



SCOTCH PLAINS

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THOSE CRAZY HATS...Children of all ages arrived at La Grande Park in Fanwood on July 17 in their craziest hats as part of the park's summer program. Please see story on Page 10.

Scotch Plains One of Only Three Towns in County To Receive Round No. 2 of COAH Certification

By JUSTIN BRIDGE
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

Editor's Note: The following article is the second and final segment of a two-part series relating to low and moderate income housing requirements stemming from the 1985 Fair Housing Act which was a result of the New Jersey Supreme Court's Mount Laurel decision.

This past April, the Council on Affordable Housing (COAH) set new income limits for persons to qualify for low to moderate housing in New Jersey. These limits determined the eligibility of low and moderate income households, price new sales and rental units and set the maximum resale or re-rental prices on existing housing.

COAH defines low income as 50 percent or less of the median gross household income for households of the same size within the same housing region. Moderate income is over 50 percent, but less than 80 percent of the median gross household income for households of the same size. These new income limits will help New Jersey towns to meet the COAH standards for round two of COAH certification, which ends in 1999.

Only three towns in Union County are certified by COAH for the second round of certification, between the years of 1993 through 1999. They are Scotch Plains, New Providence, and Union. However, every town in New Jersey has to meet the standards set forth by COAH. The following shows how several different towns are working to meet their respective requirements and what they have to say about it.

Fanwood has met the COAH standards through the construction of new units and through a Regional Contribution Agreement (RCA) with Elizabeth. Terrill Commons provides two units for low income and one for a moderate income level. La Grande Midway Partnership will have one unit designated for a moderate income level.

Through the RCA, Fanwood will provide the funds for constructing four low to moderate income housing units in Elizabeth. This will satisfy Fanwood's obligation to COAH by providing the assigned eight units. Fanwood's fair share requirement is so low due to the lack of land available

that is able to be developed to meet COAH requirements.

Scotch Plains is one of the three COAH certified municipalities in Union County. In 1989, COAH deemed that Scotch Plains needed to build and rehabilitate 218 housing units to meet their requirements, according to Sidna Mitchell, the Deputy Director of COAH. The Scotch Plains Planning Board has just approved a new development known as Woodland Estates, that meets Mount Laurel requirements, and is currently hearing testimony on a proposed site, known as The Reserve, which will provide 16 low to moderate income housing units.

Although not certified by COAH, Westfield is also working to meet its requirements. According to Town Attorney Charles H. Brandt, "once you announce a housing plan, it goes into repose for six years."

The current housing plan, he said, will not come into question until around November.

"We've met the requirements of the first round, and we are re-zoning for the second," added Mr. Brandt.

Westfield has re-zoned two parcels of land to meet the Mount Laurel agreements. Mr. Brandt also said that Westfield has entered into an RCA with Elizabeth, providing money for the construction of 21 units. He went on to say that Westfield has also constructed 133 units, such as the senior citizens home on Boynton Avenue, in addition to rehabilitating several units.

Although November, the month in which the six-year repose ends, is approaching, Mr. Brandt said that there is still time, "to work on a plan for the next time around."

He added that one problem in meeting the requirements set forth by COAH is finding existing units to rehabilitate.

"Westfield is an upscale town, there are not that many houses that need rehabilitation," Mr. Brandt explained.

John Laezza, Cranford's Administrator, claims that Cranford is working on meeting the COAH requirements mostly through the rehabilitation of existing structures.

Mr. Laezza also said that two senior citizen homes have been constructed in the town to help meet the requirements. However, he added that, "I've been working here for five years, and

no one has pushed us to build."

Mr. Laezza said that there were no current plans to build any more housing units that would satisfy the Mount Laurel agreements in Cranford.

The Borough of Mountainside was all but exempt from COAH, according to Borough Administrator Kathleen Toland, the former Borough Clerk.

"We were 98 percent developed when the Mount Laurel laws came into effect," said Mrs. Toland, "which left us in effect, exempt."

Mrs. Toland also said that, except

DEVELOPER PURCHASED 6.5-ACRE PROPERTY IN JUNE

DEP Effort Continues to Find Homes for Nearly 70 Animals From Now Closed Township Zoo

By SUZETTE STALKER
Specially Written for The Times

Officials with the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) are continuing their efforts to find new homes for approximately 70 animals at the Scotch Plains Zoo, while the fate of the 6.5-acre property itself remains uncertain. The popular establishment, which has been mired in financial and other troubles since last year, has been closed to the public since May 28.

DEP spokeswoman Sharon Southard said last week that the department is working in conjunction with Union Township attorney Martin B. O'Connor, 2nd, the court-appointed guardian for the establishment, in relocating the animals to other qualified facilities. Mr. O'Connor was named as the permanent guardian for the zoo on April 10 by Superior Court Judge Frederick C. Kentz, Jr. in Elizabeth.

In the meantime, Scotch Plains attorney Robert F. Kraus, who represents former zoo owners Frank and Louise Terry, confirmed that a deed was recorded June 26 transferring ownership of the property from Harold and Deborah Kafka to Scotch Plains Realty Investors, Inc. The deed showed that developer Mitchell Berlant, who heads Scotch Plains Realty Investors, Inc., purchased the zoo from the Kafkas for \$338,000.

Mr. Kraus said that he only discovered last week that the transaction had occurred after conducting a search of county records in preparation for the Terrys to initiate foreclosure proceedings on the property. He stated that the Kafkas, have not made a mortgage payment to his clients since March, and currently owe the Terrys approximately \$355,000. He calculated that amount as \$340,000 plus interest, adding that the amount "is climbing every day."

The attorney acknowledged that although the transaction was legal, it represented a "great risk" to the Kafkas. He remarked that he felt the Kafkas "had got a goose egg" out of the deal since the amount they owe to the Terrys exceeds what Mr. Berlant paid them for the zoo. Mr. Berlant, as the new owner, has now assumed the mortgage payments and is expected to pay off the entire debt by Labor Day, September 1, according to the attorney.

When he entered into a purchase agreement with the Kafkas nearly two months ago, Mr. Berlant said he was interested in maintaining the property as a zoo. In response to speculation that the property, which is zoned as residential, could be developed for houses, Mr. Kraus said he "doesn't have a clue" as to what will eventually be done with the site.

He conceded that, because of a stream which runs through the site, it would not be easy to put houses there, but said nevertheless "it can be developed."

The zoo was ordered closed by the DEP's Division of Fish, Game and Wildlife after the Kafkas failed to submit a report detailing how they planned to relocate wildlife at the site. The Kafkas were required to submit the report within 15 days after withdrawing their appeal May 13 of the state's decision not to renew their operating permits. The couple had been cited for violations related to public safety and animal welfare.

Ms. Southard remarked that "it's taking a little longer than we thought" to relocate the animals, which include some rare and endangered species.

"We've been very diligent in getting the animals to good, approved homes. We're in frequent contact with the court-appointed guardian and we're trying to keep things moving as best we can," the DEP spokeswoman added.

A male lion and a female peccary, a piglike mammal indigenous to North, Central and South America, were recently transferred to the Space Farm and Museum in Beermerville, a village in Wantage, New York. The 70-year-old family-owned business comprises a total of 450 acres and is home to 500 animals. Owner Fred Space recently reported that the lion and the peccary were in good condition when they arrived at Space Farm and have been doing well in their new environment.

Other species which have also been relocated include an orangutan, which was transferred to a facility in another state, and 19 migratory birds such as bald eagles, hawks, cranes and owls, which went to other licensed establishments in New Jersey. The United States Fish and Wildlife Service owns the birds and supervised their transfer.

Lawrence Herrigty, Supervising Biologist for the Division of Fish, Game and Wildlife, confirmed that Mr. Kafka had submitted a list of places for relocating the animals, but that not all of them had the necessary permits from their home states to accept them. He acknowledged, however, that "some of these have since been recertified." One facility, the Peninsula SPCA in Virginia, was not interested in taking the kinds of animals housed at the Scotch Plains Zoo, Mr. Herrigty said.

He said that the other places suggested by Mr. Kafka included the Pocono Snake and Game Farm and Appalachia Pet Farm, both in Pennsylvania; the Panther Survival Project in Florida and Chimp Party in Missouri. The biologist said the only one of these which had not yet met with his approval was Chimp Party because he had not seen a permit from the United States Fish and Wildlife Service for the facility to maintain endangered species.

Engineering Firm Seeks to Move To Former Orthodontist Office

By SUZETTE STALKER
Specially Written for The Times

During a meeting which lasted more than three hours last Thursday, the Fanwood Board of Adjustment heard six new appeals, including an application by one of its members to move his engineering and surveying firm to the former site of an orthodontic practice which sparked a controversy among neighbors on the street last year. The public hearing on the matter is expected to continue at the board's next meeting on Thursday, August 21.

James Watson, recently elected as Vice Chairman of the Board of Adjustment, is seeking to transfer his business, EKA Associates, to the Martine Avenue property which has been owned since 1968 by Dr. Francis Besson. Dr. Besson, who has since moved his practice to Scotch Plains, drew the ire of several neighbors last fall when he sought a variance to add his son as a second professional at the site.

Dr. Besson was awarded his variance, with the provision that when he retired, the status of the property would revert back to use by only a single professional. The board's resolution of that application also stated that any new professional seeking to occupy the site, which is zoned as residential, would have to come before the board with a site plan and parking plan. This aspect of the case generated a debate among board representatives last week as to whether Mr. Watson would actually need to get a separate use variance.

Board attorney Charles H. Brandt proposed that Mr. Watson would only need approval of his parking plan since EKA Associates, currently located in Scotch Plains, already qualifies as a professional use under the Fanwood code. Board member Jack Molenaar, however, argued that since

the premises would be used for a different purpose than as a medical building, the body should have the option of considering a separate variance.

Mr. Watson, who is a licensed surveyor, explained that his business specializes in civil engineering, mapping and surveying, and primarily deals with real estate transactions. He said he began it as a part-time venture in 1988 and later turned it into a full-time business which he operated out of his home for three years before opening his present office in Scotch Plains.

The board Vice Chairman stated his communication with clients is done primarily over the telephone, fax machine or computer modem, and that clients only occasionally visit his office to discuss projects. He added that he currently has a staff of four other people, including a licensed professional engineer and a licensed professional land surveyor; a college student from the Stevens Institute of Technology in Hoboken, and a high school student.

Mr. Watson said the college student would work at the most only part-time after the new school year begins, and that the high school student would be returning to classes full-time. He anticipated that, during most of the year, he would require only three parking spaces for himself and his staff, noting that two staff members are generally out in the field during the day. The office, he said, is open from 7 a.m. to 4 p.m. and that staff members only work a half day on Friday.

Mr. Watson said he has no plans to alter the interior of the structure, and said that since all drafting functions are done on computer, there would not be a need for large work tables. He said he was interested in placing a professional identification sign on

the exterior of the building which would be illuminated by a downward directional light.

One of the most complex topics dealt with during the public hearing concerned the number of professionals who would be working on the premises and which of the principals are considered professionals. The board concurred that the licensed engineer was a professional, though there was some discussion among board members as to whether surveyors fell into the same category.

Concerning the issue of whether the site must be owned either by the occupant of an upstairs single-family residence or by the professional using the office, Mr. Watson said he currently has a lease agreement with Dr. Besson with an option to purchase the building. He added that Dr. Besson's daughter is planning to occupy the living quarters area. Board members noted that the orthodontist could sell his daughter a share of the building whereby she could become part owner of the site.

The applicant, who exhibited a drawing of Montrose Avenue and its intersection with Martine, said he felt "there is plenty of space available" for parking, particularly since his company represents a "much less intense use" of the property than an orthodontic practice. Mr. Watson anticipated sharing two of four spaces in the building's garage and driveway with the upstairs occupant, adding that there are also 15 spaces available on Montrose Avenue.

Mark Edelman of Montrose Avenue questioned Mr. Watson's eligibility to apply for the variance, since he is not the owner of the building. Mr. Watson reiterated his earlier statement concerning his lease agreement with Dr. Besson, arguing that since he would be the person signing the lease he had the right to apply for the variance.

Mr. Edelman also addressed concern about traffic along Martine and Montrose Avenues, which had been a key issue as well among those opposed to Dr. Besson's appeal last year. He observed that students from Park Middle School cross at Montrose, and proposed that parked cars belonging to Mr. Watson's business could reduce motorists' visibility on that street.

During the interim before the board's next meeting, Mr. Brandt is expected to research several aspects

CONTINUED ON PAGE 10



AND THE WINNER IS...Matthew Taylor, left, an eighth-grade student at Park Middle School. Matthew won first place in the Veterans of Foreign Wars Essay contest. Pictured with Matthew is Joe McCourt, VFW Post No. 10122 Essay Chairman.

Matthew Taylor Wins Local, County VFW Essay Contest

Scotch Plains-Fanwood Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), Post No. 10122, and Ladies Auxiliary presented Matthew Taylor of Park Middle School in Scotch Plains with a United States savings bond for placing first in the VFW Essay Contest.

Matthew placed first in local competition and came in first in District

No. 5, Union County, where he was also presented with another savings bond and plaque. The contest was open to seventh-, eighth- and ninth-grade students.

Matthew is an eighth grade student in Meg Fitzgerald's class at Park Middle School.

Deadlines Told For Submittals To The Times

Those persons preparing press releases for submission to The Times are reminded that copy should be E-mailed or faxed by 4 p.m. on the Friday prior to publication. The Times E-mail address is golder@aol.com. The fax number is 232-0473.

Releases, pictures, and letters to the editor can also be dropped off at our office located at 50 Elm Street or through our mail slot. To ensure that submittals reach our office prior to deadline we encourage E-mail or faxed material.

Sports stories which occur prior to the weekend must be in by the Friday deadline. Weekend sports events must be submitted by noon on the Monday prior to the publication date. Obituaries will be accepted up to 5 p.m. on Tuesdays.

All copy must be typed, double-spaced, no more than 500 words in length, and include a daytime telephone number where the submitter can be reached.

For events which are planned months in advance, we encourage submission of stories as early as possible prior to the event.

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