

Belleville commission votes down \$5 million public safety building

By JERRY THOMAS

The Belleville Board of Commissioners, saying it would be "unwise" and "fiscally unsound" to build a public safety building, last night voted 3-2 to kill the \$5 million plan.

Just moments after the vote, a dejected Mayor Michael Pizzi, who along with Finance Commissioner Joseph McGreevy voted for the project, criticized the board for the decision, which forced the township to forfeit more than \$800,000 in architect and engineering fees.

"I feel we have acted irresponsibly tonight," Pizzi said. "We have taken the biggest crap shoot in the history of New Jersey, and we talk about fiscal responsibility."

Commissioner Joseph Fornarotto, the director of public affairs who voted to kill the project, said his decision was based on a projected 110-point tax increase. He said the Belleville Board of Education budget is expected to increase taxes 44 points, the township's budget 12 points, while the garbage disposal cost will increase taxes 40 points and the new public safety building 14 points.

Fornarotto asked McGreevy, "Do you know where the money to cover these 110 points will come from?"

McGreevy answered, "Eventually, the taxpayers."

"I vote no," Fornarotto said to the applause of the audience.

After a 2-2 vote which included a no vote by Commissioner Vincent Frantantoni and yes votes by Pizzi and McGreevy, the ultimate decision rested with Commissioner Angelo Rosoli.

"This is not an easy decision to make," said Rosoli, who drew a calmness to the room. "I have weighed the pros and cons. On the yes side, I have come up with very little. On the no side, there are many many reasons" the commission should reject the project. "This time I'm voting no."

The crowd shouted "yeah," and praised the board for knocking down the plan. Some, however, were saddened by the vote. "I feel that a police headquarters is absolutely essential," said Michael Giordano of Valley Street.

Angelo Veneziano of Harrison Street said he came to the meeting apprehensive of how the vote would turn out but left happy. "There was enough support to kill the plan. That's a savings for the taxpayers. There's much more savings that has to be done, but this is the beginning."

Police Chief George Lister said the decision not to build the 24,000-square-foot facility takes the town back to zero. "We have been working on this project for two years," said Lister, who served on the building committee.

Lister said the police department, which has its head-

quarters in the basement of the town hall on Washington Avenue, was designed for 20 officers but there are 88 men in the department.

Besides being crowded, the chief said, the police station has been cited for numerous health and safety violations. "We are waiting for a tragedy to happen," he said, noting the conditions have hurt the morale in his department.

After the special meeting, Mayor Pizzi said he was disappointed that few supporters of the plan turned out. "I'm sure they're out there."

Although he lost a major battle during his eight months in office, Pizzi said he is willing to proceed with new business. "I hope we can be progressive; it has been a nonproductive eight months," he said. "We have to pull together as a board. I want to forget about it. It's over. It's done. Everybody voted his conscience."

Risoli, joined by many residents outside town hall, said, "I think this will bring the board together."

"Now we can come up with our own plan, not one dumped in our laps, he said. "All of us realize something is needed."

Last night's vote put to rest a controversy that began in 1983 when the administration led by Mayor Michael Marotti voted to build a three-story rectangular public safety building.

At that time, Belleville was offered free land to build the station on Franklin Avenue, but the merchants on Washington Avenue were against the plan. The Marotti administration voted it down.

The township lost a \$1 million federal grant that would have offset the \$1.6 million cost, officials said.

Two years later, commissioners voted to approve a \$10 million bond ordinance not simply for a public safety building, but for a 64,000-square-foot municipal complex.

Officials said the town hall would be "one of the most up-to-date" in the nation. The five-floor triangular building, designed to house all municipal employees and the board of education staff, would have been erected behind the town hall, and the construction would have been the "first step" in redeveloping the township's main thoroughway from Belleville Avenue to the Newark line, officials said.

But some residents, mostly members of the Concerned Citizens of Belleville (CCB), lead by Frantantoni, were against the development, saying the board had provided no plans in the clerk's office. Plus, they feared it would increase taxes.

In 1986, commissioners voted 5-0 to kill the plan, and Marotti appointed a five-member board draw up a new design not to exceed \$3 million.

A WEIGHTY ISSUE

Livingston officials diet for good cause

By MEG NUGENT

For the next 19 weeks, Livingston Council and township school board members can kiss junk food goodbye.

The council has challenged the Livingston Board of Education to a diet to raise money for Project Graduation, an annual alcohol- and drug-free bash the township throws for graduating high school seniors.

"I'm giving up chocolate, pizza and Chinese food for this," said Councilman David Wildstein, adding he threw down the weight-loss gauntlet on behalf of the council and Mayor William Shaunessy in a formal letter that was sent to the board on Monday.

"I gained 10 pounds extra for this, just so I could make more money for the kids," said board member Charles "Buddy" August.

Asked if there was any particular dish for which he had a weakness, August said, "Food is my weakness. I always had a goal to weigh 200 pounds; I have yet to get down to 200."

"After I bulked up for the holidays, it'll have to come off," said Shaunessy, adding his food intake yesterday consisted of half a dry muffin, a small container of soup and an orange.

"My goal is to get down to 195, my fighting weight for the softball season," said the mayor.

School Board President Alex Richardson said the five-member board has the message and "we've accepted the challenge."

The council officially started its diet Monday night, when each council member and Township Manager Charles Tahaney, who agreed to enter the contest, took to the scale.

The combined weight of the six men is 1,241 pounds, according to Wildstein. As to their individual weights, "That's none of your business," said the councilman, who is notorious for sending out for pizza during late night council sessions.

"There's always been friendly competition between the two groups and we're using that sense of

competition to do something for the kids," said Wildstein.

The township held its first Project Graduation night last June when almost all of the 420-member Class of '87 turned out for an alcohol- and drug-free party which was thrown at a Lyndhurst health club.

Livingston mothers Andrea Ubaldi and Joyce Mazzarella spearheaded a four-month townwide campaign last year to gain support from teachers, students, merchants and parents, and held myriad fund-raising events to come up with the \$22,000 needed to finance the party.

The same amount is needed for Project Graduation 1988 and they are "halfway there" in reaching that goal, said Ubaldi, who approached Wildstein with the idea of a weight-loss contest after reading about similar competitions held in other towns.

Wildstein said money will be raised by a method borrowed from such events as walkathons, with residents, corporations and local merchants pledging money per pound lost. Sponsorship can be given to individual contestants, the entire board, the entire council, or both groups together.

In addition, township employees are welcome to enter the diet contest, said Wildstein, who named School Superintendent Robert Kish and Livingston High School Principal Bob Grady as two other participants.

"The real winners will be the kids because the more weight we lose, the more money for the kids and if the board goes out and loses twice as much weight as we do, that's fine with me," he said.

But Wildstein could not resist a prediction on which group will shed the most poundage by the May 23 deadline.

"The council will win. We have more courage, more willpower, and we're more competitive and we will not lose to them," he declared.

Said Richardson: "I think we will win because we've got more weight to lose. If you look at the combined weight of the board and the combined weight of the council, we must outweigh them."

Allegations of police drug probe go unanswered in Orange council

By KEVIN DILWORTH

A claim that a small group of Orange police officers is being investigated for drug trafficking went unanswered at last night's city council meeting.

There also were no answers to questions about the department's controversial "house arrest" policy that forces sick or injured officers to stay at home and to answer the telephone when police headquarters calls to check on them.

The concerns were not addressed because neither Police Chief Robert Sorge nor Mayor Paul Monacelli, the city's police director, attended the session in city hall.

Sorge was reported to have undergone a last-minute operation. And Monacelli, according to a statement read by City Clerk Felix DeFeo, was out of town participating in the Army Reserves.

For the sixth time, an angry Councilwoman Louise Corvino said, "The chief has not shown up. It's unfortunate he scheduled a hemorrhoid operation (yesterday)."

He again has "made a complete mockery of this council. The council should form an investigative body and subpoena the chief," Corvino said.

"Is he confined to his house?" Corvino questioned, referring to the house arrest policy mentioned by the Orange Kinsmen, a black officers' group, as well as by Sgts. Joseph Pagano and Chester Penta.

Rocco Zarillo, a South Center Street resident, also criticized the absence of Sorge and Monacelli.

Zarillo, the city's former director of information and complaints, stressed how he "personally" was "affronted" by reports that some police officers are under investigation for drug trafficking, and neither Sorge or Monacelli has chosen to respond.

If there were police officers "using or selling narcotics," he said, then Sorge had an obligation to arrest those

persons and refer the matter to the municipal court and prosecutor's office.

Zarillo is noted for having testified in Superior Court in Essex County to help put an end to past corruption in the police department.

Speaking to the council, Zarillo said, "We're talking about narcotics here. The matter should be investigated. We got too many clean cops in this department" who are being forced "to have a stigma attached to them."

The Army Reserves sessions usually are held once a month on weekends, Zarillo said. That is why it appears "very convenient" that Monacelli had to be out of town yesterday, he said.

Councilman Dwight Mitchell, who frequently has questioned how the police handle certain crimes and investigations, said, "We know what we want. We want him (Sorge) here."

But Mitchell, rather than support Corvino's suggestion or turn it into a resolution, said he preferred to wait and see if Sorge will come to a subsequent council meeting and answer the questions.

Councilman James J. Brown, noting Monacelli previously vowed Sorge would show up at last night's meeting, described the police chief's absence as "a contempt of council."

He also said the council has "exhausted remedies" to get Sorge to appear at one of its public meetings and discuss police concerns.

Unfortunately, said Lt. Charles Cobbert, president of the Kinsmen, the only way to get things resolved is to air grievances in public.

And even then, he added, sometimes nothing is resolved. That has been the case with Monacelli's administration, Cobbert said—it "listens to us, then turns a deaf ear."

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