

THE COURIER-NEWS

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William H. Gannett, Publisher
Clive H. Gilbert, Assistant to the Publisher
John J. Curley, Editor
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Make Spring Lake a scenic park

Transforming the Spring Lake area of South Plainfield into a Middlesex County park would represent an excellent and badly needed addition to the county's park system. Additionally it would be a boon for South Plainfield and a valuable contribution to environmental protection.

Advantages are so great that it's unfortunate that little progress has been made on the project since it was taken under official consideration seven years ago.

Over the years the county has acquired a few small parcels of the envisaged 288-acre park. But the bulk of the area remains in private ownership — and enthusiasm that once bubbled for the venture at county level seems to have waned.

At present the area has the appearance of a marshy, mile-long stretch of black lowlands fringing the Cedar Brook through South Plainfield from the Union County line to Spring Lake. Because of neglect it's reported to have become rat-infested in places.

But it has the potential, without excessive development costs, of being transformed into one of the beauty spots of Central Jersey.

To lose this opportunity by abandoning plans to use Green Acres funds for the proposed parkland acquisition would be a short-sighted disservice to the county and a rejection of the basic aim of New Jersey's commendable and progressive Green Acres program.

Indeed, the stalled project has so many potential advantages that Middlesex County Freeholders should stipulate that enough time be devoted to planning and negotiation stages of the project — and direct that the account now be turned to acquisition and development.

An opportunity for the freeholders to demonstrate such a leadership role will surface on July 6 when the board is scheduled to meet with South Plainfield Mayor and Council, County Planning Director Douglas Powell, the county's park committee and officials of the Middlesex Water Company which owns much of the involved land.

At a time when the county's Master Plan cautions that park acreage is inadequate for the needs of the county's population and when the population is growing in leaps and bounds, abandoning an opportunity to acquire and preserve a scenic open area like the Spring Lake tract would be a shame.

Acquisition costs in 1971 will be higher than they would have been when the project was taken under official consideration in 1964. But with the benefits of federal and state Green Acres program grants, the project still represents one of the best bargains available to the public of Middlesex County — and offers a way to demonstrate active interest in the growing need for environmental protection.

Church merger no easy step

Congregations of Grant Avenue Presbyterian Church and the First Presbyterian Church, both in Plainfield, are now one. They've combined as the First Presbyterian Church of Plainfield — a move making history with the first consolidation of churches in the Elizabeth Presbytery.

The church members involved are to be commended for rising above limited interests and deserve success in their venture.

The merger has allowed what had been two congregations to attain long held goals that would have been difficult, if not impossible, had they gone their separate ways.

Decisions and actions involved were not easy. Giving up a church or relinquishing a traditional church name means breaking strong attachments. Merging with another can mean more changes in what to many is their spiritual home.

But beginning Sunday, members of the Grant Avenue congregation will be worshipping in a new sanctuary and both they and the First Presbyterian congregation will have a new church name.

Happily, a well-thought-out merger plan has advantages for both former congregations.

Extensive facilities at the E. Front Street church will be more fully utilized by the addition of members who formerly conducted religious activities at the smaller Grant Avenue church.

The Grant Avenue facilities, which include a community center, will now be used to involve even more church members in operation of a day care center and other activities of the community ministry to be continued there.

Both former churches, who were without pastors, are now joining efforts to locate a new minister. Plans also call for obtaining an assistant pastor to lead the new church in reaching out to the total Plainfield community.

The merger involved sending questionnaires to all church members, numerous committee meetings, two congregational meetings and various sessions with Presbytery officials.

"It takes a lot of determination and a certain amount of daring to put sentiment and tradition aside and vote to start an entirely new church," said William G. French, assistant clerk of session, who was active in the consolidation planning.

When United Presbyterian Church of Plainfield members gather for the first time Sunday it will be as a new congregation, unafraid and willing to undergo change in order to better carry out their mission. Such willingness deserves admiration.

State House scene

Politics shadow legislative reform

By JAMES H. RUBIN

TRENTON (AP) — Elements of political partisanship are creeping into the widening debate over how workable and responsive are the operations of the N.J. Legislature.

For example: — Assembly Speaker Barry T. Parker, R-Burlington, named two Democrats and two Republicans this week to the new Commission to Study the N.J. Legislature. But while the makeup of the group is bi-partisan, Parker got in a plug or two for steps taken this year by the Republican legislative leadership to eliminate "secrecy in the caucus system" and replace it with stronger committees.

— A group called the Committee for a Responsive Legislature announced last week that it was seeking reform of the Legislature which it characterized as "one of the least effective legislatures in the nation." Skeptics noted that the committee had a decidedly Democratic cast to its composition despite claims by its leaders that Republicans were invited to join.

It appears quite likely that both major political parties will attempt to use the issue of legislative reform to their own benefit in the November election.

Republicans, who control both houses by 3-1 majorities, can be expected to point to what

they consider important accomplishments in reducing secrecy, providing greater staff assistance and improving the continuity of the legislative process.

On the other hand, Democrats are becoming more outspoken in their criticism of legislative structure and procedure and some are making bolder recommendations for change.

The Committee for a Responsive Legislature, headed by former Democratic Assembly Speaker William F. Hyland, called for a constitutional convention to restructure the Legislature "before it suffers a total collapse."

One of the men who was asked to join the committee but refused is Donald G. Herzberg, executive director of the respected Eagleton Institute of Politics at Rutgers University.

Herzberg, a registered Democrat who has worked for and actively supported Democratic candidates, said he was eager to protect the status of the Eagleton Institute as "dedicated to bi-partisanship."

Herzberg, who has headed the institute since 1966, said that "legislative reform can't be accomplished in a partisan way. The parties must cooperate."

The 65-year-old Princeton resident said he was particularly disturbed by the support Hyland's group has given to a report by the National Citizens Conference on State Legislatures, which has its headquarters in Kansas City.

The Kansas City group issued a report earlier this year which placed New Jersey's Legislature among the bottom third in the nation in terms of effectiveness.

THE RATING SYSTEM was attacked bitterly by Republican lawmakers in New Jersey, particularly Senate President Raymond H. Bateman, R-Somerset.

Herzberg sides with Bateman on this point. The political analyst said the study was based on "false reasoning."

Herzberg said the group's rating system was comparable to "evaluating a football player by quality of the stadium he plays in, the type of locker room facilities, the equipment he is given and the quality of the training table food."

He added, "I don't think New Jersey's Legislature is the laughing stock of the nation because of that report."

Hyland, on the other hand, was quick to point out that New Jersey ranked 32nd in the report and contended that this far only "patchwork efforts" have been made to improve the process.

Herzberg, who noted wryly that "I have no objection to electing Democrats to the Legislature," said he did not want his name or the Eagleton Institute associated with the conclusions of the national study group.

SERIOUS STUDENTS of legislative reform can find much to disagree about in the way of issues.

For example, the proposal for a unicameral or one-house legislature is receiving much attention these days from both Republicans and Democrats although the idea was brushed aside at the last state constitutional convention in 1966.

Former Assemblyman Robert N. Wilentz, a Middlesex County Democrat and one of the most ardent supporters of unicameralism, feels a one-house system would cure the Legislature's "fatal flaw."

He said, "members do not spend sufficient time on the job."

Herzberg is equally firm in his backing for the present two-house system and parttime lawmakers who only spend a couple days a week in Trenton.

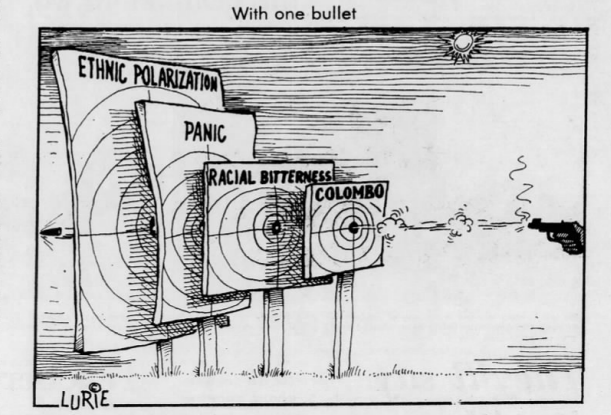
"My goal is for broader participation in the legislative process," he said, "I favor the idea of citizen participation in the Legislature rather than fulltime lawmakers. You can go too far in a quest for efficiency."

ALTHOUGH THIS AND OTHER troubling issues of legislative structure confront students of reform, there is the fear in some quarters that meaningful discussion could be lost in partisan politicking.

The disagreements can even extend to family lines.

Herzberg's brother, Richard, a former manager of the publications department of the Prudential Insurance Co., is a member of Hyland's committee which is calling for overhaul of the present structure.

Donald Herzberg says of his brother, "He does good work. But like all families, we can disagree and still be friends."



Letters from readers

Secrecy only one of the evils of war

The recent revealing of military secrets seems to surprise many people; but I am not surprised. Military secrets are a part of all wars, but should not be thought of as the only evil of war.

The entire concept of war lies together the worst traits of man. I ask God for guidance in my thoughts and I truly believe that war is the destruction of man. The love, peace and understanding that Jesus Christ taught is the only way to a better world.

War involves the evil and the darkness of man's mind. For men make war and yet they hide the thoughts even to themselves that they are capable of such cruelty as to kill a fellow human being.

Politicians and military leaders should understand what it is like to be under that bomb, in front of that gun, or held as a POW. I am not only concerned for the life of each individual fighting the war but also for the country that is fought in. Corruption and economic greed are apparent in all wars. All nations fight wars for some benefit. To take advantage of a smaller and less powerful nation develops deep hostilities and increases future chances of war.

Watching ROBERT E. FRIELAN

Military strength study urged

With the 196th birthday of our beloved United States close at hand should we not consider the condition of our country?

Gen. Earl G. Wheeler of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff says that the United States "hasn't a new fighter or a new bomber," but the Soviets have put at least three new fighters into the air. He says Russia also has a new bomber, has developed a new ABM system, built up their fleet of submarines, cruisers and nuclear capabilities, and mechanized their armed forces.

The American Security Council's Strategy Committee pointed out in its June, 1967, strategic balance report, prepared at the

request of the House Armed Services Committee, that the preponderance of evidence points to the conclusion that the Soviet Union is succeeding in its massive drive toward military superiority and that the United States is cooperating in this effort by slowing down its side of the arms race.

The U.S. News and World Report reported April 5 that U.S. superiority has ended and that "this country had better wake up unless it becomes a second-rate power."

"Yes, it is not time to wake up, study the situation and seek solutions,"

Julian Williams, research director for Christian Crusade of Tulsa, Okla., in a new publication says that "the United States is supposed to celebrate its 197th birthday in 1976, but will she 'Will America survive to celebrate its 200th anniversary in 1976'?"

So, Round Brook RONALD YORK

Another letter

Hillsborough zoning plan seen as 'dollar mockery'

A parcel of land in a middle income neighborhood of Hillsborough is being considered by the Township Committee for rezoning from an agricultural-residential area to a neighborhood business zone.

The majority of people in the vicinity don't seem to want it. Most of them purchased homes in that locality because they wanted to live in a rural environment. Because the township zoning ordinances indicated that their biggest lifetime investment — a home — was well protected, it was with shock and surprise that they learned that a developer was planning to

build a 30-store neighborhood shopping center, plus a large gas station, in their midst. This would probably drastically change the essential characteristics of their beloved rural surroundings.

The citizens protested at an open hearing on May 25, when the postponed hearing was resumed, a meeting room jammed with about 70 people was the scene of what appeared to be dollar mockery at work.

The protesters were completely without counsel. A lawyer who was to represent two of the protesters was on vacation. The backers of the neighborhood shopping center were represented by two lawyers, had two expert witnesses and one court stenographer to keep a record of testimony.

The "objective" experts tried to tell the spectators that what common sense, the township master plan, the U.S. census report, and their own knowledge of the township made obvious — that there was no need for a shopping center at the present time, and possibly not for decades — was a delusion.

The senior attorney also stated that there was no gas station in the shopping center when one appeared in a prominent place on the model of the proposed center, in clear view of the spectators. The junior attorney, associated with a local taxpayers group, when hired to represent the backers of the center, was apparently effectively blocked from giving the township board any evidence to support its position.

Of course the disgruntled citizens could hire an attorney or even their own experts. If they did so an individual basis it could cost much more than what they would lose if they just said "no" and stopped trying to fight city hall. The developer and/or his backers, if they win, hope to offset their legal expense through profits.

Who will replenish his bank account? On July 6, the hearing will be resumed. Even though one of the "experts" admitted that the township's advantageous position was already changed for business, the drama goes on. Democracy or dollar mockery?

Mr. and Mrs. EUGENE HART
Mr. and Mrs. J. M. MONTANARI

Flagnon

In Union County

Unicameralism still being eyed

By TEK TALMONT

ELIZABETH — The possibility of a unicameral legislature for New Jersey surfaced during the 1968 Constitutional Convention in a heated argument.

Sen. Matthew J. Rinaldo, Union Republican seeking re-election, has introduced a resolution to bring about a change from the present two-house Legislature of 40 senators and 40 assemblymen.

Rinaldo's proposal would utilize New Jersey's 15 Congressional districts as the basis for electing a 40-member state legislature — one from each of these subdivisions. He also would have the single house serve on a full-time basis.

Christopher Dietz, Rahway Democrat running for the state Senate this year and a delegate to the 1968 convention, sees the unicameral system as a possibility. But he feels that any restructuring of state government should be done at a convention, rather than

through a proposal emerging from either house of the existing Legislature.

The restructuring, he says, also needs to be more comprehensive. Among other things, Dietz feels provisions must be made to enable a single body to operate effectively, especially in two specific areas.

Dietz lists these as the Senate's "most precious" power of confirmation of gubernatorial nominations and the Assembly's control of appropriations.

Regarding the former, Dietz said a simple majority by a single house should be sufficient to confirm a nominee. He assumes the senatorial courtesy rule, which now allows a senator to block a nominee from his home county without stating any reason, would be eliminated.

Rinaldo says he's open to suggestions and would be willing to have the structure for a unicameral legislature drawn up at a state convention. Dietz said the 1968 convention was

limited in that its main purpose was to find a way to deal with the one-man, one-vote decision, which ended the tradition of having one senator from each county.

As far as Rinaldo is concerned, the time is ripe for a change. He thinks the large number of incumbents who will not seek re-election in November supports the argument that it would be difficult to cut a 136-member legislature to 40.

Another point made by Rinaldo is that the legislative districts established under the 1970 census have been ruled illegal, but will be allowed to be used for the November election.

The possibility exists, he said, that another election may have to be held next year in court-ordered revised districts.

A Democratic study team recently recommended changes in the existing Legislature. A panel led by former Governor Cahill is studying operation of the Legislature will be asked by the Union lawmaker to look into the unicameral idea.