

Westfield Finished 2018 With Budget Surplus of \$14.5 Mil.

By MICHAEL BONACCORSO
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD - Councilwoman Linda Habgood, chairperson of the council's finance committee, and Town Administrator Jim Gildea hosted a 2019 budget forum on Thursday. Councilwoman Habgood said the evening's purpose was to discuss how the \$173.7 million of Westfield's 2018 total tax collections was allocated. As of December 31, 2018, Westfield's municipal budget surplus totaled \$14.51 million, stated Ms. Habgood.

Ms. Habgood said the 2019 municipal budget goals include "maintaining a \$9- to \$10-million-dollar surplus or nest egg." The municipi-

pality will utilize \$4.2 million to \$5.2 million of the \$14-million surplus to invest in Westfield's roads, sewers, public works and service equipment, and enhance resident safety, she said.

Councilwoman Habgood reviewed the "breakdown" in total dollars and described by percentage of total tax collections of how 2018 collected taxes were utilized. She said each tax dollar was allocated to different governing entities for annual operations described as different tax levies including the school district, Union County, Union County Open Space, Westfield Memorial Library and the municipal tax.

While Westfield's total tax revenue exceeds \$173 million, the municipal budget, overseen by Mayor Shelley Brindle and the town council, is \$27,975,396 or 16.11 percent of the \$173-million total tax revenue, stated Ms. Habgood. The school district receives 58.7 percent or \$101 million.

Of each tax dollar Westfield residents pay, 23.05 percent or \$40 million to the county. The Westfield public library receives 1.48 percent of each resident tax dollar, totaling \$2,571,941, stated Ms. Habgood. Mr. Gildea said the library is overseen by a board of trustees who make executive decisions pertaining to the library's annual discretionary and non-discretionary budget.

The Union County Open Space Tax Levy received \$1,166,662 or .67 percent of the total tax collection, stated Ms. Habgood.

Westfield's 2018 municipal revenue was up 6.1 percent, to \$2.96 million, and "more than anticipated" at the 2017 budget year's end, stated Ms. Habgood.

"Despite more than a 24.5-percent non-discretionary cost increase of \$1.15 million and \$150,000 in "unexpected storm cleanup costs," the municipal tax levy increased .52 percent," said Ms. Habgood.

A total of \$4.2 million of the municipal surplus was "invested strategically in equipment, technology and (improvement expenditures) to reduce the tax rate (for future years)," stated Ms. Habgood.

A 2018 "positive budget highlight" includes \$381,000 in interest earned on "budget money" held in custodial or investment accounts, or "more than double the projected interest amount," Ms. Habgood explained.

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Hartz Planner: Twp. to See \$2.76 Mil. In Tax Revenue

By CHRISTINA M. HINKE
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

CRANFORD - Updated demographic data and the costs and revenue associated with the rezoning application for 750 Walnut Avenue, where the owner, Hartz Mountain, seeks to convert commercial and industrial uses to a residential zone for 905 planned apartments, was provided Wednesday to the planning board by planner Keenan Hughes, an expert in planning hired by Hartz Mountain. He said the municipality and school district in total would see a \$2.76-million net-positive impact in tax revenue on a yearly basis as a result of the apartment complex.

The municipality would see \$660,000 in tax revenue yearly, based on Mr. Hughes' projections, while the school district would see \$2.1 million in tax revenue yearly.

In terms of the impact to the public schools, a range of 100 to 135 public-school children was projected to be moving into the 905 apartments, Mr. Hughes calculated based on two different methodologies. He took data from apartment complexes in Cranford - Riverfront at Cranford Station, Woodmont Station at Cranford, and Cranford Crossing. Those comparisons yielded 52 public-school children in phase 1 of the construction, and 110 public-school children at full build out. He also used a statewide Rutgers study updated in November 2018 that focused on multi-family housing, he said. Mr. Hughes, in his application of the Rutgers methodology, yielded 70 at phase 1 and 135 public-school children at full build out. He said he took the data from the Rutgers study, which showed school-age children (which includes children who may not be attending public schools), and calculated out 85 percent, which is the percentage of



MINDWASKIN FROZEN OVER...Mindwaskin Pond in Westfield was frozen over during last week's cold snap that saw single-digit temperatures and below zero wind chills. The photo shows the glow of ice on the pond and the lights of East Broad Street businesses.

Paul Lachenauer for The Westfield Leader

Board Concurs With Re-Zoning Of 24 New England Dr. Properties

By MICHAEL BONACCORSO
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD - The planning board on Monday unanimously approved a report by the town planner recommending the re-zoning of 24 properties located on New England Drive from an RS-12 single-family residential district to the RS-16 single-family residential district following an analysis conducted by the town planner.

Both districts permit detached single-family dwellings, stated Town Planner Donald Sammet. However,

"bulk standards," such as lot size requirements, "differ between the districts," stated Mr. Sammet. The zoning changes will be officially adopted following a second reading public hearing on the ordinance at the Tuesday, February 12 town council meeting.

During planning board comments Mayor Shelley Brindle said she wanted to thank Mr. Sammet for the "incredibly impressive" analysis he conducted on the zone's history and current status.

"At issue is if an alternative zone district designation would be more appropriate for the area, given the characteristics of existing lots such as lot frontages and lot areas," said Mr. Sammet, describing his initial purpose for the analysis and inquiry. In 1991, prior to the properties' RS-12 designation, the area was zoned RS-100, stated Mr. Sammet. On December 7, 1992, Westfield's master plan was amended, "in an attempt to minimize the number of non-conforming lots that exist," explained Mr. Sammet.

The effective zoning change from RS-100 to RS-12 reduced the minimum lot requirement from 100 feet to 75 feet, stated Planning Board Chairman Robert Newell.

The minimum lot areas required for an RS-100 and RS-12 zone remained the same at 12,000 square feet, stated Mr. Sammet, while the

minimum lot area within an RS-16 zone is 16,000 square feet.

"Areas where one side of the street met the RS-16 minimum lot requirement and the other side did not were eliminated from consideration for a rezoning at this time," Mr. Sammet said.

Mr. Sammet said the planning goal is to keep a consistent set of zone district regulations on both sides of the street. "In achieving consistency, the neighborhood character along a residential block" will be preserved, he said.

"Most striking is that New England Drive is characterized by lot frontages which far exceed the 75-foot minimum required by RS-12 zone, but are closer in frontage length to the RS-16 zone," Mr. Sammet said.

If the 24 properties were to remain zoned as RS-12, the number and percentage of non-conforming lots will increase in the minimum lot size, stated Mr. Sammet.

"The creation of an unduly large number of non-conforming lots in a zone would run counter to good planning practice," Mr. Sammet said.

He said changing the zone from RS-12 to RS-16 will not adversely affect the town's ability to provide low- and moderate-income housing, thus preserving existing street patterns, and would not exclude the con-

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COMMUNITY FEEDBACK...Garwood Mayor Sara Todisco welcomes residents and hears their ideas during her first "Breakfast with the Mayor" held on Saturday morning at Borough Hall.

Paul Lachenauer for The Westfield Leader

Mountainside Discusses 2019 Capital Projects

By KATE BROWNE
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

MOUNTAINSIDE - The borough council discussed the scope of the municipality's capital projects at its work meeting on Tuesday. Mayor Paul N. Mirabelli explained that a temporary capital budget was necessary because of the time constraints imposed by the terms of the community's bonds. The mayor anticipates the final budget for 2019 will be introduced in March and adopted in April.

Infrastructure improvements, which will be funded, include phase four of the storm-sewer upgrade project, approximately \$40,000 for pothole repair, and paving Barton Drive and Partridge Road. Additionally, a new sound and video system will be installed in the municipal courtroom. The new system will allow prisoners to be arraigned via a live video feed to the Union County jail rather than transporting them to the jail located in Elizabeth.

In addition, the entire municipal computer system, including the seven servers, and the systems used by the finance and police departments, will be upgraded. According to Borough Administrator James Debbie, all of the data and systems will be moved to the Cloud. Mr. Debbie noted that the borough's insurance provider had recommended the transition because of the age of the equipment and the Malware and other virus-detection systems that Cloud computing provides.

Frank Masella, director of pool operations for the Mountainside Community Pool, made a presentation during which he advised that the Berkeley Heights pool had been purchased by the YMCA. As a result, that pool will be closed for the summer of 2019. Mr. Masella recommended, and the council unanimously agreed, that all residents of Berkeley Heights be invited to join the Moun-

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DEDICATED VOLUNTEER...Joseph Starkey, pictured center, was presented with a proclamation by Cranford Mayor Patrick Giblin, left, at the January 29 township committee meeting recognizing his 10 years of service to the township's library board. Mr. Starkey is a lifelong Cranford resident and chairman of the Swim Pool Advisory Board.

Courtesy of Patricia Pavlak



FAMILIES TAKE A TOUR...Garwood Police Officer Scott Eriksen shows kids the holding cells in the borough's police station as part of Saturday's "Breakfast with the Mayor."

Paul Lachenauer for The Westfield Leader

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