

# \$3.2 Million Athletic Field Complex Introduced; PBA Negotiations Complete

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

**GARWOOD** – The borough council Tuesday night approved the introduction of a 15-year, \$3,257,000 bond ordinance to construct the Athletic Field Complex (AFC), increasing taxes \$65 on average for a home assessed at \$100,000. This tax is in addition to the yearly taxes, which were \$105 per \$100,000 on the average assessed home this year.

Of the \$3.2 million, \$920,055 represents a general obligation bond at a 3.25-percent interest rate, and \$570,916 represents a Green Acres Loan at a 2-percent interest rate. After interest, by 2028 the borough would pay out close to \$1.9 million for the bond and loan, according to a debt schedule submitted by the borough's auditor.

In addition, the borough is using \$630,000 of its capital surplus and \$42,819 of the Borough Reserve funds to finance the AFC.

The borough also has attained \$1,093,209 in Union County Green Acres and State of New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection Open Space grants, as well as a \$29,425 County of Union Senior Focus grant.

Louis Petruzzelli, chairman of the AFC committee, told *The Westfield Leader* that the cost for all utilities of the AFC were estimated by the Musial Group to be approximately between \$4,000 and \$5,500 per year, based on usage of seven hours a day, five days a week. He said \$3,400 is the current yearly Little League utility bill.

Keith Sluka told *The Leader* that under the turf field contract, the turf field installer will maintain and upkeep the turf field for the first eight years.

Mr. Sluka also said the com-

mittee had discussed potential equipment the borough's Department of Public Works (DPW) may need to invest in to maintain the AFC, but costs and an itemized list had not yet been determined.

The AFC will replace the Garwood Little League Park located on the south side of town at the end of Myrtle Avenue. The new AFC will be expanded into

the forested area along Rankin Avenue to include a Little League field, a 280- by 165-foot multi-use turf field, basketball and bocce courts, a playground, an air-conditioned and heated field house that can also be used for senior citizen meetings, a full kitchen, scoreboards, field lighting and a walking path.

The council heard from a standing room-only audience of residents, including those for and

against the AFC.

Some residents stated the AFC would be a benefit to the children and also would enhance how homeowners and new homebuyers would view the borough.

"You have to provide some of those facilities locally, which we don't have...we are running out of space," said Angelo Alimonti. "We shortchanged the Garwood

students since I was born and raised in this town."

Many residents of the age-restricted condo complex, The Pointe, spoke against the high cost of the AFC and the added taxation they would have to pay, given the residents at The Pointe pay about double the taxes of the average homeowner in Garwood. Other residents outside of The Pointe agreed the cost of the AFC is too high.

Ed Guinan of Center Street said, "I have lived in Garwood with my family for 20 years; before that my wife lived here for 35 years... I am not opposed to children; I have three of them myself. I am not opposed to recreation...[however], this project, at this expense, is large. I heard something about the value added to the town; the only value I see added is to my taxes."

John Conlin of Hemlock Avenue said, "I'd like to see my taxes go down, but not at the expense of our children."

"A 2010 Census found 814 Garwood residents are age 18 or younger. That would mean spending \$4,000 for every one of those children," said William Connolly of Chestnut Court.

Kathleen Villaggio, who was on the AFC committee back in 2000, said at the time, residents were involved in the development of the project and they were in favor of it. "People were involved in this field and it is sad to see the new people in town fighting against us old people...we should all work together. This is something good. This is good," she said.

Some residents asked to have the AFC be voted on by the public by way of a referendum on November's ballot, a sentiment shared by Councilman Jim



Christina Hinke for *The Westfield Leader*

**UNHAPPY CITIZENS...**Residents of Garwood packed the Council Chamber Tuesday evening to express their disapproval of a \$3.2-million bond proposal to build a turf field. They argued against undertaking more debt and that the project only benefits a few. The borough has about 4,000 residents. The added debt would average about \$1,800 per property owner. The council nevertheless voted to proceed and a final vote will occur at the next governing body meeting in August.

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