

WF Residents to Receive Sewer Bills to Offset RVSA Costs

By LAUREN S. BARR
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD—The Westfield Town Council took the first step Tuesday night in setting up a new fee for sewer usage in order to offset a budget gap of approximately \$1.5 million.

The council unanimously passed an ordinance on first reading which will allow the town to bill single- and multi-family housing units \$170 for the year; condominium and townhouses \$135 per unit; commercial and industrial uses \$315 and each apartment unit \$100. Bills will be sent out on or around Tuesday, May 15, and payments are due Sunday, July 1. A public hearing on the ordinance will take place at the

Tuesday, March 13, meeting.

Finance Committee Chairman Sam Della Fera told the council during their conference session that the fees are an amount that, "the committee believes is reasonable." He pointed out that the town's bill from the Rahway Valley Sewerage Authority (RVSA) is up 7.6 percent over the previous year and is the single biggest line item increase in the budget.

Town Administrator Jim Gildea told *The Westfield Leader* that "no tax exempt properties are being billed" and that this ordinance is for 2012 only. He said that bills to residents are to cover "a portion of the utility that is normally supported in total" and that the town

"only wanted to charge what we needed to fill the budget gap," rather than creating a utility to cover the full \$3.6-million bill from the RVSA.

According to Mr. Gildea, the RVSA was using its surplus to help offset costs to the towns it services, but has now run out of money to do so. Additionally, the RVSA is carrying a large debt service related to court-mandated improvements and a new co-generation facility. Westfield is joining the neighboring towns of Clark, Springfield and Scotch Plains, all of which bill residents for sewer use.

At the start of the public meeting, Mayor Andy Skibitsky told the public that an armed robbery at Turning Point that was recently reported "did not occur" and that an employee has been charged with filing a false report and theft in connection with the incident. He also told residents that they should make sure that all of the doors and windows on their homes are secure, and encouraged residents to be alert to suspicious activities following recent home robberies.

The public comment portion of the meeting once again centered around the Central Avenue pedestrian crossing signal.

Cambridge Road resident Lisa Decicco said "what has been going on here is totally ridiculous," referring to behavior on the part of both audience members and members of the governing body. She said that the council may have created a safer crossing, but has made the intersection of Central Avenue and Clover Street worse.

"I think that you missed the opportunity," resident Sharon Stockwell told the council regarding its resolution to not move the light to the corner at the county's expense.

Peter Serpico said he uses the light regularly and "this is an improvement to this neighborhood." He acknowledged that some cars do run the red light, but said that happens at all lights.

Tony DeDuca criticized the latest report on the light from the engineering firm Pennoni Associates, commis-

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REDEDICATION CEREMONY... The community gathered on Sunday at the rededication of the Cranford Rescue Squad. The building that housed the squad was destroyed during Hurricane Irene.

Paul Lachenauer for The Westfield Leader

WF BOE Presents Tech Report, Discusses Reading Requirements

By KIMBERLY A. BROADWELL
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD – Members of the Westfield Board of Education (BOE) and audience members heard and saw a technology presentation given Tuesday evening by Assistant Superintendent Paul Pineiro and Chief Technology Officer Brian Aauker. The presentation was introduced by Board member Mitchell Slater who is the chairperson for the Technology Ad-hoc committee on the BOE.

In his opening statements, Mr. Slater noted that the committee "has looked closely at how our district was currently integrating today's technology into everyday life in the class-

room." He added that work was also done looking at trends in other districts and looking at the possibilities of how to help update how Westfield integrates technology.

When asked how Westfield rates in bringing technology to students, Superintendent of Schools Margaret Dolan, who is also part of the district wide technology ad-hoc committee, stated "our schools have pockets of technology." She elaborated that there were some programs, teachers and

administrators that utilized technology very effectively, but that the recent years of budget cuts have prevented updating of equipment and other technical resources.

During the presentation Mr. Aauker noted that from March 2012 until July 1, 2012 work will be done to make the district wireless and he would give students and teachers alike the opportunity to use their own technology devices at school. He said the

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Betsey Burgdorf for The Westfield Leader

HOUSEWIFE IN THE FARMHOUSE... Former "The Real Housewives of New Jersey" star, Dina Manzo, was in Westfield on Monday filming a segment of her HGTV series "Dina's Party" at the Farmhouse Store on East Broad Street. Pictured with Ms. Manzo are Farmhouse Store co-owners, Ed Menapace, left, and Bill Curtis.

Cemetery Financially Responsible for Security

By BETSEY BURGDFORF
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD — The media attention has faded surrounding the sudden death and the unexpected interment of singer Whitney Houston at Fairview Cemetery in Westfield, but police presence is still noticeable at the cemetery gate.

Questions have arisen as to who is responsible for payment of the round-the-clock police presence, needed to keep curious fans out of the private cemetery.

Westfield Police Chief John Parizeau told *The Westfield Leader* that although he cannot "comment or release information on the security procedures in place," Westfield taxpayers are not responsible. "The compensation for the police officers is being provided by a private entity," Chief Parizeau said.

Despite police presence, several audacious fans have attempted to "crash" the gate, claiming they are visiting loved ones buried in the cemetery.

"All the fans of Ms. [Whitney] Houston have been respectful to being turned away from the property," stated Chief Parizeau. "Those with loved ones are permitted entry after speaking with the officer at the gate."

Because of the level of Ms. Houston's celebrity, and the magnitude of interest in her final resting place, the Westfield Police Department required the assistance of several other local departments to keep the area surrounding Fairview safe for motorists and residents.

"With the cooperation of the Union County Police Department, the Union County Emergency Response Team, and the Cranford Police Department, we were able to minimize the impact of the burial service to our community," Chief Parizeau said. "I would also like to thank the residents in that area with being patient and understanding, as well as those who have been visiting loved ones at the property."

Westfield Town Administrator Jim Gildea concurred, telling *The Leader* that Westfield residents will not bear the cost in any way of the 24/7 security and that the safety of the community is not being compromised. "The private property owner has made arrangements with the Westfield Police Department for private security at their own expense. These private arrangements have no impact on the daily operations of the police department," Mr. Gildea stated.



Benjamin B. Corbin for The Westfield Leader

CROWD CONTROL... The Westfield Police Department was hired by a private entity to control the influx of visitors to Fairview Cemetery after singer Whitney Houston was buried there on February 19.

Costs of Family Court Building Up to \$45 Million

By PAUL J. PEYTON
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

COUNTY – The Union County Board of Chosen Freeholders last Thursday introduced two ordinances and passed a resolution regarding construction of a \$45-million, 78,000-square-foot family court building being built at 10 Cherry Street in Elizabeth. The new building will include a 150-space parking deck.

Freeholder Dan Sullivan said the \$45-million cost includes \$36 million for construction costs; \$5.2 million for demolition of the existing building, construction management, architectural and legal fees, and \$3.7 million for the cost of the bond and debt service.

"It's starting to sound like a boondoggle," said Garwood resident Bruce Paterson. He said cost estimates have jumped from an original \$20 million to the now \$45-million total. "The whole facade (of the family court building) is basically window walls" which he said is not an efficient construction plan.

"The taxpayers are footing the bill for this," Mr. Paterson said. "You are actually now borrowing legal costs, you're borrowing the engineering costs. You're borrowing the soft costs, \$9 million, which is 25 percent of the

hard costs."

County Counsel Robert Barry explained that the issue on the family court dates back nine years, when the state first informed the county of fire-code and safety issues in the courthouse tower.

"We have investigated a number of alternatives," Mr. Barry said, noting that the state gave the county two initial options, one for an exterior staircase on the tower or to build an interior stairwell into the tower.

He said building an interior stairwell would have caused "an enormous disruption" of the courts as well as "enormous costs" of \$29 million. He said talk of moving courtrooms to another location was first discussed two years ago.

Finance Director Bebe Taylor said the debt payments for the family court building for the next 11 years, beginning May 1, 2013, are projected to be \$1.8 million annually. She said after 2024, debt payments would increase as principal on the bond is included in the payments. The county's net debt is currently \$556,196,024, although she said the family-court project would not impact the county's net debt as the project is being funded with revenue bonds and lease pay-

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MS BOE Presents Budget Details; Seeks Public Support

By DOMINIC A. LAGANO
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

MOUNTAINSIDE – The Mountainside Board of Education (BOE) provided more specific figures in its second budget proposal for the 2012-2013 school year this past Tuesday evening.

Acting Business Administrator Daniel Saragnese and Nancy Lubarsky, chief school administrator, presented the proposed budget to the public.

According to Mr. Saragnese, the district's financial position has significantly improved from recent years. "As fate would have it, things fell in our favor and we're in a much better posi-

tion this evening than I thought we were going to be three weeks ago," he said.

The proposed budget expenditures for the 2012-2013 school year are estimated at \$14,950,056, with the required tax levy in the amount of \$13,937,971 for the borough.

The residents of Mountainside will not vote to approve or reject the proposed budget this year as a result of a new state law enacted on January 17 stating that public approval is not required if the proposed budget does not exceed a state-mandated 2-percent increase cap over the previous year's

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BOE ELECTION CHANGE... Union County Clerk Joanne Rajoppi is interviewed last week by Paul Peyton, *The Westfield Leader* assignment editor, on the change of the school election from April to November. See story page 2.

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