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Christina M. Hinke for The Westfield Leader
WINTER THAW...Ducks swim at Mindowaskin Pond where the water is half frozen, half thawed after the temperatures rose to 60 degrees on Monday.

Westfield Board of Ed. Interviews Board Candidates for Vacancies

By SARAH McGRAIL
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD — Work on the renovation of Kehler Stadium has started with the removal of the metal bleachers, the stadium owners were told this week.

The Westfield Board of Education heard that the \$1.5-million project, which should have been completed last year, had finally got off the ground following delays caused by legal proceedings.

At Tuesday's meeting, Board President Peggy Oster thanked Audrey Zavitz, principal of Lincoln School, which backs onto the stadium, for keeping the parents of her kindergarten pupils informed about the work.

On another matter, board members had been hard at work for more than three hours prior to the meeting interviewing candidates to fill two vacant positions on the board.

Sixteen people had applied to fill the vacancies created by the resignations of Charles Ostroff and Lynn Benner.

According to Mary Ann McGann, coordinator of school and community relations, the board will likely vote to approve two new board members at its next board meeting on Tuesday, February 26.

The new board members will be appointed by the board to fill those positions until the next election in November 2019.

SP Council Faces Increased Budget Expenditures In '19

By FRED T. ROSSI
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

SCOTCH PLAINS — After four years of essentially flat municipal budgets, the township council this year faces a less certain environment as it starts to finalize a 2019 spending plan that could include an increase in municipal property taxes, according to Township Manager Al Mirabella.

At a four-hour budget meeting on Monday, the council and Chief Financial Officer Ted Georgiou met with the heads of the police and fire departments, the township library and the directors of the construction, engineering, recreation and public works departments to discuss their spending requests.

Since 2015, township expenditures have not increased significantly while the municipal portion of the property tax levy has been similarly flat. It currently stands at \$1,507 per 4100 of assessed property value. But Mr. Mirabella told *The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times* that a \$218,000 increase in pension obligations — an amount equal to about two tax points — will need to be considered as this year's budget is finalized in the coming weeks. Furthermore, increased investments in public safety, including more police and fire personnel, and a possible new branch and brush pickup in the fall are also affecting spending and tax decisions. "It will be more of a challenge" to keep expenditures down this year, he said.

"After four years, there are things out of our control that we have to deal with," Mr. Mirabella said, while adding that the overall operating budget and township employees' salaries will

Re-Zoning

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struction of less expensive homes in Westfield.

The 24 properties proposed for an RS-16 zone designation include New England Drive residences listed at 808, 818, 834, 854, 870, 902, 908, 924, 940, 956, 897, 885, 873, 857, 841, 825, 809, 955, 945, 935 and 925.

Residences at 1065 and 1061 Lamberts Mill Road, as well as 11 Willow Grove Parkway, are included as per neighborhood layouts, said Mr. Sammet.

Rec. Commission to Host Chili, Chowder Cook Off

By KATE BROWNE
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD — The recreation commission on Monday urged residents to pre-register early for the town's first annual Chili & Chowder Cook Off, which will be held on Sunday, February 24, from 2 to 4 p.m., in the Community Room located in the municipal building.

The event, which is jointly sponsored with the town council, will feature dishes prepared by members of the Westfield Police, Fire and Public Works Departments and local businesses. The entrance fee is \$5 and registration is capped at 150.

In other business, commission members unanimously voted in favor of contributing \$5,900 to the Westfield Girls Softball League to help defray the cost of resurfacing the infields and other routine maintenance at Memorial Park Fields One and Two. According to the representatives from the League, Joel Kamins and Joe Verga, the estimated cost of the project is approximately \$14,000 and the League's goal is to have the fields ready for opening day.

Recreation Director Don Bogardus provided a detailed overview of the recently completed filter project at Memorial Pool. According to Mr. Bogardus, four of the five filters, which are more than 30 years old, were successfully repaired; however, the fifth was too damaged and needed to be replaced, which increased the total cost of the project by approximately \$3,000. Commission members discussed the challenges of maintaining the portions of the pool infrastructure which are at the end of their useful life and increasingly difficult and expen-

sive to service. They agreed the issue would need to be considered as part of future discussions regarding the capital budget for projects.

Mr. Bogardus also provided an update on the status of the parks and fields master plan project. He advised that the consultants had received a large number of maps, surveys and related materials and public meetings seeking input from the community and field user groups would be scheduled in the near future.

Commission Vice-Chairman Brad Rothenberg provided a report regarding the operations at the temporary ice hockey rink located on the Gumbert Park basketball courts. He advised that as of the end of January, 15,000 people have been to the rink and the average number of attendees at the public sessions has been 100 people. Several events have included the Adaptive Needs Skating nights and events held by McKinley and Wilson Elementary Schools.

To address ongoing concerns from residents regarding excessive noise, the rink's owners have installed sound-absorbing pads on the portion of the rink facing Fourth Street and have received approval from the state's GreenAcres division to install a noise-canceling curtain. The rink is scheduled to be dismantled on Friday, March 1, and discussions regarding whether it should be allowed to return will begin shortly after that.

Commission Chairman Gary Fox reminded the public that their input is welcomed and advised that the date of the yet to be scheduled meeting where the rink will be discussed will be well publicized.



Paul Lachenaier for The Westfield Leader
SEE WHAT I SEE...Garwood Police Chief Jim Wright hands over a pair of long-range binoculars to a child during Garwood Mayor Sara Todisco's first "Breakfast with the Mayor" held Saturday morning at Borough Hall.

Health Bd. to Address Sub. Abuse, Ped. Safety in '19

By MICHAEL BONACCORSO
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD — Board of Health President, Dr. Lawrence D. Budnick, said Monday that the board should focus on three broader public health categories in 2019 for promoting policy, sponsoring public initiatives and providing information to keep residents informed. They are deterring teen substance abuse and promoting and protecting pedestrian safety, with the third pertaining to a Westfield Board of Health bylaw review.

Dr. Budnick said the board should concentrate on deterring "teen nicotine use" within Westfield. Health board member Sharon Dorry, a registered nurse, said the "vaping trend" is rampant in Westfield High School. Students who are athletes or who are aware of the "dangers of smoking tobacco" do not categorize "vaping to be as dangerous," stated Ms. Dorry.

The vaping de-stigmatization has led many teens to become addicted to nicotine or the "vape," Ms. Dorry said.

"Even student athletes, I know, have begun vaping and just cannot quit," Ms. Dorry said.

Ms. Dorry said the vaping trend is hazardous to all teenagers involved. However, the fact that even students who are supposed to be or are health conscious have begun the trend without hesitation is definitive to the lack of information about "vaping hazards."

Dr. Budnick said the town passing an ordinance barring flavored vaporizers or "avored oils" (nicotine-filled vaporizer fluid) could deter younger consumers from finding the appeal. He said studies are finding that teenagers who begin vaporizing are "more likely" to smoke cigarettes at an older age.

Programs have been enacted within the Westfield school district to "speak with middle-school-aged children" about the dangers of vaping and "why not to begin," stated Ms. Dorry. The "concept," she said, is to reach students before they are introduced to vaping in high school or have begun.

School administrators have discovered vaping is more prevalent amongst high-school students than middle-school students, stated Ms.

Dorry. Marijuana's pending recreational legalization in New Jersey will be a second focus for the board of health as it applies to substance-abuse deterrence, stated Dr. Budnick. Health Officer Megan Avallone said the problem is that there is not enough information surrounding the nefarious side effects of marijuana abuse amongst any cohorts.

Dr. Budnick stated that from "what he has read," automotive accidents in "legalized (marijuana) states" have "increased 6 percent."

Westfield Board of Health Vice-President Elizabeth Talmont said law enforcement will police intoxicated drivers similarly to those intoxicated on prescription medications. Law enforcement's ability to detect "high drivers" is hindered as no formal or accurate test exists, stated Ms. Talmont.

Councilwoman Jo Ann Neylan said Mayor Shelley Brindle and the town council will discuss ways to keep marijuana dispensaries from operating in the downtown business district. Councilwoman Neylan stated that to her knowledge ordinances "have already been passed" prohibiting marijuana-oriented businesses.

Dr. Budnick said the board also must remain vigilant on the opioid epidemic by continuing to assist parents, community leaders and all involved in identifying the warning signs of opioid addiction and locating programs to help those addicted.

On the pedestrian safety goal, board member Thomas K. O'Neill said, "Promoting pedestrians walking more leads to healthier living."

Dr. Budnick said the board's bylaws are more significant to future board operations than dealing with the public. However, he said keeping efficient operations and the board's actions significant to the community through effective "by-law considerations" will benefit Westfield residents for years to come.

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750 Walnut Avenue

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The school district's net-positive impact would be \$2.1 million per year, after full build out of the apartments, based on his calculated \$14,179 cost per pupil in the public schools. The school district's cost per pupil, he said, is \$18,296 per the state department of education, and approximately 77.5 percent of that cost is funded by local property taxes, so after extracting taxes he said the cost per pupil for the project would be \$14,179.

Karl Pehnke, the traffic engineer hired by Hartz Mountain, also returned to provide an update of traffic data based on a new survey conducted on October 30, 2018. He said the data showed a higher flow of vehicular traffic heading northbound on Walnut Avenue in the morning than his previous counts, but he said he felt it was an "anomaly." Board member Peter Taylor commented, "or it could be reality." The count was 524 versus 415 previously.

Mr. Pehnke said his conclusion is, "we can design safe and proper access into the site."

He said the timing of the traffic signal at the corner of Raritan Road and Walnut Avenue could be changed

to accommodate an improved traffic flow, as well as adding left-hand-turn lanes on Walnut Avenue, heading towards downtown Cranford, into the property. The turning lanes would be designed to hold 10 vehicles, he said. Walnut Avenue would be widened to accommodate the lanes, and would be accommodated by using the land at 750 Walnut Avenue and not the residents' properties across the street on Walnut Avenue, Mr. Pehnke said.

The property is bordered by the Conrail line on one side. "We do not intend to connect to the residential neighborhood across the rail line," said James Rhatican, the applicant's attorney, in response to a question posed by resident Jim Carvalho. Mr. Carvalho also asked why one of the owners of the property was not listed on the zoning application. Mr. Rhatican said if one of the subsidiary owners is not on the application, then "it's an oversight" and he would correct it.

Hartz Mountain will continue on Wednesday, February 20, at 8 p.m., with a planning board workshop meeting to be held at 7 p.m. The Cranford Planning Board is to have its own experts present at the 8 p.m. meeting.

Westfield Budget Process Begins with Forum

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Mayor Brindle and the council noted that "strategic drivers" or categorized priorities will remain in the administration's focus while "demonstrating fiscal responsibility" during the implementation process.

The "strategic drivers" include strengthening communication capabilities, prioritizing infrastructure and safety, enhancing services and operating efficiencies, and improving economic development and community engagement.

Westfield is considering assisting residents with sidewalk repairs by "splitting the cost" with residents, stated Ms. Habgood. The sidewalk in front of a resident's home is the resident's responsibility currently. The project, if enacted

or approved, could be one municipal effort in assisting residents, she said.

The funding assistance would incentivize homeowners to improve neighborhood infrastructure, protect pedestrians and increase their long-term home values, stated Ms. Habgood.

The finance committee is open to residents offering "new revenue stream suggestions" not including increased taxes, stated Ms. Habgood.

The finance committee will review each department's budget requests within the municipal purview in upcoming weeks, stated Ms. Habgood. A finalized municipal budget will be introduced on Tuesday, March 26.

Mountainside

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tainside Pool this summer at the resident member rate.

In addition, Mr. Masella indicated he had been approached by representatives from the Westfield Y's swim team who asked the borough to consider allowing the team to rent the Mountainside Pool for its early-morning summer practices. The council asked Mr. Masella to keep borough officials updated. Mr. Masella also explained that several borough residents had asked for a new category of membership which would consist of two adult residents and would cost \$325 a season. The council agreed and asked Mr. Masella to prepare a resolution regarding same for consideration during the Tuesday, February 19 public meeting.

In other business, the governing body voted to approve a raffle application from Benjamin Franklin Elementary School in Westfield to contribute \$300 to Governor Livingston High School's Project Graduation, and to authorize the Mountainside Fire Department to apply for a New Jersey State Volunteer Fire Assistance Grant.



Paul Lachenaier for The Westfield Leader
THIS WEATHER IS FOR THE DOGS...Despite the below freezing temperatures, this lady and her dog are out for a run last weekend along the path at Mindowaskin Pond in Westfield.



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