots with limited frontage, and the borough

wants to reduce the likelihood of subdivision of the properties.

A group of 12 lots located on the west side of Martine Avenue, stretching from Paterson Road to Pleasant Avenue are exempted from the change because they would be made under-sized by the change, officials said.

Mayor Colleen Mahr requested that courtesy notices be mailed to the affected property owners, informing them of the proposed change. Public comment must be made before or at the next regular council meeting, Tuesday, March 13, when the change is slated to be codified.

In other business, Councilwoman Donna Dolce said that the next issue of the *Fanwoodian* newsletter would be mailed in late March. She said this issue would include the annual public works calendar.

The council also revealed that the grand opening of the new Fanwood museum, located in the Community Center at the historic Fanwood Train Station, would be held in May.

In other business, the council authorized putting a plan for storm-sewer improvements out to bid. This plan would utilize a federal grant of \$399,000 to reduce flooding in several places around the borough.

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PRESIDENT'S DAY... Bill Sanders of Mountainside, founder of the Portraits of Patriots project, discusses his efforts to put portraits of President George Washington back into schools with Victoria McCabe of *The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times* at the newspaper office last Thursday. See timesnj.com/video for the interview.

Cooper Rd. Resident Opposes Three-Home Subdivision

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

SCOTCH PLAINS — The township planning board decided Monday night to continue its hearing in March on a major subdivision application on Cooper Road that is drawing protests from neighbors.

One resident contends that if the application is approved, his own property would be "impossible" to subdivide and develop if he should choose to do so in the future.

Needle Point Homes seeks approval to subdivide the rear portions of adjoining properties at 1240 and 1250 Cooper Road. The rear lots would be converted into three conforming lots with new single-family homes that would front on an extension of the Eton Row cul-de-sac, with one of the new homes situated at the end of the extension.

Needle Point attorney Robert Kraus told the board that the two existing lots are 787-feet deep and that dividing them would still allow creation of three new lots larger than the 40,000-square-foot minimum size required in that neighborhood. The two properties on Cooper Road, with houses that would remain, would be nearly 43,000 square feet in size after the subdivision.

Vincent DeLisi, who owns the property at 1230 Cooper Road, told the board that a subdivision would leave the rear of his own "similarly sized" property landlocked from a development standpoint, since, according to his attorney William Butler, Eton Row would not be able to be extended further into Mr. DeLisi's property once Needle Point's new homes were built.

Mr. Butler told the board his client was offering to extend Eton Row further into Mr. DeLisi's property, at Mr. DeLisi's expense, prior to the reconfiguration of the three new lots Needle Point seeks to build on the

street.

Needle Point showed an informal sketch proposing a new roadway from Cooper Road along the eastern edge of Mr. DeLisi's property that would provide access to the rear of the property. But Mr. Kraus said it wasn't part of Needle Point's formal presentation.

Multiple Ashbrook Drive residents, whose rear properties border the side of Mr. DeLisi's property, attended the meeting prepared to oppose any new roadway plan, which, according to Mr. Butler, would leave them with "two front yards."

Mr. Kraus disagreed with the assertion that Mr. DeLisi's property would be landlocked, saying that it had access from Cooper Road. Anthony Gallerano, an engineer for Needle Point, agreed with Mr. Kraus's assessment.

Mayor Martin Marks, who sits on the board, told the board that it "can't base our decision [on the subdivision application] on hypothetical development applications [for the DeLisi property]" that could be years in the future.

Planning board member Joseph Doyle said the board had "an obligation to look at the plan as submitted," not at Mr. Butler's proposal, which had not been formally submitted.

Toward the end of the nearly two-and-a-half hour hearing, Mr. Butler said he and Mr. Kraus would meet soon and "hope to work something out" before the hearing resumes at the board's Monday, March 12 meeting.

Earlier in the evening, board planner Mary Moody outlined some "highlights" from the just-completed review of the township's Master Plan. She said the master plan review committee had spent the past nine months examining major problems, objectives and goals that were outlined in

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BALLFIELD PLANS... Scotch Plains Recreation Director Ray Poerio reviews conceptual plans for the Jerseyland Park Project at Monday evening's recreation commission meeting. See story on page 10.



WINNERS... Union County Freeholder Alex Mirabella of Fanwood presents a resolution to Scotch Plains-Fanwood High School students (from left to right) Kristen Barry, Ashley Castore, Portia Price and Stephanie Fredas (color guard captains, 2006) congratulating them on winning first place in all of the U.S. Scholastic Band Association Group 6A competitions across New Jersey.

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