

Three SPHS players earn All-Area girls hoops recognition. See Sports, page A-14

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ASARCO site debated tonight

Loud, lengthy discussion expected on proposed settlement

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THE REPORTER

Officials and residents should be prepared for a tumultuous public hearing at tonight's Borough Council meeting on the proposed settlement of the Krame Development Corp. lawsuit.

Although the council is sure to hear many angry, raised voices, it hopes residents will get a better understanding of where the lawsuit stands and what options are available to South Plainfield.

Bill Krame, president of the Paramus firm, is suing the borough over the old American Smelting and Refining Company (ASARCO) site on the corner of Park and Oak Tree avenues. The lawsuit alleges

the borough has not met its Mount Laurel affordable housing obligation.

Krame wants to build a shopping mall on the property, but area residents rallied last spring and were able to get the Planning Board to vote down the proposal. Opponents were concerned about an increase in road traffic and the potential for environmental pollution on the site.

Two weeks ago, those same complaints resurfaced when residents heard rumors the council was about to settle the suit.

Mayor Dan Gallagher said the suit had not been settled, but there was a proposal to do so.

In response to the residents' concerns, the council released the proposal to the public and scheduled tonight's public

hearing. Mayor Gallagher told the residents to take the proposal home, read it and return with questions.

Borough Planner Art Bernard and Planning Board representatives are expected to attend the meeting and answer residents' questions, Borough Attorney Patrick Diegnan said.

"I think there is the impression that since [the proposal] has been distributed, that the case has been settled and that is not the case," Mr. Diegnan said. "I think the mayor and council are genuinely interested in getting the residents' input."

People attending tonight's meeting should expect Mr. Bernard to explain three options: what would happen if South Plainfield were to lose the court case, what

would happen if the borough accepted the proposal and what could be done with the property should Krame lose or drop the lawsuit.

The proposed settlement calls for a zone change that would allow the developer to build the 180,000-square-foot shopping center, increase buffer zones, add a 9-acre open space lot which will not be developed, and contribute \$400,000 to the borough for construction of affordable housing in another part of South Plainfield.

The settlement would not create a low-income housing development on the site, which Krame has threatened to build.

Although many residents have expressed opposition to the proposal, one

Clark Lane resident who declined to be identified said Monday he thought it wasn't a bad idea.

"They've increased the buffer zones and I think the shopping center is better than the low-income housing," he said. "At least that doesn't impact the schools."

But other residents feel the increase in traffic to the area would be much worse than increasing the burden on the schools.

One resident during the meeting said another shopping center in Edison on Oak Tree Road, in addition to the development Krame wants to build, will cause bottlenecks and bumper-to-bumper traffic along Oak Tree Avenue.

Still another resident expressed concern about what the shopping center would do to property values.