

# \*\*\* Garwood Sets Salary Review, Hears Tax Complaints \*\*\*

By **CHRISTINA M. HINKE**  
Specially Written for *The Westfield Leader*

**GARWOOD** – The borough council unanimously voted Tuesday to approve a resolution to establish a compensation review procedure for the purposes of determining salaries and wages for full-time employees of the borough who are not the members of any employee bargaining unit, are not afforded compensation protection by law, and whose compensation is solely with the discretion of the mayor and council.

Under the resolution, each department head within police, public works and administration are charged with the responsibility for the annual evaluation of their respective employees' performance and recommending appropriate salary adjustments. The mayor and council would have the final vote in determining the percentage increase in compensation.

Three residents of The Pointe, a newly built condominium complex located along North Avenue in the borough, voiced their opposition to The Pointe residents paying what they said is double the taxes than the average taxpayer in the borough.

Christine Spear, a resident of The Pointe, said, "I, too, would like to express my displeasure of the unfair taxes imposed on us for services we do not receive — snow removal in particular is one example. We are paying twice through our taxes and again because we are required to have private snow removal."

The borough is currently in litigation with The Pointe about the costs associated with snow removal and other related services.

Carl Teschke, who lives with his wife, Olga, at The Pointe, said, "We have meetings with upwards of 60 to 65 people — every meeting you hear about taxes, taxes, taxes. We have about 44 units over there, and eight are paying

about \$14,000 [as] they have larger units, the rest of us we're paying \$12,000. We have a lot of seniors over there, and we have super seniors. They are not working people over there. ... You guys got jobs and income and I dare say if I ask you, none of you are paying \$12,000, \$14,000 for your taxes. I think you ought to give us consideration, it is just not fair."

Resident Tom Pedas, who spoke at the last borough meeting, also spoke up again, asking that taxes for The Pointe residents be reduced by half.

Resident Bruce Paterson told *The Westfield Leader* that he filed a notification with the borough clerk on Tuesday to begin a recall petition for Councilman James Mathieu's council seat. Mr. Paterson first announced his intention in a statement to the mayor and council at the end of February that he may begin filing for a recall on Councilman Mathieu's seat as a result of a lawsuit filed by Borough Clerk Christina Ariemma against Mr. Mathieu, the mayor and borough council that claims she has been harassed and intimidated by Mr. Mathieu and was denied raises the last two years as retaliation for being a whistleblower.

As part of the consent agenda, the council also unanimously voted to approve a resolution to amend the purchasing and procedures manual, as well as a resolution to authorize an agreement with JEN Electric for annual preventative maintenance on two traffic signals at an annual cost not to exceed \$600 per light.

A resolution that would urge the State Legislature to approve Republican bill, A-2454, which would alter eligibility requirements for unemployment insurance for seasonal public entity workers, was tabled. During the workshop meeting, Council President Keith Sluka said the bill was to be amended to say it would apply to

anyone who works 36 weeks or under, and would include school workers. He said school crossing guards work 36 weeks and would be affected by the bill.

Councilwoman Sara Todisco said the police committee have been reviewing the issue and would have a recommendation by the next council meeting.

During the March 27 council meeting, the crossing guards approached the mayor and council about their displeasure of the

possibility of losing their unemployment benefits. At that meeting, Mayor Patricia Quattrocchi stated that the current state law considers crossing guards part-time employees, not seasonal workers, and said, "For me, nothing will change until the laws of the State of New Jersey change."

"Again, they are in the crosshairs," said Bruce Paterson regarding the crossing guards. Should the bill become law, he asked the council to consider

taking \$5,000 to \$10,000 of the \$22,000 it would save by not having to pay into the unemployment fund for crossing guards, and give it back in the form of a raise to the crossing guards.

Also, during the workshop session, Ms. Todisco asked the mayor to consider having the borough council attend Union County freeholder meetings, suggesting the councilpersons rotate, with each council person responsible for attending two meetings a year.

## Cranford Committee Unveils Birchwood Ord.

By **FRED T. ROSSI**

Specially Written for *The Westfield Leader*

**CRANFORD** – The township committee, under protest, voted on Tuesday to introduce a court-ordered ordinance that will formally permit the Birchwood Avenue property to include multi-family affordable housing.

The ordinance, which will be voted on after a public hearing on Tuesday, May 22, is part of the township's compliance with a state Superior Court Judge's December order allowing Paramus-based S. Hekemian Group, which owns the property, to move forward with its plans to build 360 housing units. Township Attorney Phil Morin said at the committee's meeting this week that the ordinance was being introduced "under protest," a formal designation allowing town governments "saddled" with what he said were "adverse" affordable-housing obligations to legally register their objections.

The four township committee members in attendance – Mayor David Robinson was absent – did not speak in detail about the ordinance, with Commissioners Lisa Aduabato Nesi and Edward O'Malley both simply voting to

approve the ordinance's introduction "under protest." Deputy Mayor Andis Kalnins, when asked for his vote, said, "Unfortunately, yes." Commissioner Kevin Campbell voted for its introduction, but said he had "serious doubts" if the ordinance is in compliance with the goals of the municipal land use laws.

The planning board early next month is set to adopt similar changes to the township master plan – again, under a court order, and again, according to Mr. Morin, under protest. He said that once the township committee formally passes the ordinance on Tuesday, May 22, the court would issue a formal judgment of compliance. Then, he said, the township can file an appeal of the court's decision. In the meantime, the township will continue to actively oppose Hekemian's permit applications with the state Department of Environmental Protection based on what Mr. Morin said were a "multitude of issues," including flooding impact issues.

Work continues on the township's \$33.7-million budget for 2012, and Deputy Mayor Kalnins said that at the committee's Tuesday, May 8

meeting, several amendments will be offered, including one to add a new line of revenue from the Cranford Crossing PILOT (Payment-in-Lieu-of-Taxes) program that "will ease the tax burden" a bit. He said some added appropriations would be necessary this year for renovations to the lower level of the storm-damaged municipal building. Mr. Kalnins also said that for the first time since 2008, township supervisors would receive a salary increase of 2 percent.

The \$33.7-million spending plan was introduced two weeks ago, but a formal public hearing and vote will not occur until June to allow the governing body time to make changes and to await final state aid figures.

The public hearing and vote on the ordinance regulating the feeding of wildlife on public and private property will be held at the committee's May 8 meeting. Two weeks ago, the committee approved an amendment to address concerns that had been raised about the scope of the proposed restrictions, with some residents worrying that even the feeding of birds would result in penalties.

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