

Montclair municipal tax levy set to remain flat, work left to do

Staff
Photo
By
Andrew
Segedin

Mayor
Robert



Jackson reads a proclamation honoring HackensackUMC Mountainside Hospital nurses.

Council Roundup

Nearly two months after first projecting a flat municipal tax levy and after a month of departmental budget hearings, Montclair Township Manager Marc Dashield said the township should deliver on its goal.

A public hearing on the 2014 municipal budget was held during Tuesday's Township Council meeting with no member of the public stepping forward to comment.

The budget now heads to the township's Finance Committee for review on Wednesday, May 14, according to Dashield, where potential amendments such as increased Code Enforcement Office staffers and a state pension plan reduction can be factored in. Comments that the township received from the state on its budget will also be included.

A final presentation of the municipal budget will be presented during the Township Council meeting on Tuesday, May 20, according to Dashield, with a second hearing on the amendments scheduled for June 10.

Adding volume

While the strength and detail of an ordinance cannot be based on pure volume, according to Township Attorney Ira Karasick, the difference between Montclair's ordinance on street restoration following excavations and those of neighboring municipalities is telling. Montclair's regulation is two and a half pages long. Municipalities such as Livingston have ordinances between 13 and 17 pages long, noted Karasick.

"Ours is virtually not there," Karasick said.

Looking at the language other municipalities have used to protect roadways from being dug up by utilities and private companies and not being properly restored, Karasick made preliminary recommendations for amending Montclair's current ordinance. For one, Montclair does not currently have any specifications for the quality of restoration it expects after excavation, Karasick said.

Some neighboring municipalities also have language that bases permit fees on the age of the street. For instance, making it more expensive to dig up a 3-year-old roadway than an 8-year-old roadway. Similarly, in some neighboring municipalities' regulations, roads that are 2 years old or less that are excavated require complete milling and repaving, Karasick said.

Charging inspection fees and requiring that the excavator notify neighboring residents in advance are other potential requirements that Karasick recommended the township emulate from nearby municipalities.

Third Ward Councilman Sean Spiller, who recently voiced his concerns about roadways being torn up and shoddily mended, requested that Karasick be as aggressive as possible in the drafting of the ordinance.

Montclair struggles in terms of manpower in inspecting the restoration of the roads, often not making it over until the road is already sealed, according to Dashield.

Mayor Robert Jackson suggested that the township hire a private firm to do the inspections and include the firm's fee in the permit costs, ensuring that a professional is onsite.

Karasick indicated that much of the ordinance itself is more engineering-focused rather than legal. Montclair's Engineering Department will add its own expertise. For his part, Karasick said that he will look to use Livingston's ordinance as a template and customize it to fit Montclair's needs.

Splitting green with savings

The Montclair Environmental Commission made its recommendation to the Township Council for the municipality to seek savings for residents and an increased renewable energy component as it explores community energy aggregation.

As reported in *The Times*, Montclair's municipal energy is purchased in bulk with an above-average green energy component in coordination with some other municipalities in Essex and Hudson counties. Municipalities in New Jersey are permitted to similarly purchase energy in bulk for residents and businesses, with individual ratepayers having the opportunity to opt out should they choose.

While there's been a debate as to whether Montclair should seek optimal financial savings, optimal green energy component or a combination thereof, MEC Co-Chair Lyle Landon said that the commission is recommending the latter.

Should the council move forward with the recommendation, the township would seek requests for proposals from energy consultants who can help set more precise financial and renewable energy goals and lead the way toward securing a vendor. The consultant's fee, Landon said, would be paid for by the chosen vendor as part of the agreement.

There is the potential that Montclair rate-payers may see additional savings should the township team with

other municipalities in the endeavor. Maplewood and Millburn have shown interest thus far.

Fair Fare

MakeReady Press owner Maureen Reddy O'Brien and Suzanne O'Connor, owner of the Art Garage, came before the Township Council during public comment to, first, talk about the success they and their neighbors enjoyed while throwing Saturday's Glenridge Avenue street fair.

If the street fair had a sour note, according to O'Brien, then it was finding out at the last minute that \$625 in additional permits was required days before the event. Given that organizers had already forked over \$1,200 on police, nearly \$1,000 on advertising and \$500 on decorations, the unanticipated cost was a blow, said O'Brien, noting that organizers hope the Township Council could retroactively waive the fee.

Township Clerk Linda Wanat indicated that, as it was the organizers' second fair, there was an expectation that they would understand all the permits required. O'Brien indicated that the municipal website is unclear as to what is required.

Wanat and members of the Montclair Police Department, Montclair Fire Department, Community Services Department and other officials are slated to meet this week to discuss permitting. One idea that the group may cover is a "special events permit" that would consolidate under one umbrella permit all the needed permitting for events such as street fairs.

Jackson opined that a low, flat-fee permit would be easier for event organizers to utilize rather than dissuade people from putting on community events. The mayor made a recommendation that the parties involved in the meeting also make a recommendation on how to move forward with whether the Glenridge Avenue organizers should receive a waiver.

Patchwork

The Township Council approved a resolution authorizing an agreement with Billy Contracting & Restoration Inc. for roof repair of Clary Anderson Arena. The agreement is not to exceed \$99,900.

Township Manger Marc Dashield told The Times that the repairs will be a temporary measure to cut down on roof leaks by placing a rubber coating on the roof.

Contract agreed upon

The Township Council approved a resolution authorizing the execution of a memorandum agreement with the Firemen's Mutual Benevolent Association regarding the Fire Department's labor contracts. The three-year contract, according to Dashield features salary increases of 2 percent, 2 percent and 1.5 percent.

Penta-proclamations

The Township Council read five proclamations to open Tuesday's meeting. The proclamations included honoring HackensackUMC Mountainside nurses for National Nurses Week; recognizing the Inclusion Works Foundation, an organization that works for equality in access to inclusive education, in advance of its event at Kidville on Saturday; declaring Fibromyalgia Awareness Day for May 12, proclaiming Food Allergy Awareness Week beginning on May 11 and honoring the Renaissance School Robotics Team, The Clankers, for its top finish in state competition.

Contact Andrew Segedin at segedin@northjersey.com