

## Westfield Planning Board Rejects New England Dr. Subdivision

By MICHAEL BONACCORSO  
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD — After six hours of testimony at Monday night's planning hearing, the board unanimously denied applicant D. Villane Construction, LLC permission to remove an existing single-family home at 885 New England Drive, with a subsequent property subdivision creating two separate conforming lots. The application was opposed by numerous neighbors who were represented by attorney Robert F. Simon.

"This application has procedural and substantive defects," said Mr. Simon during his concluding arguments on why the planning board should deny the application.

Mr. Simon said when analyzing Westfield's municipal land-use law, the subdivision's "relationship to neighboring properties" regarding drainage, landscaping, architectural design, are essential planning details, which "should be important to this board."

"I stopped counting at 12. We heard it perhaps 14 times. 'We don't have any plans,'" said Mr. Simon, describing the applicant's testimony regarding what would be developed after the subdivision is complete.

Mr. Simon said the planning board has numerous provisions in Westfield's land-use ordinances, "which require adequate information to assess the application."

"I'm never about blowing up a

project. I'm interested in good planning," Mr. Simon said.

"The law states you shall grant [approval] when fully conforming. It's a conforming application. This application exceeds conforming," LLC attorney James M. Foerster said.

Eleven neighbors provided the board with statements addressing concerns which they felt the application did not address that were material to the decision process.

"With continued building of multi-family homes and lot splitting, we are over burdening a town that has not done enough to address either parking or the traffic situation," said resident Benjamin Bryan of New England Drive during testimony to the board.

Resident Kathleen Hanlon, of Village Green, said, "Mr. Villane's arborist stood here last month attempting to justify the removal of nearly all trees on the property. It will likely be 40 to 60 years before this returns to its natural appearance (the surrounding tree line), said Ms. Hanlon, displaying a picture of a Villane property post-development.

Planning board member and Mayor Shelley Brindle stated that, "I cannot disregard subsection 8.06G (of the land-use law)," suggesting why she could not support the subdivision application for approval.

"I will not be supporting this application tonight," said Mayor Brindle, who was met with a standing ovation by more than 50 residents present at the hearing.

Mayor Brindle said six of nine planning board members are "new this year." The planning board will adjust Westfield's land-use laws in the upcoming six months when drafting an updated "master plan," stated Mayor Brindle.

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## Freeholders, Dept. Heads To Get Raises In January

By PAUL J. PEYTON  
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

COUNTY — For the third time in the last four years, the Union County Freeholder Board approved raises for themselves and department heads. The board introduced the ordinance last Wednesday and has scheduled a public hearing and board vote on Thursday, December 13.

Effective January 1, the freeholder chairman's salary will go from \$34,096 to \$35,034, the vice-chairman's from \$33,014 to \$33,922, and the seven remaining freeholders will see a salary increase from \$31,931 to \$32,810. Board salaries were \$30,090 in January of 2015, \$30,691 in 2016, \$31,305 in 2017, and \$31,931 in 2018. During that time frame the chairman's salary went from \$32,130 in January of 2015, to \$32,772 in 2016, \$33,428 in 2017 and \$34,096 in 2018.

The county counsel's salary will go from \$171,744 to \$176,467 in 2019; the county manager from \$169,000 to \$173,648; director of administrative services from \$135,498 to \$139,224; director of corrections from \$124,746 to \$133,000; director of economic development/deputy county manager from \$149,683 to \$157,396; director of engineering, public works and facilities from \$143,632 to \$150,151; director of finance and county treasurer/chief financial officer from \$145,441 to \$153,551; director of human services from \$130,000 to \$136,658; director of parks and recreation from \$128,382 to \$137,051, and director of public safety from \$133,249 to \$139,483.

County Manager Ed Oatman, who previously served as chief of staff for Senator Nick Scutari (D-22nd, Linden), succeeded county manager Alfred Faella, who retired, in March 2018. Mr. Faella was making \$179,757 at the time of his retirement.



Kristin McAlliney for The Westfield Leader

HANUKKAH CELEBRATION...Rabbi Levi Block leads Sunday's ceremony for the lighting of the menorah for the first night of Hanukkah. The menorah is located in front of the town's Christmas tree at the Westfield train station.

## Supt. Dolan, Pres. Ohlig Comment On 'Hateful' Graffiti Messages

By SARAH McGRAIL  
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD — An angry superintendent of schools defended the district's reaction to repeated bias incidents in Westfield schools at Tuesday's board of education meeting.

Superintendent Margaret Dolan, Ed.D., was responding to a complaint from Westfield parent Benjamin Schneider about the district's communication with the public regarding graffiti in two schools.

"I am concerned about the communication from the school system in sepa-

rate incidents where swastikas have been inscribed on school property, including the current incident at Edison (Intermediate School) and a previous incident at Franklin Elementary School in February 2017," said Mr. Schneider, a Sinclair Place resident.

"There has been kind of a downplay of the true nature of these incidents as crimes. The e-mails sent by the schools avoided calling the incidents what they are, using neither the words 'swastika' nor 'anti-Semitism,'" he said. "It is only because of an e-mail from Temple Emanu-El that I am aware of the true nature of the crimes. There is a real danger in not using the word 'swastika' and calling a hate crime what it is. This minimizes the incident."

But Superintendent Dolan said the graffiti discovered at Edison Intermediate School last week was not only anti-Semitic.

"There were hateful messages against many groups of people," she said. "If it had been a swastika, if it had been completely anti-Semitic, I would have had no problem saying that. As I was writing to the community and trying to be honest and transparent, I was angry, and you might be able to hear that I am still angry, and I am not alone in that. But there are 844 students in that school. Eight hundred and forty-four students did not do something hateful that day. In this case, one person did something hateful."

Board President Gretchan Ohlig said

lessons about transparency had already been learned and this was demonstrated by the willingness to share details of anti-Semitic graffiti in 2018 that had not been shared following a previous incident in 2017.

"There are several different groups, and some of the words that were written are foul and nasty. How do you just pull out one and not list them all?" Ms. Ohlig said. "I understand the frustration because there is nobody to yell at. But this is a community issue. We need to acknowledge it and put on our armor for this battle because it is not just happening in our schools. And you know what is happening in our schools? Many times a day, countless, countless good things by countless, countless children, so we cannot be defined by this one incident."

Police are still investigating last week's incident.

Earlier in the meeting, board members heard from Business Administrator Dana Sullivan that the board audit report had been delayed because auditors were waiting for figures from the state. There was a new requirement that financial reports should reflect payments that the state makes on the board's behalf for retirement health benefits, and the state had not yet provided those numbers.

Auditor Bob Morrison said the state had known since 2015 that these figures would be needed, but they had yet

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Susan M. Dougherty for The Westfield Leader

SINGING GALS AND THEIR LEADERS...At the Mountainside tree lighting and visit from Santa on Saturday night, the Girl Scouts of Mountainside sing five songs.

## Playground Renovations Hampered by Weather

By KATE BROWNE  
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD — Recreation Director Don Bogardus told the recreation commission Monday night that the renovations to the playground at Mindowaskin Park continue to be hampered by inclement weather. The contractor has installed the rubber base and will install the color coat by the end of the month. In addition, fields two and three at Gumbert Park have been skimmed and the concrete footings for the bathrooms at Memorial Field have been installed and the project is on track to be completed before the start of the spring sports season.

Detailed financial reports on the Memorial Pool operations will be presented at the Monday, January 7, 2019 meeting.

Commission Chairman Gary Fox advised that the contract for the town's strategic plan has been executed and the administration is in the process of selecting the members of the steering committee. Mr. Fox urged residents to participate in the process by attending the public meetings, which will be conducted next year. He also thanked

commission members James Foerster and Jeff O'Connor, whose terms expire at the end of the month. Mr. O'Connor has served since 2006 and was, as Mr. Fox noted, a reliable advocate for residents. Residents interested in volunteering to serve on the commission are encouraged to complete the volunteer form, which can be downloaded from the town's website.

Commission member Brad Rothenberg provided an update on the operations of the newly-installed ice hockey rink. He explained that the rink is fully operational and usage is high, especially during the open-skate sessions. He said there have been issues with idling cars, complaints of excessive noise and parents ignoring the "no drop off" signs. The rink advisory committee will conduct a listening session this Wednesday, December 5 (after press deadline).

Aquatic Supervisor Heather ReFerrati reminded the public that the Senior Service Expo has been rescheduled and will be held at the municipal building on Friday, December 14, and there are dozens of

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Susan M. Dougherty for The Westfield Leader

HO, HO, HO...Santa stops by at the Mountainside Rescue Squad garage, to the delight of children, at the borough's tree-lighting event on Saturday night.



Paul Lachnauer for The Westfield Leader

FESTIVAL OF LIGHTS...Rabbi Abraham Blesofsky of the Scotch Plains Chabad and Andy Blumenstock light the menorah during Garwood's first annual Hanukkah menorah lighting on Sunday night.

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