

Cranford Bd. Begins Hearing for Centennial Three-Story Building

By CHRISTINA M. HINKE
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

CRANFORD — The planning board Wednesday began hearing an application by Emanuel Nimrud, who is seeking permission to construct a three-story building with retail on the first floor and six apartments on the second and third floors at 496 Centennial Avenue, a B-3 Zone. The site formerly housed Arnold's Pest Control, which burned down. The site also include a parking lot for 10 parking spaces.

Mr. Nimrud sought the following variances and design waivers: to exceed the maximum allowable height and stories; less than the minimum required parking spaces; less than the minimum required front-yard setback; no loading zone provided; and less than the minimum required foot candles in lighting in a parking area.

Mr. Nimrud owns Old City Café and Grill on North Union Avenue and said he has purchased other land in town. "I am investing my time and financials and taking over properties to make it beneficial to the town and myself," Mr. Nimrud said.

Area residents said they were concerned with residents of the apartment complex and customers of the retail establishment parking on the residential streets; the trash container area, which they thought was too small, and the seepage pit planned as a detention basin for stormwater runoff.

"He has a lot of unknowns as to where the overflows are going to go," Sandra Caceras, assistant township engineer, said regarding the stormwater management plans.

Residents asked if the seepage

pit would have standing water that would then attract mosquitoes.

"No, I have not seen that," Nassir Almkhtar, the applicant's architect, said.

"It is encased in two-feet-wide gravel. It goes into the gravel and filter fabric, then the soil. It would stand maybe two to three hours if you have a huge storm," Mr. Almkhtar said.

"It seems a lot of people are concerned about it...and you have not even done a soil test. Everything is hypothetical," said Board Secretary Kevin Illing.

"You are almost doubling the impervious surface, which is why the stormwater management becomes crucial...if the system you are proposing is adequate, we need to be assured of that," Board Chairwoman Lynda Feder said.

Pat Daly, of Garden Terrace, asked about garbage. "A two-yard dumpster seems like a small space for 12 adults and a business," he said. He had concerns about mice or bigger pests. "You are tripling in size. From the garbage point alone...we find that troubling," Mr. Daly said.

Attorney for the applicant, Gerasimos Kitsopoulos, said, "We will increase the number of times of pickup to make sure there is no overflow."

There also were suggestions by the planning board to increase the garbage area to add more dumpster space, but it would lessen the number of parking spaces.

Planning board members also had concerns about how a garbage truck could enter and exit the parking lot, which they said is tight.

Under the zoning laws, 19

spaces are required, where the applicant is providing 10.

Bahman Rzadme, traffic engineer and civil engineer, surveyed the area one weekday between 4 and 6:30 p.m. for the applicant.

Mr. Rzadme said the plan is to have shared parking, where residents are only allowed to park in the evenings when the retail business is closed.

"Shared parking - it is usually done in big developments where you get a percentage of them leaving. Wouldn't it fall apart?" Mr. Illing asked.

Mr. Rzadme suggested parking in the parking lot for the Centennial Avenue Pool, which he said is 300 feet away. Mr. Illing said that lot is full to capacity in the summer when the outdoor pool is open. Mr. Rzadme also said there is available street parking on residential streets within 300 feet of the property.

"No one is going to walk 300 feet," planning board member Dan Aschenbach said.

"I think the overarching concern of parking is the density. We are looking for mixed-use properties along Centennial...but we are always concerned about the contiguous neighborhoods.... Neighbors are justifiably concerned about what happens to their quality of life when 10 more cars appear that were not there previously. ... I think you are not asking for a one- or two-space waiver; you are asking for nine spaces that don't exist. Perhaps there are too many apartments. ... If you are talking about 12 potential cars versus six, I think it would make a huge difference to the property and to the neighborhood," Ms. Feder said.

Residents said the parking in

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Paul Lachenauer for The Westfield Leader

GARWOOD ROCKS...Families enjoy the Garwood Rocks street fair held Sunday. The event offered a variety of food, fun and games for all.

Garwood Council Continues Eminent Domain Debate

By MEGAN K. SCOTT
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

GARWOOD — The borough council on Tuesday directed the Garwood Planning Board to conduct an "Area in Need of Redevelopment" study for the abandoned Casale factory property on South Avenue, including an eminent domain provision that drew a sharp objection from Councilman Jim Mathieu.

Mr. Mathieu was the only dissenter in the 5-to-1 vote for the resolution. Mr. Mathieu, for at least the third time on council, questioned the authority of local governments to take an individual's property for a non-public use. For the third meeting that the issue was debated, he questioned why eminent domain had to be included.

Councilman Bill Nierstedt, who also is a member of the planning board, said the purpose is to ensure that the borough will be able to obtain public parking. He

reiterated that the resolution does not authorize taking property. The council would have to take separate action to do that.

"All this really is, and I hate to use the term, is a toolbox," Mr. Nierstedt said. "It is a tool that enables us to use it if we need it. We don't need it; we don't use it."

Mr. Mathieu did not see it that way.

"To me, this seems very shady. It seems like an abuse of power," he said, reiterating his concerns at previous council meetings. "To have this thing lurking back there that we really don't need but we might use; folks, this is how the government takes away your liberty."

"It's not a personal thing, but I think government should be shackled," Mr. Mathieu continued.

A frustrated Councilman Mike Martin said, "Jim. You are just

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