



Judge rejects scrapping affordable housing law

Holmdel, Wall among two dozen suburban towns that filed lawsuit

Michael L. Diamond
Asbury Park Press | USA TODAY NETWORK – NEW JERSEY

TRENTON – A state judge has dismissed a lawsuit by more than two dozen suburban towns, including Holmdel and Wall, that were seeking to overturn New Jersey’s affordable housing law.

Mercer County Superior Court Judge Robert Lougy

said Sept. 30 that the towns filing the complaint lacked standing because the program was voluntary. He rejected the towns’ argument that they had little choice but to participate; otherwise they would open themselves to lawsuits from developers.

“The Legislature is permitted to establish carrots and sticks regarding municipal compliance,” Lougy wrote. “Such incentives and disincentives do not render the program involuntary.”

See HOUSING LAW, Page 2A

MARK J. AUSTIN TRIAL



Seated next to his attorney Oleg Nekritin, Mark J. Austin looks back to the gallery on Sept. 30, while summations continued in his trial before Superior Court Judge Guy P. Ryan at the Ocean County Courthouse in Toms River. PHOTOS BY THOMAS P. COSTELLO/ASBURY PARK PRESS

Battle of lies in Brick murder-for-hire case

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Asbury Park Press | USA TODAY NETWORK – NEW JERSEY

TOMS RIVER - It could be billed as the battle of the liars.

It pits a man who admitted beating a Brick man to death with a baseball bat against the victim’s son, who is accused of hiring him to commit the murder.

Now, a jury is tasked with discerning the truth about the 2019 killing of Mark R. Austin, after attorneys summed up their cases Sept. 30 at the trial of Mark J. Austin, the victim’s son.

“If he had a nickname on the streets of Salem, they would call him Jeray the liar,” defense attorney Robert De Groot said of Jeray Melton, the 34-year-old Salem man who testified for the state that the younger Austin hired him to kill his father.

In her summation, Mara Brater, assistant Ocean County prosecutor, reminded the jury the younger Austin told detectives what she said was an absurd story that his father sent him to pick up a random black man on the side of a road, take him to their house and leave him there alone to wait for the father to come home on the day of the murder.

Austin’s description of the random man matched Melton, whom Austin lived with in 2016, Brater told the jury.

See MURDER CASE, Page 2A



Ocean County Assistant Prosecutor Mara Brater delivers her summation in Mark J. Austin’s trial on Sept. 30.

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Employee charged in shooter hoax

Civilian accused of making false report at Joint Base MDL

Jim Walsh
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A civilian employee at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst made a false report of an active shooter that put the military compound in lockdown Sept. 30, authorities said.

Malika Brittingham, who works for the U.S. Navy, wanted to prompt a police response that she expected to create closer ties with her coworkers, according to an affidavit filed with a criminal complaint.

“Brittingham explained that she carried out this hoax because she had been ostracized by her coworkers and hoped that their shared experience in response to an active shooter would allow them to ‘trauma bond,’” the complaint said.

It said Brittingham started sending texts at approximately 10:45 a.m. that claimed an active shooter was on the base, that she had heard five or six gunshots and that she was hiding in a closet with coworkers.

The recipient of the texts, identified only as “Individual 1,” believed the messages and called 911 and the Base Defense Operations Center.

Base staff implemented their active-shooter protocol, advising employees to move to designated shelter-in-place locations, the affidavit said. Authorities then determined the active-shooter claim was untrue.

Investigators questioned Brittingham at approximately 11:45 a.m., when she initially denied contacting the individual before the shelter-in-place order.

See SHOOTER HOAX, Page 2A

Officers deliver a baby who couldn’t wait on side of the road

Dan Radel
Asbury Park Press | USA TODAY NETWORK – NEW JERSEY

MONMOUTH BEACH – Two borough patrol officers donned their obstetrician hats early Monday morning and delivered a baby boy on the side of the road, according to social media posts from the police department and first aid squad.

Officers Matthew Finnegan and Matthew Golembieski responded to Ocean Avenue on a report of a woman in active labor. According to the borough’s first aid squad, the expectant parents were in their car when the soon-to-be mother’s contractions were giving her “the strong urge to push,” the squad wrote on its social media.

Finnegan and Golembieski were first on the scene, and recognizing that delivery was imminent, provided immediate assistance and successfully delivered a healthy baby boy before emergency medical personnel arrived, according to police.

Following the delivery, the officers assisted both mother and newborn boy until the Monmouth Beach First Aid Squad arrived on scene. Both were safely transported to a nearby hospital for further evaluation

See BABY, Page 2A

