

Celentano Resigns From SP Council

By FRED ROSSI
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

SCOTCH PLAINS -- Republican Councilman Guy Celentano announced his immediate resignation from the Scotch Plains Township Council on Tuesday night.

Mr. Celentano, who won his seat in a special election last November, said he was leaving the governing body because of several professional and personal reasons.

In remarks at the end of the council's meeting, Mr. Celentano called his eight months in government, "a rewarding experience for me," during which he "gained a sense of appreciation for the employees that make Scotch Plains work as effectively as it does."

He also saluted his council colleagues and thanked them for their support and assistance.

Earlier this year, Mr. Celentano had announced his intention to seek election in November to a full, four-year term.

He is the third individual to hold his present council seat, with the late Democrat Tarquin Jay Bromley having been elected to a four-year term in

November 1998. After Mr. Bromley's death in September 2000, Democrat Sharynn Porter was appointed to fill the seat until last year's special election, one in which Mrs. Porter chose not to run.

Mr. Celentano narrowly defeated Democrat Patricia Romano in the November 2001 balloting.

The four other members of the council, along with Township Manager Thomas Atkins, Township Attorney Douglas Hansen and Township Clerk Barbara Riepe, extended their best wishes to



Guy Celentano

Mr. Celentano.

Scotch Plains Republicans will now have to submit to the council the names of possible successors to Mr. Celentano. Ultimately, that individual will have to be approved by the remaining four members of the council, which is now composed of three Republicans and one Democrat.

Mayor Martin Marks said a new member would likely be approved and sworn in at the council's next conference meeting on Tuesday, September 3.

Scotch Plains Planning Board OKs Commerce Bank Application for Park, Mountain Avenue Location

By JEREMY LIPSTEIN
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

SCOTCH PLAINS -- At Monday evening's meeting of the Scotch Plains Planning Board, an application for the construction of a Commerce Bank on the northeastern corner of Park and Mountain Avenues was given the green light, assuming that variances are granted.

The bank, which would lease 3,669 square feet on two lots of land for 20 years, with five, five-year lease renewal options, plans to demolish two buildings at this location: the Licho's Inc. jewelry store and a storage building owned by Pantagis Renaissance on the adjacent property.

The property is zoned as a B-2 business district and would not require a zoning change.

Most of the board's reservations dealt with traffic patterns on surrounding streets. A secondary concern was that the bank would complement the rest of the downtown's architectural style.

Richard Gulick, planner for the Planning Board, referred to the site as a "gateway location to the central business district."

While Commerce Bank wishes to maintain its corporate image through its architecture, Board Chairman Joseph Doyle asked the bank to try to appreciate the historic significance of parts of the

downtown such as The Stage House Inn and the historic cemetery at the Scotch Plains Baptist Church.

"Commerce Bank takes great pride in the way it looks," said Robert Kraus, the attorney representing the bank in this matter.

Outside of the aesthetic aspects of the project, traffic issues became a main concern. The proposed bank would have ingress and egress at two locations for the parking lot, one on Mountain Avenue and one on Park Avenue.

While there would be no restrictions for the Mountain Avenue entrance and exit, the one on Park Avenue would allow only right-hand turns in and out. A barrier may be requested from the county on Park Avenue, a county road, to prevent drivers from making a sharp left-hand turn onto the Route 22 ramp.

John Harter, a traffic engineer, of Atlantic Traffic in Watchung, spoke as one of the bank's witnesses. Mr. Harter explained that the bank would generate traffic through its three drive-through lanes and 28 parking spaces.

To combat problems, Mr. Harter suggested additional traffic signs for speed limits, children at play, and driveway warnings at both the bank and neighboring Sunset Place. One Sunset Place resident asked

the board to keep in mind that the street already has additional traffic from the American Legion, the Scotchwood Diner, and the Italian-American Club. The possibility of making Sunset Place a one-way street will be further looked into.

The bank will make efforts to shield its additional lighting and noise by adding shrubbery and fencing, to act as a buffer, along the edges that border residential areas.

Since the bank would add grass and other landscaping to the properties, drainage would not be a problem according to Bret Skapinetz of Bohler Engineering. The bank would have on-site drainage with a lead into county run-arounds.

John Madden, a specialist in planning and landscape architecture, of Madden and Associates in Flemington, spoke as another witness. Mr. Madden explained that the bank would act as an anchor

store for the downtown because of its "gateway location."

Mr. Madden stated that because of its corporate backing, the bank would have economic stability and remain in town for a while.

The bank is seeking variances from the required 10-foot setback for off-street parking and from the required truck loading/unloading zone. Commerce Bank has proposed a five-foot setback and claims it will not have trucks loading and unloading.

While town ordinance specifies that no advertising on directional "in" and "out" signs are permitted, the bank hopes that the board will approve a variance on this issue as well.

Commerce Bank originated in Mount Laurel and has since spread north in the state and west into Pennsylvania. The bank has more than 100 branches in New Jersey, including one location on the corner of North and Hetfield Avenues in Fanwood.

SP Council Puts Tax Constitution Convention On November Ballot

By FRED ROSSI
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

SCOTCH PLAINS -- Scotch Plains voters will have a chance in November to express their opinion on the holding of a state constitutional convention to reform the state's property tax system.

With the Township Council's approval of an ordinance at its Tuesday night meeting of an ordinance, a non-binding referendum on this subject will appear on the township's general election ballot.

This action comes in the wake of the State Legislature's failure to act this year on legislation that would have placed a statewide referendum on the November ballot regarding a state constitutional convention to address property tax reform. Despite having gained some momentum earlier in the year, the legislation stalled without ever coming up for a vote in Trenton.

A constitutional convention would have prepared proposals consisting of amendments to the state constitution and revisions to existing state statutes, all revenue-neutral. It might have helped eliminate the inequities in the current system, ensure greater uniformity in the application of property taxes, reduce property taxes as a share of overall public revenue and help communities reduce their high dependence on property taxes. In the aftermath of the Legislature's inaction, several towns have signaled their intention to replicate Scotch Plains' referendum.

Mayor Martin Marks called the property tax, "the most onerous" of all taxes because it doesn't take into account the ability of people to pay.

"We have an over-reliance on property taxes," he said, to pay for education and local and county services while the state government can rely on a number of revenue sources to finance itself.

Responding to comments from Scotch Plains resident Walter Apple, who said the ballot referendum was "addressing the symptoms rather than the cause"—which Mr. Apple said was, "runaway spending," at the local, county and state levels as well as by boards of education.

Mayor Marks defended the local government's effort to rein in spending, but agreed that the cause of property tax hikes in general was "out of control spending."

Saying that about three-fourths of property taxes are earmarked for the board of education, Councilwoman Paulette Coronato said property taxes, "are very unfair," especially to those residents, such as the elderly, empty-nesters and young couples, who don't participate in the local education system.

In other business, the council awarded a \$424,500 contract to A. Juliano and Sons Contractors of Stirling to serve as general contractor for construction of the new three-acre park on Plainfield Avenue.

Mayor Marks expressed his hope that the park, which will include a ballfield and a soccer field, could be ready for use next year.

Separately, Councilman Frank S. Rossi announced that the state Department of Community Affairs has approved the township's application for a grant that will be used for reimbursement of a \$55,000 software program that will be used for

the scheduling of ballfields by Scotch Plains, Fanwood and the joint board of education. Eventually, the software will permit online registration for various recreation programs.

The grant application has been pending in Trenton for about a year and Mr. Rossi thanked Assemblywoman Linda Stender for her assistance in getting the grant approved.

The council also approved an ordinance prohibiting parking on the west side of High View Court between Princeton Avenue and Algonquin Drive and on the north side of the Algonquin Drive cul-de-sac between 8 a.m. and 4 p.m. on school days.

In other miscellaneous matters, the Scotch Plains Business and Professional Association will be holding a downtown sidewalk sale today, tomorrow and Saturday. Councilwoman Geri Samuel said letters soliciting donations to pay for a fountain in the Village Green, which will soon be formally renamed Alan Augustine Park in honor of the late Assemblyman and former Mayor, are being sent out. She urged residents to send donations to the Township of Scotch Plains Augustine Park Committee at 430 Park Avenue.

The Fire Department will be celebrating the arrival of a new piece of firefighting apparatus during a wetdown on Saturday at the south side firehouse from noon to 6 p.m. There will be a band, food, drinks and rides for children. Fifty fire departments from around the state are expected to be in attendance.

Mayor Marks said Martine Avenue, in the vicinity of the firehouse, will be closed to vehicular traffic on Saturday afternoon and urged those attending the wetdown to use a shuttle service that will originate from the Union County Vocational-Technical School's parking lot on Raritan Road.

At the end of the meeting, Mayor Marks issued a proclamation declaring July 21 as Harold Goettl Day in honor of a 99-year old resident and his service to the community.

BOE Contracts Are Compared

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ricular advisors receive an annual stipend. These stipends range from \$498 to \$9,080, depending on the club, sport, or length of time the advisor has served.

In Mountainside, school board employees are insured at board expense under Blue Cross/Blue Shield and a dental plan.

For the year 2002-2003, salaries for teachers with a bachelor's degree start at \$38,557 and they can receive up to \$72,197 for 25 years of service; master degree salaries range from \$41,303 to \$42,863, and salaries for a master's degree plus 30 credits range from \$42,863 to 76,503. There is also a longevity increase of \$900 for 20 years of service, 24 years and 28 years.

Teachers also receive stipends for coaching and advisory positions, ranging from \$25 per session or up to \$3,289 per year, depending on activity and longevity in the position.

In the August 22 edition of *The Westfield Leader*, there will be a comparison of the Board of Education administrative contracts.

Parking Deck Project Updated; Costs, Plans to Be Seen By Nov.

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dential units as well as the number of decks, will be divided between the developer and the town.

Residential units will line Prospect Street, and 200 parking spaces will be added to lots 1 and 8. Ingress and egress from the deck will be on Elm Street, with only ingress for the residents of the apartments on Prospect Street.

Five hundred parking spaces will be created on lot 3, and retail will face South Avenue with two levels of residential units above them. Parking for the retail and residential will be provided in the deck.

Some residents were concerned about the height of the parking deck on South Avenue, but according to Mr. Gildea, because the land slopes down the deck will be no higher than the South Avenue Seafood building.

Though the area will be re-development the housing will not necessarily be low income. Though the town will be asking for it in the RFQ and RFP.

The RFQ process should take two to three weeks, and the RFP could take a month or longer for the proposals to come back.

The Atlantic Group is doing a similar project in Princeton.

Mr. Gildea explained that the parking fees that have been collected, approximately \$100,000, has gone into a capital improvement fund for parking improvements to be used at a later time and that the same thing will be done next year.

Currently, the committee has decided not to acquire any privately owned land, but a developer could negotiate with the owners for that.

Though there are currently no provisions to provide parking for the other residents of downtown Westfield, Mr. Gildea said that this has become an apparent issue and that the council will have to figure something out.



BEAUTY IN BLOOM...Between Thursday, September 5, through Saturday, October 4, the Members Gallery at the New Jersey Center for Visual Arts in Summit will showcase "Bouquet: Flower Paintings by Mary Wickliffe." A reception will be held for the artist on Friday, September 13, 6 to 8 p.m. Pictured, above, Wickliffe's glorious violet iris blossoms from the canvas.

Mountainside Author, Artist Wende Devlin Dies at 84

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such as "Winter Flowers."

Mr. Devlin related that during wartime, it was so important for his mother to find some form of oil for her paintings, that she would use

vegetable oil or a similar variation in order to continue her pursuit of great art.

Both Ms. Devlin Gates and her brother pointed out how important it was to their mother that one hold true to his or her values.

"Mother was a strong feminist," said Ms. Devlin Gates. "She bucked the tide to some degree. She was true to her own values."

Mr. Devlin added, "She was authentic. She never wavered in what she believed was right."

The recipient of the George Arents Medal for Art and Literature, which is the most acclaimed award bestowed by Syracuse University, Wende had her paintings included in permanent collections at banks in New Jersey, as well as in homes throughout the country.

Since 1980, Wende held membership on the Rutgers Advisory Council on Children's Literature and, nine years later, was named to the New Jersey Literary Hall of Fame. The 1970 book "How Fletcher Was Hatched" earned Wende the New Jersey English Teachers Award. She also received the Chicago Book Fair Award for Excellence for "Old Witch Rescues Halloween."

Of their parents' famously close and reciprocally artistic relationship, Ms. Devlin Gates said, "Since their early 20s, they were inseparable from that moment on. They went through a great deal together."

In a previous interview with *The Leader* and *The Times*, both Harry and Wende had expressed that working together as artists allowed them to be "marvelous critics for each other." They had described their relationship as "easy and pleasant," with a mutual respect, adding, "we do feel fortunate that we're both involved in the same things."

On August 30, Wende and Harry would have celebrated their 61st wedding anniversary, related Ms. Devlin Gates.

"Maybe, she wanted to spend it with him," she said.

A special service, during which remembrances of Wende will be shared, is scheduled for tomorrow, Friday, August 16, at noon, at the First Congregational Church on Elmer Street in Westfield.

Planning Bd.

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ative solution to overcome a parking variance."

Mr. Newell, echoing Mr. Boyle's comments stated, "This is not a requirement on the applicant. This is a voluntary solution on the part of the applicant to overcome a parking variance."

Mr. Trzesniowski questioned the voluntariness of the applicant asking, "if he doesn't agree, aren't we going to deny his application?"

Mr. Martino, principal of Teriman Enterprises, Inc. stated that he was reluctant to agree to this type of requirement.

Anthony LaPorta, Planning Board member, asked Mr. Martino if he was willingly entering into this agreement or was he under duress in agreeing to these terms.

"I don't want to have to pay but I will agree to this condition because I need to begin conducting business," stated Mr. Martino. He noted that he had signed a lease and had been paying rent since July.

Mr. Newell commented that, "this began with last month's applications requiring employees to purchase employee parking permits in the Central Business District."

He continued by stating that to overcome a parking variance, "it should be standard to require businesses" to purchase employee parking permits.

A divided board approved the application, which included the applicants "voluntary" purchase of four municipal parking permits.

Following the meeting, Parking Director Barry Sommers was contacted by *The Westfield Leader*. Mr. Sommers said that though there is always a parking requirement on developed properties, there is currently no space available in either of the employee permit lots. He said that applicants could be placed on a waiting list.

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