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Fanwood Planning Board Takes Stand Against Parking Proposal

The Fanwood Planning Board took a stand upholding residential zoning for First Street last year, when a revision of the borough Master Plan was approved. The Board upheld that position at a special meeting this week, as the planners voted 6-0 to recommend to the Board of Adjustment a negative vote on a variance application which would allow a commercial parking lot in the residential neighborhood.

At issue is a request from United National Bank to extend its parking and driveway facilities (now located alongside and behind the bank building on Martine Avenue) back further behind the bank, into two lots which are part of the First Street residential neighborhood. The parking lot anticipated by the bank would be a cul-de-sac, with no ingress or egress on First Street. Cars would reach the additional parking stalls through the Martine Avenue entrances to the bank lot.

Richard W. Sage, Chairman of the Zoning Committee, read to the full Planning Board membership his committee's stand. The planners then voted their agreement with the position.

The planners feel the variance is inconsistent with the comprehensive Master Plan, and state that the area involved was studied in detail at the time the Master Plan was formulated, and retention of residential status

was decided upon. Furthermore, allowing a variance of this nature, with commercial use sandwiched between lots in a residential neighborhood, "would be a classic example of spot zoning, a practice inconsistent with the fundamental concepts of good planning." If the variance were granted, it would result in isolation of a single residential lot on the northerly side of the parcel in question between two areas used for general commercial parking.

While the planners disfavor the entire concept of the parking lot, if it were to be approved, they pointed out that the screening is backwards. In other words, fencing is provided as the view from the residential neighborhood, with plantings on the inside of the lot. The reverse would be more appropriate, it was noted.

Tonight, the Board of Adjustment takes up the question of the variance request. It is not known whether the Board of Adjustment

Committee Recommends Construction Of New Borough Facilities

Fanwood Citizens Group Suggests Removal Of Existing House From Slocum Property

The 15-member Citizens Advisory Committee named by Mayor Ted Trumpp to study municipal facilities on the Slocum property, has unanimously recommended to the Fanwood Borough Council that new facilities be constructed on the site. The recommendation for entirely new facilities incorporates a suggestion that the Slocum home be removed.

The Citizens Advisory Committee made its feelings known to Mayor and Council during a special, informal meeting on May 4. Committee Chairman James Russell said the group had considered all available input in formulating its unanimous position.

From the time of its formation, on October 9, 1974, until January of 1975, the Committee considered the various possibilities inherent in the building and the land, which were acquired by the Borough for \$234,000. The property, which had belonged to former Mayor Clarence Slocum, represented an opportunity for the borough to acquire one of the last large pieces of real estate in the borough. When the Slocum property came onto the market last summer, the Borough Council acted quickly to acquire the parcel of land for potential development as a municipal building.

During the early stages of study, there were many in the borough and on the Committee who had anticipated that the home itself might be modified for use as administrative offices. However, structural studies indicated that the foundations were not sufficiently strong to accommodate offices and/or public meetings without shoring. The 15-member committee soon took a unanimous position that the existing Slocum home could not be efficiently used for administrative purposes and that maintenance and operating costs would be prohibitively high. This opinion was shared by consultants retained by the committee.

In January, 1975, after reporting to Mayor and Council on the condition of the home and its weaknesses for municipal use, the Citizens Advisory Committee received a request to develop costs for several alternatives identified during the initial stages of their work. Russell said a cost study sub-committee was formed, under the Chairmanship of Patrick Dunne. The cost study sub-committee worked closely with Benoist and Goldberg, Architects and Engineers from Union. The sub-committee evaluated nine possible alternatives and ultimately recommended Scheme 1-A, which would have an "outside" cost of \$832,000.

According to Dunne, all nine alternatives have costs "very close to each other with no clear cut economical alternate."

"Estimate 1A, covering all new facilities on the Slocum property,

was clearly the only real choice of the full committee as well as the sub-committee," Dunne said. "In essence the committee, by choosing Alternate #1, is confirming its original recommendation that a new complex for all functions be constructed on the Slocum property." The recommendation includes housing for the Borough administration, legislative function, police, and fire and rescue in new facilities on the Slocum site. The existing Carriage House would be preserved on the property even if it becomes necessary to relocate it.

Russell said there was apparent unanimity expressed by Mayor and Council following the Committee's report to them on May 4. The estimate of \$832,000 was based upon a gross area of approximately 13,000 square feet, with a setback roughly the same as the existing Slocum home to retain the parklike setting of the property, Russell indicated.

"We believe the Mayor and Council now possess significant input from this Citizens Committee to proceed with dispatch to create competent housing for the agencies of Fanwood's government," Russell said. "Our committee will stand by for any further charge from the Council and I am confident the Council will make our reports and the report of Benoist and Goldberg available for public scrutiny in the immediate future," he concluded.

In his view, the obvious next step for the committee, working with Council, is to "zero in" on a concentrated study of absolute needs in the way of square footage actually required by the various agencies of local government. The effect could be the reduction of the \$832,000 cost estimate, he felt.

Russell said the committee's recommendation, if pursued by the Council, would cost \$34 a year to the property owner with a home assessed at \$50,000.

Public Meeting For Plans Board

The regular public meeting of the Scotch Plains Planning Board will be held at 8:15 p.m. in the Municipal Building on Monday, May 19. A comprehensive Flood Ordinance, prepared by the Planning Board, will be recommended to the Scotch Plains Council for consideration and implementation.



will take a vote on the issue tonight.

In rendering their position to the Board of Adjustment, the planners did take note of the existence of the parking problem, which has led to the variance request. On Saturday mornings, when the bank is open until noon, the line of cars awaiting drive-in banking help often circles around from Martine Avenue back into LaGrande, thence into First Street.

The planners raised the question of potential problems if additional parking were to encroach into a residential neighborhood, since the bank is used by community organizations for nighttime events, which would bring noise, lighting, etc.

The next step will be taken by the Board of Adjustment, which will recommend approval or denial to the Borough Council.

Although no public hearing was required, the Planning Board did open the meeting for citizen input. Several were on hand. They applauded the position taken by the Planning Board, and raised questions regarding their taxation status, property values, etc. if such zoning were to occur. One woman questioned whether the cul de sac parking lot might bring gatherings of young people, noise, and drinking.

Mayor Ted Trumpp registered his personal preference that First Street remain residential. He feels the commercial community should grow west on South Avenue. He had not personally favored the recent change from residential to business/professional on South Avenue, from First Street to LaGrande School.

Meeting On Flood Control

The Union County Park Commission will conduct its own public meeting on Thursday, May 15, concerning the proposals of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for the Green Brook sub-basin flood control.

The meeting, to which the public is invited, along with members of the Green Brook Flood Control Commission, municipal and county officials, will open at 8:00 p.m.

It will be held in the auditorium of the new Trailside Nature and Science Center building in the Watchung Reservation, at Coles Avenue and New Providence Road, Mountainside.

Plan Petition To Board On Schnitzer Decision

A petition signed by students, parents and alumni of Scotch Plains-Fanwood High School will be presented to the Board of Education during its meeting tonight in Terrill Junior High School, according to Gent Cook, chairman of a committee formed to retain Ray Schnitzer as athletic director.

Cook said the petition drive was organized to "prove to the Board of Education that Ray Schnitzer enjoys the type of broad-based support that warrants his being continued as athletic director."

"We have been heartened by the spontaneous out-pouring of support for an outstanding educator who has brought credit to the athletic program at Scotch Plains-Fanwood High School during his 18 years in charge of the operation," Cook said.

Larry Sprague, co-chairman of the Schnitzer Committee said he expected a large turnout at the meeting tonight. "We are determined to persuade the Board that the action contemplated is not in the best interests of the school system. The response to the petition drive, which was organized only last week, has been heartening and gratifying," Sprague declared. "The petition has been signed by students, their parents and alumni, as well as other citizens who are interested in quality education."

Cook and Sprague contended that "there is more to this plan than meets the eye. We do not accept the reasons given by Board President Richard Bard," they declared. "The fact that one of the assistant principal's positions was eliminated should have no bearing on Ray Schnitzer continuing in this job."

Schnitzer, who has been athletic director for 18 years, was

retained as assistant principal, a post he has held for 11 years. However, the majority of the Board has indicated it plans to replace Schnitzer as athletic director as part of the shift.

"Ray Schnitzer is both willing and able to absorb added professional duties while doing the job of athletic director," Cook asserted. "The fact is that he has devoted countless thousands of hours of his free time to the athletic director's job, and the results of his efforts are apparent in the type of outstanding teams Scotch Plains-Fanwood has fielded during his tenure."

The pro-Schnitzer spokesmen noted that school administrators, up to and including the Superintendent have recommended that the athletic director be retained.

"This is a matter of principle," Cook and Sprague declared. "The function of a Board of Education is to set policy; it does not superimpose its members' bias judgement on personal matters over that of professional educators. If the present majority of the Boards succeeds in sacking Ray Schnitzer, the educator's will have lost the voice they traditionally have had in the operation of our schools. This is a dangerous precedent that can destroy a school system. We intend to thwart it here and now."