

Montclair Township Council mulls solutions to water deficit



Gary Obszarny

Will it be more prudent for Montclair to purchase additional water, lease additional water supplies or build a well? That is the question members of the Montclair Township Council were left with at the end of their conference meeting this past Monday.

Montclair, by state Department of Environmental Protection standards, has a "firm capacity" deficit of 857,000 gallons of water per day. Firm capacity refers to the amount of water needed to supply a municipality at maximum demand sans the municipality's largest pumping or treatment facility - in Montclair's case, Glenfield Well.

Montclair, which purchases 4.7 million gallons per day from North Jersey District Water out of the Wanaque North Reservoir, has mulled the possibility of buying or leasing an additional million gallons daily from the Wanaque South Reservoir.

Deciding to purchase the water would tie Montclair into an agreement with North Jersey District Water forever, according to municipal Water Bureau Director Gary Obszarny. At present rates, the purchase would run Montclair \$402,960 annually, a cost offset by recent increases in water rates. The purchase would also come with a nearly \$1 million one-time fee to buy in.

Leasing the water from North Jersey District Water would not come with a buy-in fee, but would cost 15 percent more for the water itself, or \$463,404 annually at current rates, Obszarny said. He cautioned that all rates are subject to decisions made by the North Jersey District Water Commission.

Montclair also has the option of leasing water from Kearny, which has a surplus, Obszarny said.

Over 25 years, Obszarny estimated, purchasing the water would cost Montclair \$11.4 million.

Leasing the water would cost over \$12 million, he calculated.

Constructing a well in Nishuane Park, even with estimates on the high side, would cost Montclair about \$5.8 million, Obszarny said. To move elements of the well operation to the existing Glenfield Park site would cost roughly an additional \$2 million, Obszarny said.

Obszarny said that it would take Montclair at least three years of seeking certification and construction before water would be able to be produced from the well. In the short term, to meet DEP regulations, water would need to be leased for at least a 10-year time frame. An early buyout could, potentially, be negotiated into such a lease agreement, Obszarny said.

Equating the decision to buying or leasing a home, Councilman-at-Large Rich McMahon said he liked the idea of buying the water rights as the township will, in the end, have something to show for its investment - owning a piece of the reservoir forever.

Mayor Robert Jackson asked how likely it would be for the well project to be turned down by the state. Obszarny indicated that it would be unlikely.

Jackson then expressed his preference toward purchasing the water, adding that the potential disruption to the lives of residents living around Nishuane Park must be factored into any decision. The mayor said he would not support a proposal to build a well solely in Nishuane Park..

Deputy Mayor Robert Russo, 4th Ward Councilwoman Renée Baskerville and 2nd Ward Councilwoman Robin Schlager all supported the idea of purchasing the water.

Township Attorney Ira Karasick said that purchasing the water does not preclude eventually constructing a well. By purchasing water, Montclair would also have the option of selling any surplus amounts to other municipalities, Karasick said.

Third Ward Councilman Sean Spiller said that leasing water for a short time and then constructing a well appealed to him, as it would spare the township from having to pay forever for the million-gallon-per-day allotment. Spiller said that total cost and the opportunity for Montclair to further diversify its water sources appealed to him and requested that Obszarny produce estimates for 10-year leases with North Jersey District Water and Kearny.

First Ward Councilman Bill Hurlock concurred with Spiller.

WATER RATES

Obszarny has proposed increased connection fee rates, which have not been increased since 2009.

Obszarny proposed 33 percent increases across the board, with single-family dwellings' rates increasing from \$1,500 to \$1,999.95. Multi-family dwellings including apartments and condominiums will have rates increased from \$950 to \$1,266.64. Low-income, nursing home, dormitory and motel and hotel will all increase in connection fees from \$500 per unit to \$666.65.

The Water Bureau director indicated that is likely he will round the fees up in some instances, for example charging single-family dwellings \$2,000 as opposed to \$1,999.95.

Montclair also transfers water through its system for Glen Ridge and the Passaic Valley Water Commission. Last year, Montclair pumped 317 million gallons for Glen Ridge and 13.9 million gallons for PVWC, for which the township

charged \$543 per million gallons. Obszarny proposed a 10 percent increase in rates for 2015 and increases of 2 percent and 3 percent in 2016 and 2017, respectively. PVC would be charged a little more than Glen Ridge as the water is pumped through Montclair's system twice as opposed to once for Glen Ridge.

If Montclair pumps the same amount of water as it did in 2013 in 2015, then the increase in rates will net the township an additional \$18,700, according to Obszarny.

Dangerous Crossing

During public comment, resident Gloria Barter, a longtime resident, requested that the township consider placing a traffic light, blinking lights or a four-way stop at the intersection of Walnut Street and North Fullerton Avenue.

Barter claimed that the 25 mile-per-hour speed limit for the intersection is rarely honored and that there have been a number of accidents, including one in which a bus crashed into her front yard.

Spiller told Barter that Township Engineer Kim Craft has already looked into the traffic of the intersection and that the Traffic and Parking Advisory Committee is also expected to examine it.

An ordinance placing a four-way stop at the intersection has already been introduced and is slated to be heard on second reading at the council's Nov. 17 meeting.

Getting it right the first time

On the council's Nov. 17 agenda is a resolution executing a professional services agreement with Smith Maran Architecture and Interiors LLC of Montclair for professional services in connection with redevelopment plans.

Ira Smith of the firm attended the meeting and explained that the firm has done similar work for Jersey City, Long Branch and Seaside Heights. Smith has previously served on the Montclair Historic Preservation Commission and assisted in the redesign of The MC hotel project.

Karasick said that, as is the case with all professional service contracts, the agreement will be for one year. The firm's fee will be paid by developers.

Finding a Place to Recycle

A resolution authorizing the execution of a recycling agreement with Atlantic Coast Fibers of Passaic for the sale and disposition of recyclable materials is scheduled for the Nov. 17 meeting.

Green Sky Industries, the previous purchaser of Montclair's recyclables, has gone out of business.

New CFO

Anthony Blasi has been appointed as the township's acting chief financial officer. Blasi has served as the municipality's comptroller, according to Acting Township Manager Timothy Stafford.

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