

Board of Adjust. Denies Solar Panels on Orenda

By MICHAEL BONACCORSO
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

WESTFIELD — The board of adjustment approved four applications and denied one application at Monday's meeting.

Applicant George Rizk, of 370 Orenda Circle, was denied approval to install a solar panel rooftop on the street facing side of his roof. The town ordinance prohibits solar panels from being placed on the street-facing side of the roof, but allows solar panels to be placed on the rear facing rooftop or as an accessory structure.

Board member Matt Sontz said that although he supports renewable energy efforts, an approval would "disregard" the town ordinance, which clearly prohibits the street-facing solar panels. Town Planner Donald Sammet said the ordinance was passed with consideration to "neighborhood aesthetics."

Mr. Sammet said many "early-stage solar panels" did not blend aesthetically with the roof.

Solar Panels representative John Jones testified on the applicant's behalf. Mr. Jones said Solar Panels is owned by Tesla. Tesla has created a solar roof which blends well with a black rooftop, including "solar shingles" which are available to customers, stated Mr. Jones, describing the solar panel aesthetic during testimony.

Mr. Rizk said the solar panels could not be placed anywhere on his property or the rear roof as the panels are best suited for a "southern facing display" to receive the "most sunrays."

Board of adjustment Chairman Chris Masciale said the ordinance clearly prohibits solar panels from being placed on the roof's street-facing side.

Mr. Masciale said a visual presentation of what the solar panel roof would "look like" compared to ordinary roofs or neighboring roofs would have helped with approving the application based on aesthetic appropriateness.

Board member Allyson Hroblak said, upon hearing testimony suggesting solar panel roofing has improved both aesthetically while supporting renewable efforts, she would recommend an ordinance change to Mayor Shelley Brindle and township council's attention.

Ms. Hroblak voted for the application to be approved.

Applicants Kevin and Michelle

McGurn, of 421 Birch Avenue, were unanimously approved to expand an existing garage. A variance was required as the garage is greater than 500 square feet and is required to be 10 feet from the property line. The proposed garage is only 3.7 feet from the property line.

He said the garage does not impose on neighboring properties in the side and rear yards. Mr. Masciale said the board recognizes the original structure is quite old and provides less accessibility than a modern constructed garage.

A renovation would be beneficial to the particular neighborhood, not detrimental to the neighborhoods character, stated Mr. Masciale.

Applicant Jeanne Martel was unanimously approved to construct a one-story addition including a one-car garage.

Ms. Martel stated that the garage would provide storage space for her children's sports equipment and seasonal backyard ornaments. Ms. Martel said the garage would not impose on their neighbors' property lines.

Applicants Thomas and Brittany Moore, 1121 Wychwood Road, were approved to construct an addition. The addition would convert a three-bedroom home into a five-bedroom home, stated Mr. Moore. The project is pending Mountainside Planning Board approval before construction can begin.

Applicant Columbus West LLC., 532 Cumberland Street, was approved to construct a new two-family dwelling. The lot was previously zoned for a two-family dwelling where one currently exists, stated the applicant's attorney Joshua Koodray.

Mr. Koodray said the project's architect determined the home was in irreparable conditions. The developer decided to rebuild the home "from the ground up," Mr. Koodray stated.

"The application is not only functional, but is a great benefit to the neighborhood," Mr. Koodray said.

Mr. Masciale said the application does not create a parking issue and the property is already zoned for a two-family home.

ADS PLACED IN THE LEADER/TIMES BRING RESULTS



YOUTH ACADEMY...The Cranford Police Department (CPD) will host the 13th Annual Cranford Police Youth Academy Class from Monday, July 8, to Friday, July 12. Classes run daily from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. The academy is for students completing grades 6 through 8. The primary goal of the academy is to encourage open communication between the youth of Cranford and members of the CPD. The program gives Cranford youth the opportunity to see some of the aspects of the police department. Applications can be found on the department's website, cranfordnj.org/police-department. The deadline for applications is Monday, April 15, at 3 p.m. There is an \$80 registration fee. Interested persons are invited to contact Detective Steven D'Ambola at (908) 709-7336 or Captain Joseph Van Bergen at j-vanbergen@cranfordnj.org.

Theresa's Restaurant Closes After 25 Years

By PAUL J. PEYTON
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

WESTFIELD — Theresa's Restaurant, a staple in Downtown Westfield for more than 25 years, closed its doors last week.

Located at 47 Elm Street, the restaurant offered northern Italian-style cuisine.

In a letter sent to Sherry Cronin, executive director of Downtown Westfield Corporation, the management entity of the Westfield Special

Workshops for Master Plan, Parks And Rec. Reexamination Told

WESTFIELD—Community Workshops for public input on the town's Master Plan reexamination and the parks and recreation strategic plan will begin next week.

Dates for workshops are as follows: Thursday, March 21, 7 to 9 p.m., Edison Intermediate School cafeteria; Wednesday, April 3, 7 to 9 p.m., Town Hall Community Room; Wednesday, April 24, 7 to 9 p.m., Edison School cafeteria; Monday, April 29, 7 to 9 p.m., Town Hall Community Room, and Sunday, May 5, at Spring Fling.

For more information on the Master Plan Reexamination, please visit westfieldnj.gov/futurewestfield.

For more information on the Parks and Recreation Strategic Plan, visit www.westfieldnj.gov/parksplan.

Improvement District, Theresa's owner, Robert Scalera, cited his reasons for the closure as "difficult economic times and regulatory restrictions (that) make it impossible to keep the doors open."

"After an amazing 25 years of serving the Westfield community, I am closing the doors of Theresa's Restaurant. While I am ending this professional chapter, I will be moving on to another business opportunity," Mr. Scalera said. "This decision was not an easy one and along with it, comes much sadness and a heavy heart."

Mr. Scalera also had owned and operated the Isabella's and Mojave Grille restaurants that previously closed their doors. Isabella's was closed and sold in the fall of 2013. Mojave and Isabella's were located at 35 and 39 Elm Street, respectively.

Spice Bazaar, an Indian restaurant, is relocating from Quimby Street to 39 Elm in space most recently occupied by Ambeli Greek Taverna. Buddha Sushi is opening in the former Mojave Grille space at 35 Elm.

Approved by the Westfield Planning Board in October of 1993, Theresa's opened in the former storefront of All-Star Sports.

To his customers Mr. Scalera said, "I am looking forward to the next chapter in my life, and hopefully, our paths will cross again soon."

NJ Transit Officials Hear From RVL Commuters

By MICHAEL BONACCORSO
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

WESTFIELD — NJ Transit held a "listening session" at the Westfield Train Station last Wednesday night to hear from its ridership. The "listening session" was prompted by resident concerns regarding "one-seat rides" to New York City along the Raritan Valley Line (RVL).

Westfield residents, alongside neighboring residents who share commutes on the RVL, asked local leaders including state Senate Minority Republican Leader Thomas Kean, Jr. (R-21st, Westfield), Assembly Minority Republican Leader Jon Bramnick (R-21st, Westfield) and Assemblywoman Nancy Muñoz (R-21st, Summit) for support in negotiating a "more equitable distribution of one-seat rides."

A "one-seat" ride allows passengers to commute directly to New York City without having to transfer trains in Newark. Train transfers increase the probability for delays, according to residents attending Wednesday's NJ Transit event. Westfield was given an "off-peak" one-seat ride last summer. The off-peak one-seat ride was suspended by NJ Transit last fall as Positive Train Control (PTC) equipment was installed on all trains. PTC monitors and controls a train to prevent unsafe speeds.

Governor Phil Murphy appointed Kevin Corbett as NJ Transit's executive director. Mr. Corbett, who was on hand for last week's event, said Westfield's RVL one-seat ride will not be restored before or during the summer of 2019. Mr. Corbett said New Jerseyans are "sharing the pain" throughout the state regarding transit problems.

Mr. Corbett said restoring a "broken relationship" with Amtrak, hiring more train engineers, and appropriating the NJ Transit budget to reduce problems on a "systemic level" throughout the entire transit system should improve all New Jersey residents' transit experiences over time.

He said NJ Transit has been working proactively to repair the relationship with Amtrak, noting that the relationship has propelled discussions regarding track maintenance, track responsibility, train schedules and train priorities for both Amtrak and NJ Transit trains.

Train engineer staffing remains "a problem" NJ Transit is beginning to address, stated Mr. Corbett. NJ Transit has been met with a reduced budget in recent years, he stated.

Mr. Corbett said he refused to place budgeting cutbacks "on anyone in particular." He stated that within the next six months, NJ Transit will be training more engineers. With more engineers, he said the transit lines will be properly staffed with workers to guide and ride the trains to more destinations at increased intervals.

Numerous residents criticized NJ Transit for providing "one-seat rides" at peak and non-peak times to neighboring lines and towns including Summit and Princeton. Attendees openly stated that the RVL has more "riders" than other lines that were given "peak and off-peak one-seat rides."

Mr. Corbett responded that NJ Transit's planning subcommittee "always considers the entire system" when planning rides throughout the state. Mr. Corbett said although the rider experience may seem hassled for Westfield commuters, NJ Transit is resolving a "no service" situation for Atlantic City residents.

"That is what we mean when we say sharing the pain," said Mr. Corbett in describing "systemic" failures which his administration and himself are working daily to resolve.

One-seat rides would increase Westfield home property values with a ripple effect on neighboring municipalities, said one commuter.

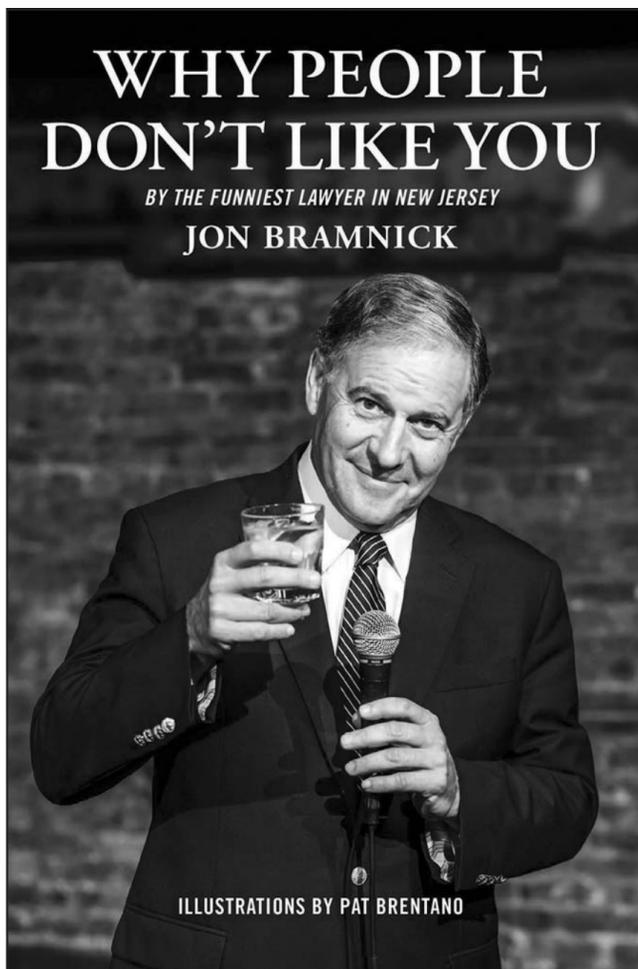
Cranford Township Commissioner and Deputy Mayor Ann Dooley said towns throughout Union County have had to accommodate housing for more than 8,000 units to be "compliant" with court-mandated affordable housing. She said train platforms are already overpopulated with commuters.

"How does the state expect us to provide housing for commuters when the infrastructure (one-seat rides and higher-frequency trip generation) does not exist to accommodate these new residents?" Ms. Dooley asked.

Assemblyman Bramnick said the lack of current infrastructure to accommodate all the commuters proves surrounding towns' resources and state resources are overburdened by the affordable-housing mandates. He said New Jersey must place affordable-housing oversight back under the State Legislature, not the court system.

Scotch Plains Mayor Al Smith, Westfield Mayor Shelley Brindle, Westfield Councilman David Contract, Garwood Planning Board member Bill Nierstedt and Roselle Park Mayor Joseph Signorello also were in attendance.

Bramnick's New Book Now Available On Amazon



Jon Bramnick, New Jersey's Funniest Lawyer, has published a hilarious book on interpersonal skills
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