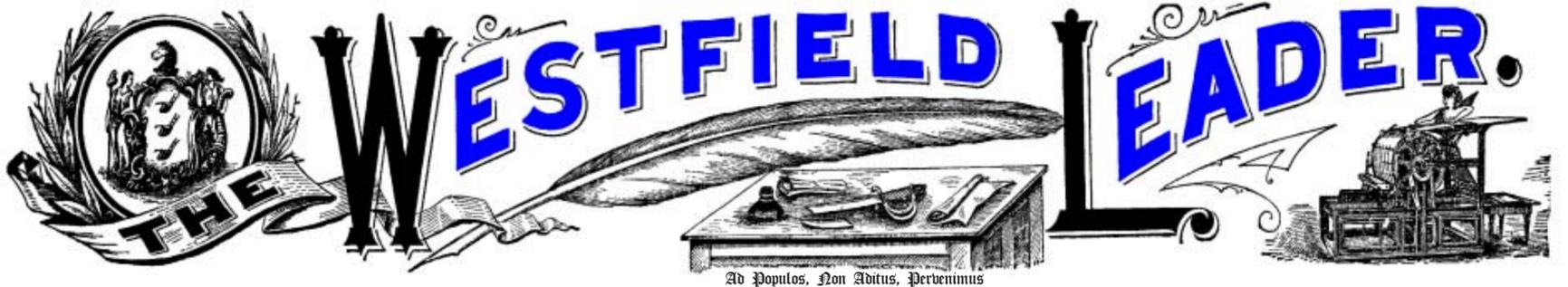


WESTFIELD VOTES ON TUESDAY, JANUARY 23. POLLS WILL BE OPEN FROM 9 A.M. TO 9 P.M.  
\$9.4-MILLION SCHOOL BOND REFERENDUM – ‘Yes’ is Approval, ‘No’ is Disapproval



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SIXTY CENTS

## Foley, BOE Members Say Bond Would Alleviate School Overcrowding

By MICHAEL J. POLLACK  
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD – Superintendent William Foley and two members of the Westfield Board of Education (BOE) visited *The Westfield Leader* offices on Thursday to discuss the \$9.4-million bond ordinance to be decided on Tuesday, January 23.

Mr. Foley, BOE Vice President Ginny Leiz and Beth Cassie, BOE member and chairwoman of both the Long Range Planning and Citizens Advisory Com-

mittee on Enrollment (CACE), said classroom overcrowding could be relieved by the bond's passage.

In addition, the contingent believes that Lincoln School, which would become an early-childhood center, would not only conserve space in elementary schools to dedicate for music and art rooms but would also save the district about \$20,000 per special-needs child by educating them in-district.

Mr. Foley said, "With facing pressures for space, this is the best way I

can conjure to deal with it...I do believe from a dollar standpoint, it's good value, and we have a facility that is underutilized in Lincoln."

When broken down, the bond's largest component is the \$6-million appropriation to transform the Hillcrest Academy on Westfield Avenue into a facility that would house morning and afternoon kindergarten, transitional kindergarten, pre-school handicapped and autistic children.

Last August, a state administrative-law judge decided to allow Hillcrest Academy to remain at Lincoln School, which the Union County Education Services Commission (UCESC) leases from the BOE, until June 30.

The BOE did not renew the lease following a May 3 incident in which police arrested six Hillcrest students who were charged with stealing a bicycle and a car.

If the bond passes and Hillcrest does not find a home, Mr. Foley said, "We'd go to the education commissioner (Lucille Davey) and ask for a ruling ordering them to vacate the premises."

Mr. Foley said the original recommendation of the advisory committee was to mimic Summit and build a childhood center on each side of town, creating a "pod" each at Washington and Jefferson Elementary Schools.

That option, he said, would have cost about \$8.2 million and didn't offer the same number of rooms. Then, he said, "when we had the problems at Lincoln with Hillcrest Academy, it became clear that that was not going to be acceptable."

Mr. Foley said "as we worked more and more with Lincoln, we felt that the early-childhood center, while not the panacea, would make a significant dent in our classroom shortage and provide a reasonable prospect to get those music and art rooms."

According to the Department of Education's "October 15 Report," which shows a district's enrollment, in 1997 Westfield had 4,877 students as compared to 6,060 students last year. The first through fifth grades cumulatively in 1997 contained 2,100 kids. In 2006, Westfield educated 2,477 in the same range. Mr. Foley expects similar enrollment in 2010, judging by the current trend.

In terms of overcrowding, in the New Jersey School Report Card from 2004-2005, when comparing average elementary class sizes in "high achieving school districts" in Union County, Scotch Plains-Fanwood's (SP-F) Evergreen Elementary had third and fourth grades averaging 18 and 18.7, respectively, while Jefferson averaged 22.8 and 20.8, respectively. SP-F's McGinn Elementary School housed

CONTINUED ON PAGE 10

of both departments. After the meeting, Town Administrator Jim Gildea said the matters were done in order for the town to be in "statutory compliance with the state before codification."

Town Engineer Ken Marsh said a sanitary sewer main broke at Seneca Place and Forest Avenue. Mr. Marsh said, "We have a crew out there now assessing it; contractors are making repairs. They'll 'TV' the line and try to determine the extent of the damages. Right now, only one home has been affected."

The council honored Boy Scout Tom Hogaboom at the beginning of the meeting. A member of troop no. 73, Tom built a Westfield World War II Memorial for his Eagle Scout project. He raised \$35,500 in cash donations for the memorial, which was dedicated during Veteran's Day last November.

Using \$2,500 of his surplus funds, he purchased replacement flags for the town. Acting Mayor Mark Ciarrocca accepted the flags on behalf of Mayor Andy Skibitsky and the town council.

## Fanwood Woman, 20, Dies In High-Speed Rt. 22 Crash

By PAUL J. PEYTON  
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

MOUNTAINSIDE – A 20-year-old Fanwood resident was killed early Saturday morning in a one-car crash in Mountainside just past the Springfield border.

According to police, the accident occurred off Route 22 at Sheffield Street at 12:41 a.m. when the 1997 Green Acura driven by Chantal Mueller went off the roadway and struck a telephone pole before crossing the front lawns of multiple Sheffield Street properties, striking numerous small trees and bushes and coming to rest in a water-retention basin.

"There (were) no skid marks there, so we couldn't get a (grasp) on how

fast she was going," Mountainside Police Captain Richard Osieja said. He added that Ms. Mueller was likely traveling "well over the speed limit," which is posted at 45 mph.

He said Ms. Mueller was traveling alone and there were no other vehicles near her at the time of the accident.

The force of the impact flung a 14-foot section of the telephone pole 75 feet. Ms. Mueller "was ejected out the back of the rear window of the car" and was found motionless along-side of the car, according to the accident report. Captain Osieja said Ms. Mueller's vehicle was "demolished."

He added that an autopsy was completed on the victim but the toxicology report would not be completed for 30 days. The captain said any comments prior to receipt of the report would be "speculation."

Paramedics from Overlook Hospital, the Springfield First Aid Squad and the Mountainside Volunteer Fire Department all responded to the scene, according to the accident report.

A student at Union County College, Ms. Mueller was a 2004 graduate of Union High School. Born in Elizabeth, she lived most of her life in Union before moving to Fanwood.

Funeral services were held yesterday, Wednesday, January 17, at the Rossi Funeral Home in Scotch Plains. She is survived by her parents, Charles W. and Sylvania Mueller; her brother, Charles S. Mueller; her sister, Andrea Mueller, and her maternal grandparents, Jose and Yolanda Ibanez. Her paternal grandparents, Sigmund A. and Margaret M. Mueller, predeceased her.



Horace R. Corbin for The Westfield Leader

BOND '07...The Westfield superintendent of schools and board of education members visited *The Westfield Leader* office on Thursday to discuss how, if passed, the \$9.4-million bond referendum would alleviate overcrowding in schools. Seated, from left to right, are Ginny Leiz, BOE vice president; Michael Pollack, education editor; Paul Peyton, assignment editor; Beth Cassie, BOE member and chairwoman of both the Long Range Planning and Citizens Advisory Committee on Enrollment, and Superintendent of Schools William Foley.

## Foerst Says Sales Tax Responsible for Pool Hike

By MICHAEL J. POLLACK  
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD – Recreation Director Bruce Kaufman gave the town council an update Tuesday night on issues surrounding the Westfield Memorial Pool, with Fourth Ward Councilman Jim Foerst accounting "the bulk" of 2007 pool membership increases to the newly expanded state sales tax that now includes pool memberships.

Mr. Kaufman said the pool is currently "undergoing some architectural drawings for upgrade and replacement of the main pool and replacement and upgrade of the 'kiddie' pool. These replacements will take effect at the close of this pool season and be ready for the opening of the 2008 season."

Mr. Foerst said the increases in pool fees are twofold. He said the pool is not a taxpayer-supported entity, and the hikes are due in part to recommendations from the recreation commission to cover operating expenses.

However, "the major bulk," he said, is the 7-percent sales tax mandated by the state. "The council acted last year to oppose the tax on commuter parking permit fees and pay stations," he added. "I commend the council for doing that. This is another situation where we have another 7-percent sales tax on the users of that pool. While I think it's inappropriate for the state to do that, we have to incorporate (the tax) and take certain actions to collect it and distribute it to the state."

Mr. Kaufman also said town playground equipment would be in compliance with state regulations by October. He said the commission has purchased, and has on hand, equipment for Windsor, Gumbert and Tamaques parks. After Windsor is completed, he said, the committee would award a contract to put Mindowaskin in compliance.

The council held advertised hearings on two ordinances amending the town code for police and fire departments. Both ordinances, which passed unanimously, specify a formal composition



Benjamin B. Corbin for The Westfield Leader

TRAGEDY...Friends and loved ones left flowers and candles at the site of Chantal Mueller's fatal car crash. The 20-year-old Fanwood resident died early Saturday in Mountainside just past the Springfield border.



Wayne Baker for The Westfield Leader

WE SHALL OVERCOME...Reverend Robert H. Taylor, Sr., left, pastor of St. Luke's AME Zion Church, and Noel Brown of the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Association, lead Monday's procession from Westfield's memorial to Dr. King to the Presbyterian Church on Mountain Avenue and East Broad Street. Mr. Brown, who grew up in segregated Birmingham, Ala. and saw Dr. King regularly, led the group in singing "We Shall Overcome." A service remembering Dr. King followed the procession and also recognized the winners of the essay, poetry and art contest. For additional photos, see goleader.com/photos.

## Foley Doesn't 'Support' Levels Of Fear Concerning Child Safety

By CAROLINE KOELLHOFFER  
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD – The board of education approved the revision of the 2007-2008 school year calendar on Tuesday, clustering the shortened four-hour days needed for parent-teacher conferences at the elementary schools on November 5, 6 and 7, and ending that week with schools closed for teachers' professional days.

Superintendent of Schools William Foley said this revision would keep October free of four-hour days and will help alleviate some concerns about security at the schools on Election Day.

"I spoke to elementary principals," he said. "Their biggest problem with Election Day is that typically, the cafeteria is used for voting, which makes it difficult for them to cover the kids at lunchtime. So, from that standpoint, having a single-session day on Election Day works out better."

Town resident Amy Chin of 459 Whittier Avenue still expressed concern about security, predominantly at Roosevelt Intermediate School, where students walk in and out of the building throughout the day, and at Franklin Elementary, where the entranceway for voting is separate from the actual polling location.

Ms. Chin spoke in regard to the students' safety. "Things have changed over the years," she said.

"I disagree," said Mr. Foley. "They haven't changed. What has changed are people's attitudes. I understand that there is a level of fear that exists right now that I don't particularly support."

Mr. Foley went on to say there are "numerous" other days that the schools are open to parents and other adults. "Are we going to close the schools for these programs too?" he asked. "Are we going to worry that someone is going to abduct a child every time a parent enters the building?"

Ms. Chin responded, "We have made it a policy in this school district that we want to improve security. And I feel that we should make it a policy that we are always vigilant about security."

"And if we are going to be always vigilant about security, then on days that we've got extra people attending the school, it might be prudent to look at having some extra security provided by the Westfield Police Department or an internal service," she added. "Otherwise, we are putting a lot of responsibility on the school

principals."

Board member Beth Cassie ended the discussion by suggesting that principals evaluate their particular situation and seek aid from the board if they feel that extra security is needed.

Business Administrator Robert Berman presented the projected

spending on employee health insurance for 2007-2008. Rates will increase this year by 9.5 percent for medical, 8 percent for dental and 9 percent for prescription coverage. Mr. Berman said these estimates come in under this year's insurance-inflation trend increase of 15 percent.

## County Wins Appeal in Suit Brought by Corrections Cop

By PAUL J. PEYTON  
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

ELIZABETH – A federal appeals court affirmed a decision of a lower court Tuesday by dismissing a lawsuit against Union County brought by a former corrections officer who charged that he was terminated in retaliation for his testimony against corrections officers in 1998. The county said the officer was fired for abandoning his job.

However, the Third Circuit Court of Appeals said the officer, Juan Espinosa, would not have to repay \$150,000 he received in compensation from May 1998 through his termination in August 2000.

"The Third Circuit Court of Appeals affirmed the District Court's dismissal of the Espinosa complaint. So, barring Certification by the U.S. Supreme Court — which is highly unlikely, this case is as good as over," said County Counsel Robert Barry in a memo to County Manager George Devanney and sent to *The Westfield Leader*.

Jim McCreedy of Morristown-based Wiley, Malehorn & Sirota, whose firm represented Mr. Espinosa in the appeal along with Montana attorney Tom Shea, said attorneys are still reviewing the decision to determine their next step. He said lawyers could ask for a motion for the court to reconsider its decision and/or seek an appeal to the United States Supreme Court.

"We are still weighing it and what our options might be," Mr. McCreedy

said. "We disagree with the ruling but we respect the decision of the court."

Mr. Espinosa had assisted the county's prosecutor's office in prosecuting corrections officers involved in the beating and harassing of Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) detainees on June 18, 1995 at the Esmor Federal Detention Facility in Elizabeth. He wore a recording device while inside the Union County jail and obtained related documents, and he permitted the prosecutor's office to record all phone calls at his residence.

To ensure his safety, the prosecutor's office said, according to legal documents, that Mr. Espinosa should leave his job and in return they would help him secure other employment in law enforcement in Florida. The county agreed to pay \$15,000 to cover his relocation expenses. Mr. Espinosa testified on behalf of the county in front of a grand jury and at two criminal trials.

On February 12, 1999, Mr. Espinosa was offered a position with the Atlanta Police Department. His attorney met with then-County Manager Michael Lapolla on February 17 of that year to discuss "potential job opportunities in Union County," his pension and concerns about accepting the Atlanta job, which paid less than Union County.

"At no time during this meeting did Lapolla guarantee Espinosa another position with the county," legal documents state. After the meeting, Mr.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 10



Benjamin B. Corbin for The Westfield Leader

BOND MARKET...A sign outside Westfield's Wilson Elementary School reminds voters about the \$9.4-million bond referendum to be voted on Tuesday, January 23. The money would go towards Roosevelt and Edison Intermediate Schools' renovations and create an "early-childhood center" at Lincoln School.

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### Westfield to Vote on School Bond Jan. 23

On Tuesday, January 23, Westfield residents will vote on a \$9.4-million school bond referendum. Polls will be open from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m.

See this edition's lead article for more information, and see full text of the bond question on page 9.