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KAFKAS CONTINUE EFFORTS TO IMPROVE CONDITIONS

Zoning Board Subcommittee Asks Zoo Owners to Submit Plan Detailing Renovations

By SUZETTE STALKER AND SALLY BECKWITH
Specially Written for The Times

In response to a request by the Scotch Plains Board of Adjustment's Site Plan Subcommittee, the owners of the Scotch Plains Zoo on Raritan Road agreed last Thursday to come before the board again on Thursday, January 16, with a singular, comprehensive site plan detailing proposed renovations they maintain will improve living conditions for the animals at the facility.

Harold and Deborah Kafka have been seeking formal site plan approval from the board to make multiple improvements at the six-acre

spread, which is home to approximately 60 species of animals including elephants, giraffes, monkeys, llamas, a variety of large cats, and birds. The zoo has recently been targeted by animal rights activists who claim the animals are not being properly housed or maintained.

However, Joseph E. Murray, the Berkeley Heights attorney representing the Kafkas, has stated that when the couple purchased the zoo three years ago, the animals were living under very poor conditions and that his clients have been attempting to correct the situation through their application to the Board of Adjustment, which includes requests for several variances from the Scotch Plains Township Code.

During a public hearing which lasted about four hours, Mr. Kafka presented two site plan maps to the board illustrating improvements he and his wife hope to make to the zoo. The Site Plan Subcommittee, which particularly wanted specific information about the location and design of proposed additional buildings, asked that the applicant merge the two maps into one site plan, which the zoo owner is expected to present at the meeting next month.

The Kafkas have already cleaned up most of the debris at the site, with the exception of some telephone poles lying on the ground which will eventually be used as fence posts, according to their attorney. They have also

made such aesthetic improvements as perimeter fencing and flowers planted on the property, although they will not be able to initiate their planned renovations until receiving variances from the board.

Among the renovations which the Kafkas are proposing are interior fencing between eight and 15 feet high in order to prevent certain animals, such as the large cats, from climbing over; enlarging the animal enclosures to provide them with more living space; constructing a storage shed for hay adjacent to the giraffe area and relocation of a dumpster and pad used for manure deposits to approximately 75 feet from the zoo's property line.

The couple is also seeking a variance to maintain six-foot-high exterior fencing which Mr. Kafka put up in accordance with requirements of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), which has jurisdiction over the site, but which is in violation of the township code provision stating that the fencing be no more than four feet high.

In accordance with a state mandate from the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection and Energy's Division of Fish, Game and Wildlife, the zoo owners must move their chimpanzees and an orangutan to larger quarters by December 16 or demonstrate their intention to do so. Mr. Murray said the Kafkas had planned to enlarge the simian quarters somehow as part of their overall plan to renovate the facility.

Mr. Kafka told officials he planned to move the apes to a more spacious enclosure currently occupied by the large cats, and appealed to the board for temporary approval to build new cages for the cats in order to meet the state deadline. The board denied this request but said it would send a letter to the Fish, Game and Wildlife Division confirming the zoo owners' good faith in attempting to comply with the mandate and asking that the Kafkas be granted an extension.

The zoo, which also borders Clover Lane and Terrill Road, has drawn complaints from some neighbors who said noises and odors have been emanating from the facility, which is located in a residential zone. The establishment, formerly known as the Terry Lou Zoo, has been located there for 30 years.

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MARCHING THROUGH THE STREETS...Hayrides were among the activities during the second annual Old-Fashioned Holiday Celebration, held on December 8, sponsored by the Scotch Plains Business and Professional Association. In addition, 200 children flocked with their parents to the downtown to meet Santa and his elves.

William A. Burke for The Times

Council Scheduled to Vote on Whether to Switch From JIF Pool to Commercial Insurance Carrier

By SUZETTE STALKER
Specially Written for The Times

Members of the Fanwood Borough Council are scheduled to vote during tonight's regular meeting on whether to continue membership in the Suburban Municipal Joint Insurance Fund (JIF), a regional insurance pool, or switch to a commercial insurance company for the borough's general liability coverage. Participating communities must decide by Wednesday, January 1 if they will renew their JIF membership.

During last week's council agenda session, Administration and Finance Committee Chairman, Councilman Andrew J. MacDonald, recommended that the governing body change its coverage from the JIF, of which it has been a member for three years, to the American International Group (AIG), which he maintained would save the borough \$27,000 — the equivalent of more than one tax point.

Mr. MacDonald's opinion was shared by Councilman William E. Populus, Jr., his fellow committee member, who said he felt "it's imperative that we look into these options to save the taxpayers money." He observed that at the time Fanwood joined the JIF, "a hard insurance market" made it difficult for municipalities to obtain coverage at reasonable rates, but that this trend has since been reversed.

The third member of the committee, Councilman Louis C. Jung, argued against changing insurance coverage, however, maintaining that since the borough joined the JIF, "our overall experience has been good." Headed there was also no guarantee that if Fanwood were to drop out of the JIF and then decide to rejoin it again later on, that the municipality would automatically be accepted back into the insurance pool.

Borough Clerk Eleanor McGovern, who represents the borough as a JIF commissioner, listed several advantages last week of remaining with the JIF, among them that it would probably be beneficial to stick with one group rather than jumping around;

that the program offers stability and an alternative to the "wild fluctuations" in insurance coverage costs, and that the borough may be eligible for a \$10,000 rebate from the JIF in 1997.

"I think we're building something here as far as communities coming together, and in what we have learned," Mrs. McGovern told the members of the council, adding that the JIF also sponsors valuable safety programs as part of its membership package. "You can't put a dollar amount on that," she added.

Mr. MacDonald responded that there were borough people who are equally qualified to give instruction in the same safety programs which are provided to municipalities through the JIF, and therefore the community would not lose this advantage in the course of saving tax dollars.

Mrs. McGovern explained that the JIF also offers its members "more control" than they would have with a commercial insurance company. She noted, for example, that if a claim comes in to the JIF which exceeds more than \$5,000, a claims adjuster

must give the commissioners, which include one from each participating community, a breakdown in order for them to determine whether or not to approve the claim.

The Suburban JIF was formed in 1994 to enable area communities to acquire coverage less expensively than they could through commercial insurance companies. In addition to Fanwood, the other member municipalities include Scotch Plains, Westfield, Mountainside, Summit, Watchung, Bernardsville and Bedminster.

Revised Fanwood Zoning Ordinance to Reflect Community Growth and Change Since the 1950s

By SUZETTE STALKER
Specially Written for The Times

The Fanwood Borough Council heard a summary by Charles H. Brandt, the attorney for the municipality's Board of Adjustment, of pending revisions to the Borough Zoning Ordinance during the governing body's December 4 agenda meeting. Officials hope the ordinance will be fully updated around the same time as the revised Master Plan for the community, which is near completion and is expected to receive a public hearing by the Planning Board this month.

Mr. Brandt reported that he and the council's Building and Zoning Committee, which includes Councilwoman Karen M. Schurtz, Council President Bruce H. Walsh and Councilman Louis C. Jung, have been working to update the ordinance since July, and predicted that after "another two or three meetings" the revisions would be complete. The governing body will then have an opportunity to review the ordinance and will likely adopt it by early spring.

The attorney confirmed that almost all of the revised ordinance has been written, but said there are some aspects of the document which still need to be updated or changed and cross-referencing which needs to be done between various sections of the ordinance. He noted that this is the first time that Fanwood's zoning ordinance has been revised since the 1950s.

Mr. Brandt gave an overview of some of the more than 20 articles covered under the revised ordinance. He explained the new document will represent "a big departure" from the existing version in that applicants seeking to come before municipal boards will no longer have to draw information from many chapters of the Fanwood Borough code book. Instead, all information related to the municipality's Land Use Ordinance will be contained in one place.

He said the number of definitions included in the ordinance also will be expanded to address specific situations outlined in applications which come before the Planning Board and the Board of Adjustment. The revised ordinance also will discuss how each of these boards is organized in accordance with state law, as well as issues common to both boards such as conflicts of interest, voting procedures and filling vacancies.

In addition, procedures concerning public hearings by these boards also will be covered, including legal advertising, voting on applications, memorialization of resolutions and keeping records of cases. Mr. Brandt said the fee structure for applications which was established five years ago would remain the same under the revised ordinance, observing that the general application fee of \$50 is "in the range" of what other towns charge.

Other articles contained in the revised ordinance will address such issues as permits, minor and major site plans and subdivisions, as well as a procedure whereby municipalities have the option of permitting residents who are unhappy with a municipal board's decision to appeal it to the governing body rather than in Superior Court. In addition, the document will contain information related to off-site and infrastructure improvements.

Under zone revisions, Mr. Brandt reported that the Light Industrial Zone which includes the section of South Avenue from Sheelins Crossing to Terrill Road would be changed to a General-Commercial Zone, and that the Professional-Office Zone would be expanded to include the Children's Specialized Hospital outpatient clinic and a nearby medical building.

The Central Commercial Zone would be broadened to encompass the downtown business district, including the Dean Oil site on La Grande Avenue and businesses along Marine Avenue which had not been included in that zone under the existing ordinance, according to Mr. Brandt. He added the RS-150 (residential lots of 150,000 square-foot homes) Zone also would be enlarged as well to prevent some of the larger lots, particularly those on the north side of the borough which were developed between the 1890s and 1920s, from being subdivided.

Mr. Brandt described how the remaining articles would cover such categories as accessory uses, outdoor storage, signs, off-street parking, illumination and screening, automotive establishments, public utilities, satellite dishes and conditional uses for such facilities as churches, the Children's Specialized Hospital clinic and the soon-to-be-opened assisted living facility

on the South Avenue site of the former Mansion Hotel.

There also would be a section on general requirements addressing myriad issues ranging from minimum space requirements for dwellings to the kinds of pets which are permitted in residences, to basement utilizations, fence and wall uses and high pressure gas lines.

The outdoor storage provision, Mr. Brandt explained, is designed to control the kinds of things which residents would be allowed to store on their property. It also would address trailers, recreational vehicles and boats parked in residential zones

— items not covered under the existing ordinance since these types of vehicles were not prevalent in residential neighborhood two generations ago.

Mayor Maryanne S. Connelly thanked Mr. Brandt for presenting a summary of the revised zoning ordinance, stating that she "found it to be very helpful." The attorney told the governing body that once he and the Building and Zoning Committee had finished updating the document, the council would probably want to review it over the course of several meetings before it is adopted.

Issuance of \$1.7 Million in Bonds Unveiled for Sewer Pump Stations

By JEANNE WHITNEY
Specially Written for The Times

The Scotch Plains Township Council introduced an ordinance Tuesday at its regular meeting to issue nearly \$1.7 million in bonds for major improvements to sanitary sewerage pumping stations on the south side during the next year-and-a-half. Five percent or \$85,000 of the total comes out of the township Capital Improvement budget with the remaining \$1,715,000 issued as bonds. The council passed a resolution before introducing the ordinance, to amend the 1996 capital budget to include the sewerage costs.

Engineering consultants, Killam Associates, told the council this fall that certain improvements were needed at the Raritan Road, Lamberts Mill, West Broad Street and Greenview pumping stations to handle sewage flow. A system of parallel pipe lines will also be added along with the state-of-the-art pumping stations in order to handle any increase in sewage in the future. The system is part of the Rahway Valley Sewerage Authority, officials said.

The council also introduced an ordinance allowing police and fire officials to temporarily disconnect home security alarm systems that sound lengthy false alarms. No details of the proposed ordinance were provided during the meeting, but attorneys for the township have sought advice from the Town of Westfield about the ordinance, where a similar law has been in effect for 15 years. Officials have said that owners of home security systems will also be made aware of the ordinance when they register the system or renew with the township.

The council went ahead with plans for an ordinance to prohibit street

parking on both sides of Happel Court, including the circle, on school days between 8 a.m. and 4 p.m. Councilwoman Joan Papan said both the Scotch Plains-Fanwood High School and Happel Court residents support the change.

The council also introduced an ordinance to double the fee to \$4 for birth, marriage and death certificates, following a recommendation from the township Health Advisory Board.

The council also adopted several

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Holiday Deadlines Told For THE TIMES

Those persons preparing submittals to THE TIMES should note that deadlines for the issues of Thursday, December 26, have been moved up due to Christmas.

All submittals (including press releases, pictures and letters-to-the-editor) for the December 26 issue MUST be in our offices at 50 Elm Street by Wednesday, December 18.

Sports articles will be accepted through noon on Friday, December 20. Other articles will be accepted up until 1 p.m. on Saturday, December 21.

To ensure that submittals reach our offices by our deadlines, we recommend that copy be either e-mailed or faxed. THE TIMES e-mail address is galeader@aol.com. The fax number is 212 0473. Materials may also be dropped through the door slot when our offices are closed.

All copy must be typed, double-spaced, with a maximum of 500 words in length, and include a daytime telephone where the submitter can be reached.

Please note that in addition to making our deadlines, press releases and/or letters may be delayed due to space considerations. All submittals are subject to being cut due to length and will be edited for style and clarification at the discretion of the editor.

For the issue of Thursday, December 19, the deadline for copy is Friday, December 13, by 4 p.m. The deadline for sports stories is noon, Monday, December 16; and 9 p.m. on Tuesday, December 17, for obituaries.



BEST PERCUSSION...Scotch Plains-Fanwood High School Band member Tyler Locke concentrates on his performance during the recent Bloomfield competition. The Scotch Plains-Fanwood High School's Band percussion line was judged the Best Percussion Section in the Bloomfield competition. Joe Reo is the band's Percussion Director. See another picture on Page 18.