

## Wanaque awaits COAH decision on \$300,000

### Court case pending on state seizure

By **HOLLY STEWART**  
STAFF WRITER

**WANAQUE** – The fate of more than \$300,000 in the borough's affordable-housing trust fund remains uncertain as state officials battle over the legality of Governor Christie's plan to seize an estimated \$164 million in such funds from municipalities.

The municipal accounts primarily comprise fees collected from developers, with the aim of promoting new construction or the rehabilitation of existing homes into housing for low- and moderate-income people.

Borough officials are prepared to comply by forwarding Wanaque's share of the funds, but a state appeals court panel issued a temporary injunction against the governor's action on May 13.

The New Jersey Council on Affordable Housing (COAH) on May 1 passed a resolution requiring municipalities to send proof of plans to spend money that had been dormant in their affordable-housing trust funds for four years beginning in July 2008. The municipalities were told to transfer remaining unspent money to COAH by May 22.

The Appellate Division of Superior Court issued an injunction sought by the Fair Share Housing Center. Judge Jose L. Fuentes, who signed the order, has set oral arguments beginning June 5 in Newark.

Borough Administrator Tom Carroll announced during the May 13 Borough Council meet-

ing that Wanaque was prepared to forward just over \$300,000 to COAH before the deadline.

Councilman Dom Cortellessa wanted to know how COAH's decision would affect construction of a housing project for the developmentally disabled on Warren Hagstrom Boulevard. Carroll said the plan to build a group home is not endangered – “We did it just at the right time,” he said.

Bergen County United Way and its partner, the Madeline Group, plan to build and operate the special-needs housing. Wanaque used \$320,000 from its affordable-housing trust fund to buy the property last year. Groundbreaking is expected this summer, according to Bergen United Way President Tom Toronto.

Carroll said the United Way now “is going through the regulation process” with the state Department of Environmental Protection.

With COAH, the state budget and the estimated \$164 million in housing trust funds hanging in the balance, local officials are not sure what will be expected of municipalities until resolution of the court case.

Answering council queries, Carroll said Wanaque's obligation to accommodate fair-housing units once stood at 129 units, “but it's all formula-based.” He said the borough had applied for Round 3 certification in meeting COAH requirements, but because the formula was still being contested by the Fair Share

Housing Center, nothing had come of it to date – “We've got plans sitting there that haven't been approved,” he said.

