



## First Ward residents sound off on development, township planners



LINDA MOSS/STAFF

Township Deputy Mayor William Hurlock, left, and Brian Scantlebury, the deputy township manager, address residents' questions at the First Ward meeting on Thursday night. The sessions was held at the Bellevue Avenue branch of the Montclair Public Library.

**By LINDA MOSS**

*moss@montclairlocal.news*

First Ward residents voiced their concerns on a variety of topics — including development at the former Warner Communications building, the redevelopment of Lackawanna Plaza and pedestrian safety by the Starbucks on Valley Road — at a meeting Thursday night.

Deputy Mayor William Hurlock, who represents the First Ward, had about 25 people at his meeting, the 17th he has held since elected in 2012, at the Bellevue Branch of the Montclair Public Library.

During much of the 90-minute session, Hurlock fielded questions about development, namely the Warner office building in the First Ward and Lackawanna Plaza in the Fourth Ward. Jennifer Haughton complained about the Township Planning Board's handling of developer Michael Pavel's application to increase the square footage for his proposed plans for the Warner building, which is on Lorraine Avenue.

"I think the planners have an absolutely wrong vision for Upper Montclair," Haughton said.

The planning board in a 5-4 vote rejected Pavel's request, and the body was scheduled to vote on a resolution formalizing that decision at its May 22 meeting. Haughton told Hurlock that the resolution was suddenly pulled off the agenda.

At the planning board's meeting its attorney, Arthur Neiss, said that Pavel was threatening to sue and the resolution was taken off the agenda so both sides could talk and try to reach a settlement to avoid litigation. Neiss also apologized to residents, including Haughton, who had showed up at the meeting to see final action taken on the Warner resolution.

Hurlock, who is a lawyer, told residents that as a council member he has no control over the planning board, and characterized the planning board's handling of the Warner matter as "absurd." He added that he had probably had 30 conversations with Haughton about the Warner building.

"I can't tell the planning board what to do, but as a lawyer, and as a plain little old citizen — not as a government representative — I would never in a million years make a determination or a decision based on someone might sue me later on, unless I know what I'm doing is illegal," Hurlock said. "That's different story."

In terms of planning, he said that when the town was working on a new master plan he had successfully championed against part of it that would have strained the First Ward's infrastructure.

"I beat the master plan back in the First Ward," Hurlock said.

Residents on Thursday also expressed their dismay at the proposed plans for Lackawanna Plaza, the shopping center that once housed a Pathmark and is also home to a historic train station. The plans include the construction of 350 dwelling units.

Kathleen Bennett, chair of the Montclair Historic Preservation Commission, was at the meeting and said that her group was "absolutely horrified" when it saw the proposed Lackawanna Center plan last month. Hurlock advised residents to write to the Township Council and attend upcoming public hearings on the project to register their objections.

When one resident asked why the council was fast-tracking the Lackawanna project by taking over drafting its redevelopment plan from the planning board, Deputy Township Manager Brian Scantlebury, who was at the meeting, responded.

He said the project had been discussed for several years now, with several "well-attended meetings" held on it.

"I've been kind of been there since the genesis," Scantlebury said. "This thing has been plodding along."

Hurlock started his meeting by asking residents to be patient about the "disruption" from the work PSE&G is doing along Grove Street, replacing a gas line that is more than 100 years old.

"They had a staging area outside of my house for about 2 ½ weeks where I couldn't get out of my driveway for a couple of days, too," he said.

That work will be done by August, according to Scantlebury.

As for First Ward roads, the township is in the process of getting blinking lights installed at the crosswalk by the Starbucks on Valley Road, similar to the one at Kings Food Market, and is also addressing some of the congestion with the parking there, according to Hurlock.



LINDA MOSS/STAFF

*Gray Russell, the township's sustainability officer, at the First Ward meeting on Thursday talked about an energy-saving program through PSE&G that is taking place in 10 municipal buildings.*

During the meeting Gray Russell, the township's sustainability officer, updated the group about environmental initiatives in the municipality. He said that the "shredfest" that the township held a month ago brought in 6 1/2 tons of confidential documents that 500 residents brought in to be shredded at the municipal public works yard.

The township is also in the midst of doing an energy-efficiency upgrade to 10 of the 12 municipal buildings, changing them to LED lighting as part of a program with PSE&G, according to Russell. PSE&G will foot the bill for 70 percent of the \$200,000 cost, or \$140,000, with the township permitted to pay the remaining \$60,000, interest free, over a three-year period, he said.

"This will lower utility bills for town every month, by \$40,000 a year ... within five years we will be saving about \$150,000, over the next decade save about a third of a million dollars, just from energy efficiencies," Russell said.

---



Planning board rejects Lorraine Ave. expansion



*The Township Planning Board voted against approving a site-plan amendment for an expansion of the former Warner Communications building on Lorraine Avenue at its meeting on Monday. Planner Peter Steck, left, testified at the hearing for the developer, who was represented by attorney E. Neal Zimmermann, right. LINDA MOSS/STAFF*

**By LINDA MOSS**

[moss@montclairlocal.news](mailto:moss@montclairlocal.news)

The Township Planning Board made decisions on two controversial applications on Wednesday night, voting down one to expand the former Warner Communications building on Lorraine Avenue and approving a revised plan that will keep the former Clover Rest Nursing Home on Madison Avenue intact.

After hearing testimony in a continued hearing on the application by developer Michael Pavel, the board voted 5-4 against approving his site-plan amendment for 237-249 Lorraine Ave.

Pavel was looking to increase the office space on the building's planned second floor from 5,300 square feet to 8,971 square feet, nearly 3,700 more square feet more than the board had previously approved. The first floor of the building will have retail space, and the revised site plan would have entailed construction of a 37-foot rear addition on the property.

Several board members, the Township Historic Preservation Commission, and residents voiced their objections

to Pavel's revised plans. Some claimed that the enlarged building's look wouldn't be compatible with the historic design of that part of the Historic Upper Montclair Business District on Valley Road, with its Tudor facades and older buildings, like the one occupied by Williams-Sonoma.

"This is in direct and kind of stark contrast to anything else in Upper Montclair," said resident Jennifer Haughton.

Both planning board Vice Chair Jason DeSalvo and board member Robin Schlager were critical of Pavel for taking the approach of first getting approval for one site plan and then coming back to ask for more office space.

DeSalvo accused the developer not acting in good faith and trying to "slide one in" by revising his original plan, making it bigger.

"We live in a beautiful town that's not meant to look like Route 46," DeSalvo said.

He added that this might be the case that has to be litigated to determine how much power and say the Historic Preservation Commission has with its recommendations on proposed development.

Voicing her opposition to the application, Schlager cited a resident who said they "felt that the rug was pulled out from under them" when Pavel revised his site plan.

"This is exactly how this feels," she said. "This building actually is in essence in people's backyards. ... I can't support this and be able to live with myself, so to speak."

Board Chair John Wynn spoke in favor of the application, adding that the board can try to mitigate any offending features of the plan, for example, with requirements for screening on its HVAC equipment.

"This is a business district. ... We want to attract traffic to a business district," Wynn said. "It helps the business district thrive."

Board member Anthony Ianuale said there was a need for office space and that the Warner Communications project could help revitalize that part of town.

Pavel's attorney, E. Neal Zimmermann, had called a planner, Peter Steck, to testify Wednesday in support of Zimmermann's argument that the revised plans for the Warner Communications building were in fact complementary to structures immediately adjacent to it. Zimmermann later said he didn't know if his client would appeal the board's ruling.

### **Clover Rest to stand**

In the second application on its agenda, the board approved a new plan by Luther Flurry, the former executive director of the Montclair Center Business Improvement District, and his wife, Jarmila Packard, for property at

14-16 Madison Ave. The site includes the former Clover Rest Nursing Home and a smaller one-family house.

In a move opposed by some residents in the neighborhood, Flurry had originally sought approval to raze the Clover Rest building and subdivide the property into three lots, so that two homes could be built on the front lots while the existing one-family would stay as it was.

But after meeting with residents, Flurry and his wife decided to change their plans and instead ask to subdivide their land into two lots, and then renovate the Clover House residence and keep the smaller house that's behind it, according to the couple's lawyer, David Owen.

Owen also called an architect, Scot Surbeck, who showed the board renderings of how the renovated Clover House will look. The former nursing home has been cited for township code violations after neighbors complained about the deteriorated state of the building.

At Wednesday's board meeting, DeSalvo wanted assurances that Flurry will get repairs on the former nursing started as soon as possible. Owen told the board that Flurry expected to apply for construction permits in mid-June, and get the exterior work on the house done by Sept. 30.