

Montclair Township Council prepares for the New Year

With New Year's Eve around the corner, many **Montclairites** spent Monday evening making sure New Year's celebrations would go off without a hitch.

Marc Dashield
Jeff Jacobsen

In the chambers of the **Montclair** Township Council, ducks were being lined in a row to make sure that the township was fully operational and the beginning of 2014 would go off without a hitch.

Council members spent most of Monday evening making appointments, moving funds around and getting the ball rolling on 2014 initiatives.

One of those initiatives was the much-discussed new police radio system, as the department's current system suffers from interference. Township Manager Marc Dashield said that the township will join the statewide system at the cost of roughly \$1 million.

As the township will not be able to do the bond ordinance necessary for such an appropriation until after the New Year, Dashield said, the municipal government has used \$130,000 in available funds to purchase Motorola and Tait handheld radios to get started.

By making the early purchase, Dashield told *The Times*, the township will be able to work out any kinks before completely adopting the new equipment and give officers the opportunity to work their new equipment as quickly as possible.

Dashield indicated that the remaining necessary equipment will be either Motorola or Tait, depending on the performance of the newly purchased handhelds.

Jeff Jacobsen of **Montclair's** Capital Finance Advisory Committee indicated that the committee, after examining a consultant's recommendation to the Township Council concerning police radios, mostly agreed with the consultant. Jacobsen said that Motorola was offering a discount if the purchase was made before the New Year. However, knowing that the township would be unable to have the necessary funds ready to go, he opined that the township should seek an extension to Motorola's offer.



From conversations with Police Chief David Sabagh, Jacobsen said that he found it odd that the municipal government would make a purchase of two different brands when it would be possible that one of the brands may ultimately be incompatible with the rest of the equipment that [Montclair](#) purchases.



Mayor Robert Jackson said that it would be inappropriate for a member of the public to discuss conversations with the police chief in public, opining that Jacobsen had the opportunity to address Dashield behind closed doors prior to public comment.

"With all due respect, I think the intermediary part of it is not necessary," Jackson said. "There's a police chief and a manager, both of whom speak English."

Dashield said that he was confident that both radios would be compatible with the new system and that money would not be wasted as both would continue to be used after the remaining equipment is purchased.

Snowy Days and Sick Days

The Township Council approved two resolutions transferring money to trust funds, one designated for accumulated absences of municipal employees and the other for snow removal.

A total of \$330,000 was transferred into the accumulated absence trust fund, according to Dashield. The trust fund is used to prepare for the financial burden of retiring employees receiving payouts for unused vacation time, sick days and other like paid absences.

Most new worker contracts limit the amount an employee is able to cash in on unused absences to roughly \$15,000, Dashield said during the meeting. Older employees' contracts, however, have been grandfathered in without a limit.

A sum of \$130,000 was added to the township's snow removal trust fund, which covers snow and ice removal. Dashield said that the township also uses surpluses from previous years' trust funds to aid in particularly cold, snowy winters.

Money to Start off With

To keep the municipal government running for the first several months of the New Year, prior to budget hearings, the council approved a resolution authorizing a temporary 2014 budget.

The budget, Dashield told *The Times*, represents 26.25 percent of last year's budget nearly across the board with \$15 million for the general operating budget, \$1.3 million for water, \$1.1 million for sewerage and \$500,000 for the parking utility.

While, generally, this year's temporary budget is 26.25 percent of last year's budget across departments, Dashield said that some tinkering was done to fund calendar-specific expenditures such as snow and ice removal and contracts at the appropriate time early in the year.

Appointments

The Township Council approved several resolutions renewing appointments and services agreements.

Township Attorney Ira Karasick was reappointed for another one-year term ending Dec. 31, 2014. Karasick said that, despite his reappointment, he could still be terminated mid-year should the Township Council no longer wish to have him represent the municipality.

Peter Russo, who is not related to Deputy Mayor Robert Russo, was appointed to the position of [Montclair](#) Public Defender.

Joseph Angelo was appointed as municipal prosecutor.

The Township Council authorized a professional services agreement with Norwell Amoroso Klein Bierman, P.A., for another year as [Montclair's](#) tax counsel.

Genova Burns & Giantomasi will serve another year as the township's labor and employment counsel. According to Karasick, the firm may also step in when he is unable to handle a case due to a conflict of interest.

Additionally, Robert Russo was appointed as the council representative to the Second River Joint Meeting.

Second Ward Councilwoman Robin Schlager will serve as the council's representative to the Third River Joint Meeting.

Preparing for more snow

With an already snowy winter, and more flurries in the weekend forecast, the township has already used the 300 tons of rock salt provided by [Essex County](#).

[Montclair](#) was expected to receive a shipment of ice from a vendor on New Year's Eve.

As reported, 3rd Ward Councilman Sean Spiller has been advocated for more salt from the county as, per the township's agreement with the county, municipal workers collect leaves and the county provides salt.

As the cost of labor has gone up and the cost of salt has gone down, the councilman has argued that the township's yield should be greater.

The yield has not increased, Dashfield said. However, the county has provided [Montclair](#) with additional salt in emergencies in the event of unforeseen weather or should vendor shipments not arrive on time.

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