

Garwood Board Faces Challenge Over Vote on Nine Townhouses

By BRIAN TRUSDELL

Specialty Written for The Westfield Leader

GARWOOD – The planning board is facing a legal challenge from two of its own members and two other residents over its decision earlier this year to approve a zoning variance that would allow nine townhomes to be built in a single-family area at the north end of Walnut Street across Fourth Avenue.

Board Attorney Donald Fraser informed the board at its monthly meeting on September 24 that an appeal of the May 28 vote had been filed in state Superior Court in Elizabeth, initiated by sitting board members Bruce Paterson and Ileen Cuccaro, along with *Westfield Leader* Publisher Horace Corbin and his brother, *Leader* Assistant Publisher David Corbin.

The Corbins live on Union Street near the property, which many long-time residents remember as the former home of Hidi's Deli and Five Star Catering.

"I have never seen in my years of practice (an appeal) filed by members of the very board that is the defendant," said Mr. Fraser, who, along with his firm, Perrotta, Fraser and Forrester of Clark, was retained to represent the borough in the matter.

The announcement at the end of the meeting sparked a seemingly incredulous reaction from Planning Board Chairman Steve Greet, who asked Mr. Paterson if he was, in effect, suing himself, and if he intended to resign from the body.

"If that's what it takes," Mr. Paterson replied.

But both he and Mrs. Cuccaro said that their attorney, John DeNoia of Kochanski, Baron and Galfy in Rahway, advised them that resignation was unneces-

sary.

"They're not looking for any damages," Mr. DeNoia said Friday by phone. "There's no real reason why anyone should resign. They have a right to their opinion, and a right to have that opinion heard by a court. I don't think there's any obligation to resign."

He did admit the oddity of board members suing the very board on which they serve.

"I would think it's a little unusual," he said. "I wouldn't go so far as to say it's unprecedented."

The basis of the appeal is that the property had been zoned for three single-family homes and that the owners, Sandro and Angela Villaraut, also named as defendants, did not show their proposal was "an inherently beneficial use," and therefore it should have been rejected.

Several years ago, the board rejected a similar proposal for the same property, and an appeal of that decision was dismissed.

"One of the criteria (for granting the variance) is that the property is not suited to be developed as zoned," Mr. DeNoia said. "There is a history with this property. Somebody got a three-house subdivision."

Mrs. Cuccaro abstained from the vote because she lives on Third Avenue within 200 feet of the Villaraut property. Mr. Paterson voted against the variance, which was approved 5-to-2. Robert Scherer also voted no.

"It was the last straw," Mrs. Cuccaro said. "They want to put in high-density housing and the rest of us are going to be stuck with it."

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MULTI-TASKER... Cranford Township Commissioner Tom Hannen, Jr. shows off his moves while dancing to the music and simultaneously working the grill at the Feast of St. Michael at St. Michael Church and School in Cranford on Saturday night.

Paul Lachenauer for *The Westfield Leader*

Local Letters to the Editor

Garwood Democrats On the Campaign Trail Seek Suggestions

We greatly appreciate all the feedback we are getting from residents as we walk door to door. Many tell us what we already know – that Garwood is a great place to live. We want to keep Garwood a small town with a big heart that continues to provide valuable services the residents have come to expect and deserve at the best possible price. It's equally important for us to hear residents' concerns and to answer their questions so that we can work on finding solutions. We have received many thanks for the hard work that we have done and the work we still plan to do. We look forward to meeting with all of our neighbors before Election Day.

Collectively, we have served on many borough boards and committees over the years, both through government duties and our personal lives. With our roots in Garwood, we appreciate its past history and envision an even brighter future for our small, strong borough. Keep in mind that we are hosting a Family

Pizza Night on Friday, October 24th at the Garwood Knights of Columbus from 5:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. and hope to see many residents there to enjoy a nice night out with their neighbors. Please watch your mail for our literature for updates and information.

If you were not home when we were in your neighborhood, or if you have additional thoughts you would like to share with us, please feel free to contact us anytime. Charles can be reached at (908) 789-0508 or cplombardo2014@gmail.com; Lou can be reached at (908) 233-1657 or lpetruzzelli@garwood.org; and Sara can be reached at (908) 377-7890 or stodisco@garwood.org. Comments and suggestions are always welcome from the residents and we encourage you to seek us out.

Charles Lombardo, Mayoral Candidate

Louis Petruzzelli, Council Candidate
Sara Todisco, Council Candidate

Candidate Piarulli Says Garwood Cannot Afford 'Wait-And-See' Attitude

On November 4th, the voters of Garwood have a critical decision to make regarding Garwood's future. It is no secret that we are in a period of transition, which has raised some serious concerns for the taxpayers of Garwood. Taxes have skyrocketed over the past decade, and debt has increased 66 percent over just the last couple of years.

As we speak to residents, the message is clear that we need a new direction with new ideas so

we can keep Garwood affordable and maintain its small town feel. Just this year we had an opportunity to have no municipal tax increase thanks to federal grants and state pension reforms, but our Mayor and Council refused to cut Garwood's budget the necessary 0.005 percent to make that tax relief a reality.

As elected officials, we will take a hard look at spending and we will make our voices heard loudly

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