

*** Garwood Opts Not to Change Law for Crossing Guards ***

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

GARWOOD – A borough council committee has opted not to recommend changing the borough ordinance regarding borough crossing guards to match

provisions in state legislation introduced by two Trenton Republican lawmakers.

Republican Assemblypersons Amy Handlin and Jay Webber have talked of amending bill no. 132 they introduced in January

concerning eligibility for unemployment insurance for certain seasonal workers. The amendment to the legislation would term part-time school and police workers and other departments as seasonal workers, thus

making them unable to collect unemployment.

The borough council's police committee, chaired by Councilman Timothy Hak, said the committee is not recommending changing the borough law right now to mirror the Assemblypersons' intentions. The borough's crossing guards, who are school part-time employees, came before the council previously, stating their objection to losing unemployment pay when they are off in the summer.

Currently, the borough pays unemployment to crossing guards, who are considered part-time workers. Councilwoman Sara Todisco, a member of the police committee, said the committee recommended waiting a year to see how things pan out in the state and review the outcomes of other municipalities that are changing labor laws.

"If we want to compensate our crossing guards differently, then let's raise the pay," said Councilman Jim Mathieu, who suggested having them not collect unemployment in lieu of a higher pay scale.

Council President Keith Sluka, who also said he supports not paying unemployment benefits to borough crossing guards, said there are two alternatives — privatizing the crossing guards or making them 12-month employees. "The committee doesn't think there is enough savings in both of those," Mr. Sluka said.

To privatize the crossing guards, the borough would realize a savings of some \$10,000, Ms. Todisco said, upon Councilman Mathieu's asking.

"Ten [thousand], and we're not doing it?" Mr. Mathieu responded.

Councilman Victor DeFilippo said the children and parents know the current crossing guards and have a sense of safety with

them. "For the little bit of savings — you don't know who you are getting," he said.

In other business, Mr. Hak said this year's bulk trash pick-up permit would cost \$125 per household, up from \$55 last year. This year the service will be handled privately and not by borough employees as was done last year. Officials said this is to alleviate overtime, potential worker's compensation, and wear and tear on the borough's vehicles. Mr. Hak recommended that two to three households pitch in on a permit to absorb the price hike. Borough Clerk Christina Ariemma recommended having bulk trash picked up after the borough-wide yard sale to be held Saturday and Sunday, September 15 and 16.

Residents of The Pointe, a newly built condominium complex, again voiced their negative opinion of paying double the taxes of the average taxpayer in the borough, while also having to pay extra for private snow removal and garbage hauling. The Pointe and the borough are in the middle of litigation concerning the matter of snow removal and garbage pick-up.

On another matter, it was noted that there is a prevalent rodent problem on Willow Avenue home properties due to the nearby brook that is home to the rodents, property owner Al Dolconte told the governing body. He asked the council what measures the board of health is taking and why a health inspector had entered the back yard of his property without his knowledge. Baits have been set in the brook, Ms. Ariemma said, but she said she would look into the issue further.

Councilman Lou Petruzzelli announced there would be a memorial service for deceased fire department members on

CF Committee OKs Wildlife Feeding Restrictions

By **FRED T. ROSSI**

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CRANFORD – The township committee on Tuesday night gave final approval to an ordinance regulating the feeding of wildlife on public and private property while admitting that the enforcement of the new law, particularly the feeding of birds, will be somewhat vague.

The committee has been working on the ordinance, along with some clarifying amendments, for the past few months, in an effort to balance the concerns of residents who favor more of an unfettered feeding of wildlife with those of individuals who have raised health and safety concerns stemming from wildlife feeding.

Several residents spoke at Tuesday's public hearing, with most of the concerns centering on whether residents would face fines and other penalties for feeding birds. The ordinance calls for bird feeders to be at least four feet off the ground, but ground feeding — the spreading of feed on the ground — also will be permitted. However, Township Attorney Phil Morin cautioned that if ground feeding rises to an excessive level that attracts rodents and other "unwelcome" wildlife, it could lead to possible penalties. But when pressed for an example of what might constitute excessive feeding, Mr. Morin admitted several times that there is "not a black-and-white standard" and that the ordinance does not have a "hard

and fast black line." He said one standard would be whether the feeding creates a public nuisance, which he said is defined as "a violation of public health, safety and welfare."

One resident, for whom wildlife feeding activities have been a subject of contention with her neighbors, raised the specter of residents using the new ordinance as a springboard to push for other ordinances addressing specific complaints about their neighbors. "Any time someone's neighbor does something they don't like," she said, "an ordinance can be passed." She said the color of one's house or too many weeds in a yard might be the next concern addressed in an ordinance. The ordinance, she said, "opens the door to that."

Commissioner Lisa Aduvato Nesi said the ordinance was "prudent for the community and for the wildlife." The committee approved the ordinance by a 4-1 vote, with Commissioner Edward O'Malley voting against it, saying that the town's "serious issue with deer and geese" was not adequately addressed in the ordinance.

The committee will vote on the 2012 municipal budget at its Tuesday, May 22 meeting, and on Tuesday, amendments to the \$33.7-million spending plan were approved that more clearly defined some of the appropriations and revenue figures, including a Clean Communities grant, \$400,000 from the Payment in

Lieu of Taxes (PILOT) program at Cranford Crossing that allows local governments to retain most tax revenue from age-restricted housing developments and an additional \$100,000 for the capital improvement fund to fund town hall renovations.

Deputy Mayor Andis Kalnins said the amendments would mean a slight reduction of \$227,000 in the total property-tax levy of just over \$21 million, and a corresponding reduction in the municipal tax increase from 4 percent to 2.96 percent.

The committee gave unanimous approval to the \$143,518 budget for the Downtown District Management Corp. (DMC), and a few moments later, introduced an ordinance changing the DMC's name to the Downtown Business and Economic Development Office. Commissioner Aduvato Nesi said the DMC had requested the change "to better reflect the purpose and function of that organization." The public hearing on the ordinance will be held on Tuesday, June 12.

At the start of the meeting, members of Girl Scout Troop No. 40272 led the flag salute. Mayor David Robinson presented two retiring township employees, Margaret Herzer and Kathryn Washburn, with certificates of appreciation for their service. And in conjunction with Peace Officers Memorial Day on Tuesday, May 15, the mayor issued a proclamation declaring the week of May 13-19 as Police Week.