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GW Council Sets Security Measures for Borough Hall

By CHRISTINA M. HINKE
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

GARWOOD – The borough council agreed, Tuesday night, to install a walk-through metal detector in Borough Hall. At Tuesday night's meeting, people entering Borough Hall were asked to remove the contents of their pockets and have their bags checked. Then a police officer scanned their body with a wand metal detector.

After the last council meeting where the council adopted to freeze longevity benefits, one of the resolutions hanging on the bulletin board in the hall was slashed with a "razor or knife." Police Chief Bruce Underhill said. He said the resolution that was not passed, which opted for current employees to retain longevity benefits as contracted to upon hiring, was the resolution slashed, as well as the bulletin board.

He said the incident was not caught on camera because the surveillance system has been broken for about two years, and buying a new system has been neglected by the council when the issue has come to its attention.

"It doesn't sit well as to the small community of Garwood," said resident Bruce Paterson of the new security measures.

"We're playing catch up," Chief Underhill said. He said since the 9/11 attacks a security directive was set in motion by the state Supreme Court.

"In light of the incident that happened last week, I can't see any reason not to implement that same directive for public meetings. I can't allow any type of weapon or the possibility of an incident. I have to protect the court, the mayor and council, and all of you," the chief said.

On another matter, Mr. Paterson asked Councilman Jim Mathieu to "graciously" step down from his post on the council in light of the lawsuit filed January 31 against Mr. Mathieu by Borough Administrator/Borough Clerk Christina Ariemma for conspiracy, harassment and intimidation, among other allegations. There was some applause from the audience and one saying no. "We're looking at something more deleterious than the security issue brought up before," Mr. Paterson said.

Mr. Paterson said Mr. Mathieu had brought on a lot of "distress" to the Borough of Garwood. "I am beside myself on this," he said. "I think you have gone overboard. I have taken exception at one meeting where you attacked the mayor. A resident came in and noted that she was harassed and had the police chief involved (referring to Rosemary Snow's complaint to the police last year)."

"I don't think anybody can be requested to step down until the allegations are proved," resident Dolores Dombrowski said.

Mayor Patricia Quattrocchi said some of the cost of the attorney fees could be absorbed by the borough's insurance, with which a claim has already been filed and is under review by the insurance company.

Council President Keith Sluka announced that he would introduce a shared-service agreement with the

CF Council

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The committee also introduced an ordinance to raise the height limit on buildings in the R1 through R7 zones from 30 feet to 32 feet, a move that will allow homeowners in flood zones to raise their homes, as one has already done, in an effort to avoid severe flood damage. Commissioner Kevin Campbell said the ordinance will negate the need for homeowners wishing to raise their houses to apply to the zoning board for variances. A public hearing on the ordinance will be held on March 13.

At the start of the meeting, the township committee honored four retiring department of public works employees. Wayne Rozman, Stephen Plungis, Norman Dreyer and Wayne Murray were honored for what Mayor Robinson said was "decades and decades of service," specifically "more than 130 years combined. Commissioner O'Malley presented certificates to two local businesses—State Farm Insurance and Think D'Sign Print—for their efforts at adopting environmentally-sustainable practices as part of the local Go Green initiative.

Several announcements were made during the meeting that the rededication of the Cranford First Aid Squad's headquarters, which was severely damaged during last summer's hurricane and flooding, will take place on Sunday, February 26, at 3 p.m.

board of education (BOE) at the next meeting. The proposal would be to share cleaning services using BOE custodial staff instead of the borough using an outside service. "I think we are both winners on this," Mr. Sluka said.

Currently, the council pays Char & Sons \$17,450 annually to clean Borough Hall, the fire department (FD) and department of public works (DPW) bathrooms. Under the proposal, the council would pay \$22,000 annually for BOE custodial staff to do the cleaning. Cleaning of the FD's main hall would be added to the scope. Mr. Sluka said the borough's current cleaning contract expires March 1, and the council would need to go out to bid if they did not agree to a shared service. He expects bids to come in at approximately \$25,000 to \$30,000 with the additional cleaning task.

The FD had requested the additional cleaning service because borough senior citizens hold meetings at the facility at least four times a week, Mr. Sluka said.

"The FD was not being maintained properly," Ms. Ariemma said.

After the BOE last week passed by a vote of 5-2 to move the BOE election from April to November, the council approved a resolution to adopt the move.

In other business, the council also adopted an inter-local agreement with the Township of Cranford. Details were not given.

Longtime DPW employee William Pevarnik announced his retirement to the council in a letter of intent.

The library had its reorganization meeting recently, said the mayor's library representative, Councilman Mathieu. Former Secretary Maria Nierstedt was named library board president, former treasurer Christine DiGiacomo was named vice-president and former board member Walter Tucker was named treasurer.

Giuseppe Congiusta's membership application to the volunteer FD also was approved.

Mountainside

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lot by the young adults who would use the facility, and accidents. Residents also feared the sports complex would drive down house values.

Jim McArroon called some of the objectors "hypermilitarists." "I don't think any of those things are true. I don't think a new building in Mountainside is going to cause any of those things to happen," he said.

Lisa Friedman of Briar Hills Circle in Springfield, said, "We are inundated with traffic." She said there are many other sports facilities to use in the area that are "not on top of private residences."

Considering the site is in a flood zone, some residents said the building and another 40,000 to 50,000 square feet of asphalt for the parking area on the new site would make flooding worse in the area.

"When I get flooded, is the town of Mountainside going to bail me out? Is the applicant? It's a great idea, [but] it's a bad, bad site," said Donald Cravo of Charles Street in Mountainside, who showed the board photos of how the area floods.

Joel Latona, of Briar Hills Circle in Springfield, who said his backyard abuts the property, stated, "It is an 80,000-square-foot, 31-foot-tall building, and that concerns me as I look out my window every day... I try to justify what they want to do there and I just think about the size, and it is overwhelming for me to have it that big and that close."

"Picture if it were your house. Would you want to be back there looking at that building?" he asked the board.

There were also residents who were in favor of having a sports complex in their hometown.

"To the people from Springfield... you are going to say I want you to have a vacant building in your town instead of a brand new sports complex where my kids can play," resident Steve Jennings said.

Jeffrey Whyte, a youngster and soccer and lacrosse player from Old Tote Road in Mountainside, said, "I love the idea of it."

"It's incredibly hard to find a place to play at," he said. "We have the biggest lacrosse communities around us... I think it's a great location, too, right off of (Route) 22, easy for people to get to."

In other business, Carol and Peter Goggi of 1125 Ridge Drive were approved to install solar panels on the roof of their home.

The Trilos Realty application for the Echo Park Restaurant and Grill, 1079 Route 22, was moved to the March 8 meeting. The restaurant is proposing a change of tenancy and renovations to the existing restaurant.



GOOD TIME... Craig, Maureen, Meghan, Russell and Derek Kobrin of Westfield enjoy The Westfield Leader prior to attending Super Bowl XLVI last weekend.

Task Force Recommendations Could Cut Budget \$850,000

By PAUL J. PEYTON
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

COUNTY – Freeholder Dan Sullivan announced last Thursday night that a government efficiency task force put together by Union County Manager Al Faella has recommended changes that could save the county \$850,000 in the 2012 county budget.

"The task force's recommendations cover practices regarding computers, printers, copy toner, office supplies, stationary, burglar alarms, portal to portal assignments (use of county-issued cars), fuel consumption, cell phones, BlackBerries, and the purchase of more efficient replacement vehicles," Mr. Sullivan said.

One area where the task force is looking to save money is the upgrading of the county's telecommunications infrastructure. The county will be moving its voice network hardware to new technology called Voice Over Internet Protocol, or VOIP, which the report estimates could save the county over \$400,000 annually.

Mr. Sullivan said the report recommends cutting the number of cellular devices used by county employees by 40 percent for an estimated savings of \$60,000 annually and replacing county computers "when necessary" with "less expensive, but more efficient models," for an additional annual savings of \$60,000.

"Virtually all these recommendations can be implemented with little impact on the overall operation," Mr. Sullivan said. "This is an excellent starting point" for the 2012 budget, he added. Mr. Sullivan is chairman of the freeholders fiscal affairs committee this year.

It was also announced that a \$60,000 contract with Kean University to provide information technology (IT) services to the county, a resolution unanimously approved by the freeholders, was being done instead of filling two vacancies in the county's IT department.

Cranford resident Jim Buettner said the task force's recommendations amount to only ".2 percent" of the county's budget, which was \$482 million in 2011. "It's pretty sad," he said. "That's (.2 percent) like my gas money for the week."

He said the county could save money by not developing the former Oak Ridge golf course in Clark into a park (for both passive and active recreation) at a cost of over \$16 million. The freeholders approved a resolution Thursday to apply for a matching grant of \$8,035,774 from the New Jersey Office of Green Acres. The county previously was awarded \$1.4 million for the project.

With the release of Mr. Faella's executive budget still weeks away, members of the county's largest union, Council 8, attended Thursday's Board of Chosen Freeholders meeting over concerns of potential layoffs and privatization of some operations.

Michael Bukosky, a Hackensack-based attorney representing Council 8, asked the freeholders to "protect our families and jobs that we have."

"I know the last thing that a public body wants to do is layoffs," Mr. Bukosky told the freeholders. "What we are simply asking is that you work with us to try to find some creative solutions to avoid layoffs. A layoff for an employee is the death penalty." He said the union is asking "for a seat at the table so we can work with you and your team directly" to discuss union members ideas concerning this year's county budget.

Mr. Bukosky said Council 8 workers do everything from road projects to repair furnaces to plowing snow.

He also advised the freeholders to be careful of the privatization of county services, which he described as the "same anti-government, no regulation, privatization that Wall Street sold to us."

On another matter, the freeholders approved a \$134,000 contract with an architect for plans to stabilize the Board of

Elections building in Elizabeth. Joseph Graziano, director of engineering, public works and facilities, said the building's "whole facade has a problem," noting that an area between the first and second floors, originally designed to prevent water from getting into the basement, "has rotted out." He estimated that repairs would range between \$1 and \$1.5 million.

The county installed netting to prevent parts of the building from falling on people walking on the sidewalk. Mr. Graziano said the North Broad Street building dates back to the 1920s.

During the public section of the meeting, several Summit council members addressed the board on county taxes. Councilman Robert Rubino said the city council is requesting that the county put on a referendum before voters to "permanently reduce the county's open space tax by 50 percent." He said Summit pays \$29 million in county taxes, \$1 million more than what the city collects for its own municipal taxes. Mr. Rubino also requested that the county pass an ordinance so that the county tax could not exceed the municipal tax in municipalities.

"At best we get about \$3 million in services from the county," Councilman Patrick Hurley added.

Mr. Buettner of Cranford commented that, "When the one percenters say they're hurting, I think maybe the revolution is coming."

Freeholder Deborah Scanlon commented that in the last few years the city has had "all of its main roads repaved" along with "multi-million-dollar" road projects. In addition, she said all traffic signals have been replaced along the Morris Avenue corridor.

"We are doing the things that need to be done in all 21 of our towns," said Freeholder Scanlon, a Union resident who grew up in Summit. "They (Summit) are being a little unreasonable I think... The fact of the matter is that they have already received more than they put in (to the open space tax)."

She said "up until now" the city has received \$3 million more in open space funds for projects than the city paid into the fund.

Westfield Board of Education

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\$1,319,629 since last year and that grants are expected to increase by \$906.

Mr. Yaniro stated that there was another finance committee meeting prior to the next Board of Education meeting where the state aid figures would be plugged into the budget. It was then noted that further budget discussions would be held at future Finance Committee meetings scheduled for Monday, March 5, and Thursdays, March 8, 15, and 22. In addition, Mr. Yaniro's presentation also stated that Board of Education meetings were scheduled for Tuesdays, March 6, 13, 20 and 27. The public hearing on the budget is set for the March 27 meeting.

In other business, many concerned Westfield High School parents came to last week's meeting to voice their concern over a required reading used in some of the freshman English classes.

Parents objected to the use of "The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian," by Sherman Alexie stating that the book was vulgar and distasteful. The objections ranged from passages of violence and prejudices to the use of profanity and sexual content.

Resident Christine Russo who told the board that she is a native of Westfield stated, "There are aspects of this book that I don't want taught in the class-



Lauren S. Barr for The Westfield Leader HOT TOPIC... Westfield Mayor Andy Skibitsky makes a presentation at the council meeting Tuesday night regarding the Central Avenue pedestrian light.

GW Administrator Alleges Harassment In Lawsuit

By PAUL J. PEYTON
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

GARWOOD – Borough Administrator/Clerk Christina Ariemma has filed a lawsuit against Councilman James Mathieu, the mayor and borough council and borough itself claiming she has been harassed and intimidated by Mr. Mathieu and was denied raises the last two years as retaliation for being a whistleblower.

"After being sworn in on January 2, 2011 as a sitting councilman, Councilman Mathieu began to realize that his campaign promise of a 'no tax increase' could not be met and therefore his promise to the citizens of Garwood would turn into a false one," the suit alleges. "Upon realizing his promise to get rid of Plaintiff Ariemma, Councilman Mathieu started a new campaign of harassing and intimidating Plaintiff Ariemma and other higher salaried employees in an effort to get them to resign."

Among the allegations are that Mr. Mathieu, as finance committee chairman in 2011, had Ms. Ariemma ejected from finance committee meeting after she and Chief Financial Officer Sandra Bruns gave the councilman documentation stating that, according to state statute, "it is a fourth degree crime to incur obligations" in excess of appropriations in a budget.

The suit alleges Mr. Mathieu threatened and harassed Ms. Ariemma, including moving the garbage cans on two occasions at her house from the curb to behind her residence.

"The evidence will show that the councilman moved the garbage cans," said Daniel Antonelli, Ms. Ariemma's attorney, when asked by The Westfield Leader as to how it was known that Mr. Mathieu moved the garbage cans.

The lawsuit also alleges that Ms. Ariemma was denied a salary increase of 3.90 percent in 2011 and 3.75 percent in 2012 in violation of state statute after the borough's public works and police departments received salary increases those years.

Ms. Ariemma also alleges that she was denied from receiving future longevity increases. She currently receives longevity payments of 6 percent over her base salary of \$78,393 as she has completed 15 years of service with the borough. She is eligible, according to the lawsuit, to receive 7 percent over her base as of 20 years of service to the borough and 8 percent over her base once she has 23 years with the borough.

Ms. Ariemma's suit also alleges that the borough violated state statute by failing to increase her salary by \$1,004.68 in 2011, the amount she paid for a new state law requiring government employees in New Jersey to contribute 1.5 percent of their salary towards their health-care coverage.

The suit alleges that former Police

Chief William Legg did not have to pay 1.5 percent of his health insurance and also was given a 3.90-percent salary increase in 2011, which, according to the suit, violates state law that "prohibits sex discrimination in employment."

"It is our position that Councilman Mathieu and the borough have violated the law by failing to provide Ms. Ariemma with certain salary increases she is entitled to and have further violated the law by attempting to take away certain benefits that she is entitled," Mr. Antonelli told The Leader.

Ms. Ariemma has charged in her lawsuit that denial of her benefits was done by the borough and Mr. Mathieu to "harass and intimidate" her following her "whistleblower activities."

Ms. Ariemma is seeking compensatory and punitive damages, reinstatement of her fringe benefits, assessment of a civil fine against the defendants, attorney fees and cost of the suit.

When reached Monday for comment, Mr. Mathieu said, "We've been advised by counsel not to directly comment on the lawsuit." He said he was served with the suit at his home on February 7 as he is being sued in both his official and individual capacity.

"This is the price you pay for moving forward with the Chris Christie agenda," Mr. Mathieu told The Leader.

Mayor Patricia Quattrocchi, who was elected on the Republican line along with Mr. Mathieu in 2010, said she has been unable to talk to Borough Attorney Joseph Triarsi since the borough was served with the lawsuit on February 7. "I am not going to be making any comment now," Mayor Quattrocchi said.

Mr. Triarsi was away this week and could not be reached for comment.

WF Council

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the public meetings that were held on the light, and that he was never notified that the light was moved off the corner. He also said that when he ran into Mayor Skibitsky on Saturday and talked to him about this issue, as well as taxes, fires and lack of services, the mayor "called me a buffoon, an idiot and a jackass."

The mayor said that what Mr. Foley did not tell the public was that he began the conversation by telling the mayor that he was responsible for the death of a woman who was struck and killed while crossing North Avenue recently. Mr. Foley then shouted from the audience, "I didn't say that," adding, "oh, how you lie."

Adina Enculescu, on whose lawn the light was placed, took issue with last week's Westfield Leader editorial, saying that the residents "are the best trained pets poked in the eye for a year and a half." She told Councilwoman JoAnn Neylan, "you don't care of the children," and told the mayor, "I left a communist country because I didn't want to have a leader like you."

"Last week, I was a monster; this week, I'm a communist," Mayor Skibitsky retorted.

Several residents then got up to speak in support of the council, the pedestrian light and the demand civility be restored to council meetings.

Bob Centrella said, "to sit here week after week and listen to this crap, you've got to be nuts." He added that as to the Central Avenue residents, "their voices have been heard and now it's time to stop."

Oliver Kirma said that the light "is an improvement."

Wally Parker said that while every citizen has a right to bring issues before the council, it is incumbent upon them to be respectful and to be reasonable with how the process is adjudicated. When asked by Councilman Haas what prompted him to come to the meeting, Mr. Parker said, "many of us feel this issue has been beaten to death."

Bob Burslem said that he encouraged several people to come to meetings following his letter to the editor in The Leader about behavior at council meetings.

Maria Carluccio got up to speak and began yelling at the council that, "pedestrians don't kill cars; a car kills a pedestrian." She accused the mayor of bringing his "armies tonight" and said, "all these people did was come up here and blow smoke where the sun don't shine."

Robin Kirma said that she was appalled at the behavior toward the council. While she was speaking about teaching conflict resolution to pre-schoolers, Mrs. Carluccio shouted "relevance?" from the audience, to which another audience member told her to "shut up." When Mrs. Kirma said that they were "behaving like bullies," Mrs. Carluccio got up to leave the chambers, at which time several audience members applauded.

The council also approved multiple other resolutions, including firefighter salaries, librarian salaries, tear-downs and professional-service contracts; the details of which will be reported next week.