

The Westfield Leader **The Scotch Plains - Fanwood TIMES**
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Legal Newspaper for the County of Union, New Jersey
 and for Westfield, Mountainside, Scotch Plains, Fanwood, Cranford and Garwood

Members of:
 New Jersey Press Association • National Newspaper Association • Greater Westfield Area Chamber of Commerce
 Scotch Plains Business & Professional Association • Fanwood Business & Professional Association

Periodicals - Postage Paid at Rahway, New Jersey
 P.O. Box 250 • 251 North Avenue, West
 Westfield, N.J. 07091

Tele: (908) 232-4407 • E-mail: editor@goleader.com • Web: www.goleader.com • Fax: (908) 232-0473
 POSTMASTER: Send address changes to the offices of the newspapers at
 P. O. Box 250, Westfield, New Jersey 07091

Published every Thursday by Gale Force Media, L.L.C.

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 One-year - \$44 • Two-year - \$84 • Three-year - \$122

Separating Facts from Opinion is Necessary for Good Journalism

What service do you expect from the weekly *The Westfield Leader* and *The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times* that you are reading? We think that you expect fair, unbiased, and accurate news on the front page and "jump" pages. We also think that you will view this editorial column differently. You might agree with our editorial's perspective on the news of the day, or you might disagree, but you know that we separate the news from the opinion.

These days, the distinction between news and opinion no longer exists in many of our most esteemed and reputable daily newspapers. Last week, *New York Times* opinion editor Bari Weiss quit that paper, and she didn't go quietly. Ms. Weiss, a centrist on the ideological spectrum, submitted a scathing resignation letter, and it got us thinking about the daily newspapers which are heavily read in New Jersey.

Ms. Weiss complained that "Stories are chosen and told in a way to satisfy the narrowest of audiences, rather than to allow a curious public to read about the world and then draw their own conclusions." In other words, what even qualifies as news, and how that news was told, was being orchestrated by people with an agenda. We agree with that characterization of the *New York Times*, and we lament that the *New York Times* is not alone in this malady. The largest circulating daily in our area, *The Star-Ledger*, suffers from the same ailment. Although the *Ledger's* management does not deny that its editorial page is left of center, the *Ledger* never concedes the enormous bias on its supposedly straight news pages.

The demonstration in Westfield last month over the death of George Floyd in Minneapolis was immediately covered by *The Star-Ledger* and *The Westfield Leader*, featuring public addresses by Gov. Phil Murphy and Mayor Shelley Brindle, both Democrats. At two separate protests, a local Republican mayor spoke to protestors in Clark, with speeches captured on videotape. Some five days later, the *Ledger* ran a story revealing that Clark's protest organizers felt that some of the mayor's remarks

were racially offensive. Why it took several days for people to decide they were offended was not discussed; also not discussed was that at one of the protests the local police chief had knelt with the protesters. There was no follow-up provided — no coverage of the mayor's apology, or the fact that each of the follow-up protests was much smaller than those before. The fact that some of those protesters tore down American flags was given no coverage by the *Ledger* or even the local *TapInfo*. When news coverage itself is so patently unbalanced, when clicks and the social-media universe matters more than the whole story, journalism as an industry suffers.

The Westfield Leader and *The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times* will strive to cover as many newsworthy local events as possible

without telling you, the reader, what to think. At this incredible time in our nation's history, we have a responsibility to inform you of the facts and allow you to form your own opinions. Ms. Weiss said that she, "was always taught that journalists were charged with writing the first rough draft of history." She is correct, journalists are supposed to be the witnesses to history, to provide an accurate accounting, whether good or bad, without agenda. Yes, our staff has opinions about what is going on in town, but because we want everyone to trust our news reporting, you won't be seeing — or discerning — those opinions on the news pages. There's plenty of room for opinion right here, in this section of the paper, and that's where it ought to stay.

Letters to the Editor

Biking Trails Requested in Brightwood, Tamaques Parks

Due to the current situations while organized sports and activities have been cancelled, many people have turned to outdoor activities such as biking. A lot of people around town have been biking since they are able to be socially distant. Busy streets are not ideal for kids and local off road trails would be a great alternative for anyone who wants to learn to ride off road away from traffic. Trail riding is a healthy form of exercise for an entire family that I enjoy and it keeps me outside and away from electronics. Unfortunately there are no official trails in Union County that offer off road bike riding. My parents have to drive over forty minutes to go riding in a different county which is not environmentally friendly.

Many people in the Westfield community have expressed interest in biking trails, it is the third highest requested activity from Westfield's Recreational Master Plan survey. My friends and I have been very excited about the new town master recreational plan where we will be able to ride our bikes off road locally. The Westfield mountain biking community including the kids can help build and maintain the trails in Brightwood and Tamaques Park. They will be supported by Jersey Off Road Biking Association (JORBA) - Union County Chapter based in Westfield. JORBA is a non-profit volunteer organization that promotes sustainable trail building, maintenance, and

trail riding in New Jersey. One of the key things about JORBA is that they have done this successfully in other towns and they are experts in building community ownership. This would give a great sense of pride to young people like myself to contribute to the town of Westfield. I have previously volunteered to help maintain trails in New Jersey and I know this could work in our town. In addition to that it's all free, all work will be done by volunteers, there will be no cost to Westfield. All of these will lead to a healthier community and a more actively used park.

Brightwood park has been neglected for many years and its trail network has a lot of potential to be refurbished. Studies have shown that with proper trail design and build off road biking is no less impactful on the environment than hiking, here is one article supporting these facts, <https://adventure.howstuffworks.com/outdoor-activities/biking/mountain-biking6.htm>. I am hopeful we can work out all of the different opinions and be able to share the trails with our community. I look forward to seeing everyone on the trails.

Ben Shirk
 Rising Eight Grader
 Roosevelt Intermediate School
 Westfield
Editor's Note: This letter was sent to Mayor Shelley Brindle

Letters to the Editor

Former Mayor Takes Issue With Comments About Republicans

"Shouting down and intimidating someone from speaking their mind is not exactly a Vermont town meeting value, nor should it be an American town meeting value" - Bernie Sanders.

Recently, the mayor's former campaign manager wrote a letter to a local online news source where he stated, "Too many in Westfield still vote for bigoted and misogynistic council candidates..." The mayor's former campaign manager broad-brushed, presumably, all Republican council candidates as "bigoted and misogynistic." I suppose by association all their voters must also be "bigoted and misogynistic."

As a Third Ward councilman and as mayor, I had the pleasure to serve with nearly twenty council people of both political parties. Although we often had different policy opinions and sometimes heated debates, I would never be arrogant enough to suggest I knew what was in their hearts. What I witnessed were caring, empathetic, loving individuals. Yes, on both sides of the aisle. I encourage the mayor to repudiate her campaign manager's disgusting, divisive rhetoric, and while at it, renounce her Solid Waste Advisory

Board appointee who mocked a councilwoman's physical appearance; as well as her Media Advisory Council appointee who mocked the near assassination of Representative Stephen Scalise ("Karma's a bitch") and a couple of years later posted "let's hunt republicans that support guns and trump [sic] instead."

If you disagree or challenge this mayor, sit back and watch her supporters bully you from their key-boards or at council meetings (pre-Covid), where dissenting opinions were snickered at, if not shouted down, from the gallery.

One of the mayor's first official acts was to hire a director of communications. I implore her to use that tax-payer funded position to bring civility back to the Town of Westfield. Reject the bullies, remove them from your committees and ask your supporters to stop the online bullying.

"Shouting down and intimidating someone from speaking their mind," is not a Town of Westfield value.

Andy Skibitsky
 Westfield Mayor 2005-2017

Historic Preservation Ordinance Creates De Facto Homeowners Assoc.

I am not against historic preservation. I wrote to this publication on October 26, 2017 ("Making Way for Oversized, Cookie-Cutter McMansions"), decrying the epidemic of tear-downs and subdivisions in Westfield. I said then and say now that this problem rests squarely at the feet of the Planning Board, as many of these McMansions could not have been built without receiving variances for violating Municipal Land Use ordinances pertaining to size, lot coverage and setbacks.

However, instead of fixing the planning board or modifying our existing ordinances to discourage tear-downs, the mayor and council majority have taken the "bold" step of ramming through a historic preservation ordinance which deprives property owners of their rights and imposes onerous rules on homeowners for simple repairs.

Introduced during the height of a pandemic, this process has been anything but transparent. If not for an error by the town attorney resulting in the ordinance having to be re-introduced, it would already be law. Further, the mayor and one council

member also sit on the planning board, where they cast introductory votes at council meetings, vote on the same legislation as planning board members and again approve the legislation in the council. How is that fair?

This proposed ordinance is supposedly designed to make Westfield more "compliant" with state law. What you're not being told is that the town is not required by state law to have a historic preservation ordinance. Less than 10 percent of N.J.'s municipalities do. Bringing Westfield into "compliance" with existing statutes merely awards the town a "gold star" as a "Certified Local Government" and access to some grant money — funds which may pay for implementation of this ordinance, but NOT lower your taxes.

Your home or neighborhood can be designated as historic by someone other than you — the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) or Planning Board — unelected bodies accountable to no one but the Mayor who appointed them. You're being told that there are processes in place at the Council-level that will protect your rights and make any designation difficult to implement ("Supermajority"). Does anyone really think that their property rights will be protected? Just ask the people who live near the Gumbert Park Ice Rink.

Homes or neighborhoods designated as historic will be subject to the oversight of a de facto Homeowners Association (HOA) who will control the work you perform on street-facing aspects of your home, including such minor things as roofing, lighting, fencing and awnings. You will be forced to obtain a "Certificate of Appropriateness" in advance by submitting a survey of your property, professional plans and photographs. Approvals for granting a certificate will be routed through the town planner, HPC and Planning Board — a process sure to take months. The town generously won't charge you a fee but think of how much you'll lose in delays, lost bids and diminished home value.

Since the mayor's goal of running the table and taking control of the entire Council was frustrated by Third Ward voters, Councilman LoGripio has been the sole voice of opposition on the Council to this proposed ordinance. I give him credit for speaking up, while the Mayor and other Council members have chosen to try and shout him down or cancel him through opinion pieces. So much for polite discourse.

Westfield's history is important to the character of our Town. We should all endeavor to preserve it, but this proposed ordinance is the epitome of government overreach. The mayor should go back to the drawing board, listen to ALL voices in this debate and craft something that better protects the rights of ALL homeowners.

Shawn Mullen
 Westfield

Student Asks Mayor For More Bike Trails

My friends and I have been biking a lot more since Covid-19. My lacrosse season was canceled. So was my sister's yoga. We had nothing else to do. My mom said I had too much screen time and needed to go outside. I decided to start riding my bike more with my friends. I noticed the town doesn't have very good bike trails in our parks or around town. Please support better trails and bike lanes for our town. My friends like to bike ride with me and we hope Westfield can support better trails. I noticed many families in town riding bikes since Covid-19.

Brightwood was a favorite spot of mine because I could fish and bike. The trails are not great and the fishing stinks. Anyway, you might not be able to fix the fishing but you can support more bike trails in Westfield. I love to ride my bike. So if you could please support making new bike trails, that would be amazing.

Leo Johnson
 Fifth Grade Class of 2020
 Wilson School, Westfield
Editor's Note: This letter was sent to Mayor Shelley Brindle

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State LD-21
 Sen. Thomas Kean, Jr. (R)
 425 North Ave. E.
 Westfield, N.J. 07090
 (908) 232-3673
 Asm. Jon Brannick (R)
 251 North Ave. West
 Westfield, N.J. 07090
 (908) 232-2073
 Asm. Nancy Munoz (R)
 57 Union Place, Suite 310
 Summit, N.J. 07901
 (908) 918-0414

State LD-22
 Sen. Nicholas Scutari (D)
 1514 E. Saint Georges Ave.
 Linden, N.J. 07036
 (908) 587-0404
 Asm. Jim Kennedy (D)
 34 E. Cherry St.
 Rahway, N.J. 07065
 (732) 943-2660
 Asw. Linda Carter (D)
 200 West 2nd St., Suite 102
 Plainfield, N.J. 07060
 (908) 561-5757

7th Congressional District
 Representative Tom Malinowski (D)
 75-77 N. Bridge St., Somerville, N.J. 08876
 (908) 547-3307
 [Westfield, Mountainside, Garwood, Summit and Cranford are in the 7th Congressional District]

12th Congressional District
 Rep. Bonnie Watson Coleman (D)
 850 Bear Tavern Road, Suite 201, Ewing, N.J. 08628
 (609) 883-0026
 [Fanwood, Plainfield and most of Scotch Plains are in the 12th Congressional District]

LD-21 includes Westfield, Mountainside, Garwood, Summit and Cranford. **LD-22** includes Scotch Plains, Fanwood, Plainfield, Clark, Rahway and Linden.

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ABCDICTIONOPQRSTDECEPTIONUVWXYZ
Diction Deception

Below are four arcane words, each with four definitions — only one is correct. The others are made up. Are you sharp enough to discern this deception of diction?

If you can guess one correctly — good guess. If you get two — well-read individual. If you get three — word expert. If you get all four — You must have a lot of free time!

All words and correct definitions come from the board game Diction Deception.

Answers to last week's arcane words.

1. Rousant — In heraldry, designating a bird, rising as if preparing to fly
2. Trollop — An untidy or dirty woman
3. Acrisy — Condition in which no right judgment can be formed
4. Queme — To please

TRICHOGENOUS

1. Producing hair
2. Introversion of the edge of the eyelid or of any similar structure
3. Abnormal fear of childbirth
4. Producing three offspring

LOKE

1. The seed pod of legumes
2. A green vegetable pigment
3. Private road or lane
4. A given site or location

PALUDISM

1. Characterized by an ashy, white complexion
2. Acting like a heroic champion; in a knightly fashion
3. Malaria
4. Acting indiscreetly; carelessly

POLDER

1. Lowland reclaimed from a lake or sea by means of high embankments
2. A phantom, ghost or vision
3. A flying squirrel
4. Given to be argumentative or disagreeable

Request For WPD Flag Over Town Hall Denied

Earlier this month I attended a town council meeting via Zoom asking the mayor and council to paint a blue line in support of the Westfield Police Department's (WPD) unwavering service to our town during these incredible times.

Going into this meeting I clearly understood that this request was in violation of Federal Highway Administration standards, as did Mayor Brindle. Even so, I thought my request would get strong consideration given that Mayor Brindle gladly violated these standards as anyone can see who has recently been at the corner of Elm and Quimby. This idea was shot down by Mayor Brindle and I left the Town Council Zoom Meeting feeling that this was an absolutely absurd idea.

Since that meeting, very sadly, far too many police officers to chronicle here have died or been injured in the line of duty. But noteworthy is that NYC Mayor Bill DeBlasio is to reduce the NYPD budget \$1 Billion. All while crime is climbing out of control with stray bullet killings of completely innocent youth being rationalized by DeBlasio and other NYC elected officials. Now that's absolutely absurd. Also of note; in Bothell, Washington, not unlike Westfield in that it is suburb of a major city, an officer was just killed in the line of duty. The police chief said that in his 25 years their town had never had an incident of this magnitude.

Having said all this, last week I again attended the Westfield Town Council Meeting and asked Mayor Brindle, in lieu of painting a blue line, raise a Westfield Police Department flag on the town flagpole located at Town Hall. In summary, the mayor said she was too busy for something like this, even though I have to believe this task would take only 5 to 10 minutes for this show of support. Because of her 'NO' response to my WPD Flag Raising, my last question was if she was in support of defunding the police — specifically the Westfield Police Department. I was hoping, like I'm sure many of you, that she would say enthusiastically 'No! I will not defund the Westfield Police Department!' But looking back at what she said and her tone, the defunding of the Westfield Police Department may be part of her platform, although when she presents this it will likely be under the code word 'reform'.

In closing; to the Westfield Police Department and all our first responders, I speak for thousands when I say THANK YOU!

Frank Arena
 Westfield Councilman 2008-2019

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NESEMANO'20 THE LEADER/TIMES