

Home Addition OK'd; 'Y' Must Submit Plan to Board

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

GARWOOD – The Garwood Planning Board on Wednesday voted 7-2, with board members Bruce Paterson and Bill Nierstedt dissenting, to approve a bulk variance for a 375-square-foot second-floor addition to a home at 123 Willow Avenue. The owners, Mr. and Mrs. John Marinello, sought relief for variances of pre-existing conditions regarding lot size and width-, front-, side- and rear-yard setbacks, as well as impervious coverage related to the second-floor expansion over the existing footprint.

Board member Michael Vena excused himself from hearing the application, as he is a neighbor of the applicants.

The applicants, who moved in six years ago, cited as hardships the need for more space as they have a 16-month-old child and are planning to have another baby. The plan shows expansion of the three bedrooms and master bath on the second floor. Mr. Marinello said all three bedrooms were roughly nine feet by seven feet.

The expansion would result in the master bedroom becoming 16.5 feet by 10 feet, the second bedroom 9.7 feet by 15.6 feet and the third bedroom 9.1 feet by 13.2 feet. The master bath would be 7.11 by 5.10 feet. The plans would also push out the front door with a small vestibule. The three-bedroom house currently has two full baths and a finished basement.

The existing front-yard setback of about 15 feet is already non-conforming, said Attorney Donald Fraser, Jr., since 25 feet is the required front-yard setback.

Mr. Nierstedt took issue with the house having a 15-foot front-yard setback, saying he

would rather see the addition only in the rear of the home and not the front. By building the addition, the home would have a "flat wall" as Mr. Nierstedt described, instead of it notching inward on the second floor as it currently does.

The home was built in 1907 and at some point the front porch was enclosed, creating the notch on the second floor. The property is 40 feet wide, which predates the 50-foot-wide provision.

Currently, the house has 68.04 percent impervious coverage, Mr. Fraser said, where 60 percent is the maximum allowed.

"We did try to sell the house. We put it up for six months, but

we didn't have an offer. Not even a really low offer," Mr. Marinello said.

"I'm opposed to this," Mr. Nierstedt said. "In this situation...there is no hardship."

"Having a family is not a reason for granting a variance... [Economics] is not a land-related hardship," Mr. Nierstedt continued. "You are allowing an individual homeowner to have a larger house than permitted by code and there is no hardship."

"I can buy your argument about a larger house if they were putting on an addition to give them an enormous amount of additional space. They want to put on an addition of 375 square feet – you're talking

about less than, not even a room. That is not blowing out a house," board member Stephen Greet retorted.

Mr. Paterson suggested a compromise. "Forget about the front expansion and allow the back expansion. I think that would be a fair compromise. It would maintain a nice looking house," he said.

Mr. Greet said he thought the alterations to the home would not dramatically change the appearance of the house.

Mr. Nierstedt said houses with porches add character to a home, and was not in favor of having a flat wall in the front.

"I think it is hardship," said Victor DeFilippo, the borough council liaison on the board.

"We changed this zone to a single. We hoped people would take the twos and make them a one," said Borough Planner and Engineer Victor Vinegra, noting the neighborhood has a lot of two-family brick homes.

"Why do we have 25 feet? ... If we start giving away front-yard variances it is not good," said Mr. Nierstedt.

"You are not being receptive to young families and foster a positive atmosphere in the town," said Mr. Greet, who noted keeping young families in the borough would mean children attending the school system and families paying taxes for the schools.

"Families invest in their homes and up-

keep of the neighborhood," said alternate board member Kathleen Villaggio.

At this point, the applicants passed around photos of neighboring homes that showed one that is 20 feet from the sidewalk and a house further away that is 15 feet from the sidewalk.

In other business, Mr. Vinegra said the Westfield Area "Y"'s five-year lease agreement with the board of education to use the Washington School for pre-school, daycare and after-school and fitness programs is subject to go before the planning board.

"The use is not permitted," he said. "The Washington School is zoned to be strictly a school."

The next board meeting is Wednesday, February 22, at 7:30 p.m.

Probitas Verus Honos

First Aid Squad Posts Spaghetti Fundraiser

GARWOOD – The Garwood First Aid Squad will hold its Second Annual Spaghetti Dinner fundraiser on Saturday, February 11, from 4 to 8 p.m. at the Garwood Knights of Columbus hall, located at 37 South Avenue.

The cost for the meal, featuring spaghetti, meatballs and more, will be \$10. Tickets will be \$8 for senior citizens, \$5 for children and free for youngsters age 5 and younger.

The Garwood First Aid Squad is a non-profit volunteer organization and relies on donations to continue to provide free emergency medical services to anyone who needs it. In 2011, the squad responded to more than 420 calls in Garwood and surrounding communities. For more information, call (908) 789-0300.



APPROVED...The Garwood Planning Board listens to applications at its January 25 meeting. The board approved a bulk variance for a 375-square-foot addition to the second floor of a residence on Willow Avenue, voting 7-2 in favor of the addition.

Christina M. Hinke for *The Westfield Leader*