

## Talk of affordable, specialized housing dominates Montclair meeting

Council roundup

STAFF PHOTO BY ADAM ANIK

Irving Street resident Patti Grunther shares her thoughts with the Township Council during Tuesday's conference meeting.

A sizable portion of Irving Street crammed itself into the second floor municipal conference room Tuesday evening as residents took their concerns to the Township Council.

As reported in the Jan. 2 issue of *The Times*, some residents of Irving Street are concerned over the potential sale of 45 Irving St. to Care Plus, a mental health service company. The property would reportedly house five young women transitioning out of foster care.



Residents have noted that a transitional facility already exists at 21 Irving St. and that the 4th Ward holds the vast majority of [Montclair's](#) affordable and specialized housing.

While several members of the community attended the council's Dec. 30 meeting, considerably more turned up on Tuesday. Irving Street resident Patti Grunther, in addressing council members, reported that the issue has garnered a groundswell of support in the neighborhood. Grunther and others are in the process of distributing petitions calling for the Township Council to draft an ordinance limiting the number of specialized housing units a set area can hold.

Grunther described the matter as a social issue, one that - should the Township Council not address now - will reappear in the months and years ahead.

Michael Shelley indicated that there is a peculiar, unquantifiable feel that the 4th Ward is somehow different than or inferior to other wards. Jordon Shelley said that a township ordinance would go a long way to easing residents' concerns every time a "for sale" sign goes up in the neighborhood.

Resident Christine Kelly said she did not want her fellow residents to objectify the purpose of the facility, stereotype potential residents, or make the matter a NIMBY [Not In My Back Yard] issue. Fellow resident Audrey Hawley was adamant that the concern on Irving Street is not a NIMBY issue, but rather a declaration that the 4th Ward has already been accountable for much of [Montclair's](#) affordable and specialized housing and that the time has come for the other three wards to contain these residences.

Just recently, a home on Valley Place in the 1st Ward sold for a relatively modest price, according to Hawley.

Sarah Avery told the council that her home is located between the facility on 21 Irving St. and the potential transitional home at 45 Irving St. Avery said that, as an accountant, she looked at Care Plus's most recent tax returns to find that the company made \$28 million in revenue in 2012, \$18 million of which was attributed to government contracts.

The company also disclosed \$1 million in over expenses, Avery said, and does not cite foster care or post-foster transition as one of its services on its website. With 10 facilities already in New Jersey, Avery questioned whether the company was looking to expand its operations further with post-foster transitions by acquiring 45 Irving Street.

William Scott of the Housing Commission provided council members with copies of a December 2011 resolution approved by their predecessors that focused on distributing affordable and support-service housing in all four wards. Scott requested that the council members draft an ordinance making this a requisite.

Fourth Ward Councilwoman Renée Baskerville told residents that state laws are in transition, but that specialized housing's impact on neighborhoods has become a criteria. Though unable to immediately respond to the many emails she has received regarding 45 Irving St., Baskerville said that she, Township Manager Marc Dashield, Township Planner Janice Talley and others are working on the issue.

One objective will be to identify residential properties throughout [Montclair](#) that are reasonable enough to support affordable or specialized housing, Baskerville said.

Agreeing with Scott, the councilwoman said that the "feel-good moment" of the 2011 resolution ought to be given the "teeth" of an ordinance.

### **Speaking of Affordable Housing...**

During Tuesday's meeting, representatives of HOME Corp came to update the council on their proposed six-unit affordable housing project at 127 Valley Road, with an entrance at the intersection of Talbot and Dey streets.

Executive Director Beverly Riddick informed the Township Council that the Planning Board approved HOME Corp's plans for the project and the non-profit must now raise funds to the tune of \$2 million.

Riddick reported that HOME Corp has already secured \$413,000 from the state and is seeking \$225,000 from the township's affordable housing trust fund for additional assistance.

The six units, according to Riddick, will be distributed through three structures with \$1.5 million for "stick and bricks" serving as the primary expenditure. Conservatively, \$200,000 of the \$1.5 million is earmarked toward infrastructure such as landscaping.

Mayor Robert Jackson said that, even if infrastructure costs are at \$300,000, \$200 per square foot for a 6,000-square-foot facility is roughly double the going rate. Jackson recommended that HOME Corp look for contractors with better rates.

Third Ward Councilman Sean Spiller asked why HOME Corp doesn't simply purchase six existing structures for the \$2 million.

Riddick said that most HOME Corp properties were purchased as preexisting structures and that HOME Corp is seeking a balance between old and new facilities.

Dashield estimated that the township's affordable housing trust fund currently contains \$300,000, should the Township Council decide to assist with the project.

## **Lower Health Costs**

Dashield updated the Township Council on the healthcare costs of municipal employees.

Last year was [Montclair](#)'s first year not participating in the state health plan and, instead, contracted with Horizon Blue Cross Blue Shield, noted Dashield, who added that the township realized savings of roughly 10 percent to receive similar healthcare.

This year, after negotiation, the municipal healthcare rates will not increase, but instead technically drop by .26 percent compared to last year, Dashield said. The change stems from a 1.25 percent decrease in healthcare costs and a 21.85 increase in the prescription costs for police and fire personnel, which are included in the municipal plan.

Dashield attributed the steep increase in prescriptions to an error made by Horizon last year that the company seeks to fix this year.

Prescription coverage for [Montclair](#)'s other employees will increase by 3 percent up to \$600,000, after some negotiation with another vendor, Bollinger, according to Dashield.

[Montclair](#) is set to spend \$5.7 million on healthcare costs for employees in 2014, Dashield said. That number would have been \$7 million if the township had remained on the state plan, he said. Overall, \$2.1 million will have been saved between 2013 and 2014 with the switch, according to Dashield.

## **Manning the Crescent Deck**

In previewing items for the council's Jan. 21 meeting, Dashield highlighted a resolution proposing the authorization of a contract with Propark for managing the Crescent Deck. Formerly hired by the [Montclair](#) Parking Authority, Propark is looking to stay on with the township in maintaining the deck, collecting revenue, and providing 24-hour staffing.

The one-year contract would be \$284,480, plus operating costs. While the deck brings in revenue of \$750,000, its operations barely break even, due to its debt service.

Jackson added that, in paying off debt service, the township is essentially paying itself.

Dashield said that [Montclair](#) will look to Propark for assistance with the North Fullerton Parking Deck by way of operating security cameras and an intercom system at North Fullerton from the Crescent Deck location.

## **Crossing hazard at MKA**

Following a study, it has been determined that a streetlight is needed for [Bloomfield](#) Avenue at Lloyd Road.

The intersection was initially cited as a potential hazard by the [Montclair](#) Kimberley Academy. Even though [Bloomfield](#) Avenue is an [Essex County](#) roadway, Dashield said that [Montclair](#) will be expected to shoulder one-third of the light's \$250,000 price tag.

As the school is a private entity, it will be requested to contribute as well, Dashield said.

In the interim, a new crosswalk will be added on the Parkhurst Place side of the road and left-hand turns will be prohibited onto Lloyd Road between 7 and 9 a.m. and 2 and 4 p.m., as recommended by Township Engineer Kim Craft.

## **Appropriating Funds**

During the council's Jan. 21 meeting, a capitol ordinance appropriating funds for a new senior bus, rebuilding snow plows, refurbishing garbage packers, purchasing pistols for the [Montclair](#) Police Department and telecommunication equipment for the Municipal Court will be heard on second reading.

Dashield reported that the township is in the process of looking for alternatives to purchasing a senior bus, perhaps contracting the work out.

Deputy Mayor Robert Russo asked whether [Essex County](#) could loan the township a bus and, if a new bus is needed, how long it would take to purchase.

The township manager said that [Essex County](#) is not able to loan a bus and that, should the township purchase a bus, it would take at least 90 days following the approval of the ordinance.

As a short-term fallback, [Glen Ridge](#) has offered use of its bus, Dashield said.

With the purchasing of pistols, at Jackson's request, a resolution showing the township's expectation and support of firearm manufactures valuing gun safety will also be on the agenda. Jersey City officials recently voted on and approved a similar resolution.

## **Bright Lights**

Jackson reported that, during a meeting of the League of Municipalities, he met with a representative from PSE&G and learned that the utility company is looking to replace roughly 800 streetlights in the township from incandescent to sodium - which is brighter and cheaper.

While not a fan of the yellow hue of sodium fixtures, Jackson said that the discussion does spur the need for the Township Council to discuss what it expects with new lighting fixtures.

Spiller requested that the [Montclair](#) Center BID be included in any such discussions. Similarly, 1st Ward Councilman Bill Hurlock asked that the Upper [Montclair](#) Business Association receive the same courtesy.

## **Winkler honored**

The Township Council took a few moments early in Tuesday's meeting to acknowledge and make a proclamation in memory of Nancy Winkler.

Winkler died in November after decades at the center of political and social activism in [Montclair](#).

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