



Back in 2011, by October we knew that [Harvey Susswein was planning to run in 2012](#), and that he had set his sights on the mayoral seat. His website reveal may have been premature but Susswein had been planning to announce officially after Thanksgiving. November was also the time when former mayor and current Deputy Mayor Robert Russo [ended speculation about a running again for mayor](#), but also declared himself as interested and available for another position. “No one gets re-elected mayor in Montclair,” Russo said [in a speech to supporters in November 2011 at Tierney’s](#).

Flash forward to this year, late December, and there have been no announcements, but there is a new “slate” — the “Maybe Montclair” candidates. The silence so far has resulted in many questions about 2016, with the biggest one of all being whether or not Montclair’s current mayor, Robert Jackson, will try and do what hasn’t been done in recent memory — to become more than a one-term Montclair mayor by winning re-election.

When asked the question, Jackson says he still does not know whether he will run or not.

“In terms of the local election, there’s a long way to go and I haven’t fully thought it through with my family and friends,” says Jackson, adding, “I am extremely proud of the record of this Council and gratified by the outpouring of support for me and, in fact, the team to keep it going. I know that we’ve worked really hard and ‘teed it up’ nicely for the next Council in any event.”

Is there a long way to go? Not really. According to Linda Wanat, Montclair’s municipal clerk, no potential candidate has asked for information yet, but all interested candidates will be able to pick up packets the beginning of January. All candidate petitions must be submitted by March 7, 2016. The date of the election is May 10.

THE JACKSON FACTOR

If Jackson decides not to run, expect the political landscape to change significantly. Candidates are clearly waiting to see what he will do. The longer Jackson waits to decide, any potential candidates, as well as his [four 2012 slate mates](#) and current council members, may have to decide to run without knowing his status or risk losing momentum.

In terms of the incumbents, most (below) are clearly indicating they will run again, but whether they stay together as a slate, whether one or more run for Mayor (possibly against each other) if Jackson doesn't and whether you see moves from ward to at-large candidates remains to be seen.

Baristanet reached out to both incumbents and possible new candidates. Here's what they said:

INCUMBENTS

Bill Hurlock, First Ward Councilor: "Yes, I am seriously considering another run. It has been an honor and a privilege to serve the residents of Montclair's First Ward. I am truly humbled by the outpouring of support and interest I have received to run for a second term."

Robin Schlager Second Ward Councilor: "Yes, I enjoy serving on the town council, I would like to continue. I will be considering my options and will decide in the new year."

Rich McMahon, Councilor-At-Large: "I've enjoyed my tenure on the council. The future is still under consideration."

Sean Spiller, 3rd Ward Councilor: "At this time, while extremely pleased with what we have accomplished thus far, I remain focused on even further reducing our township debt and supporting our many wonderful programs. With the budget process in its early stages, continuing support of Community Policing program, the public library, early education, street and infrastructure improvements are a priority.

Of course, I am sure that in the near future there will be plenty of conversations and specific answers to your questions will be determined."

Bob Russo, Deputy Mayor: "I'm still exploring the 2017 race for Governor but so many have asked me to reconsider and stay on the town council to finish the good work we have been doing. I love serving the residents of Montclair and will make a decision on seeking another term in the near future." Russo previously served as mayor of Montclair from 2000 to 2004.

Dr. Renee Baskerville, 4th Ward Councilor: ??? *(still waiting to hear, but if we were wagering, it's a safe bet that [Baskerville](#) will run again.)*

AN EARLY CANDIDATE

"At this time, I am exploring running for office, but I am not certain for which position. I will make a final decision in January." – **Selma Avdicevic**, who ran last election as an [independent candidate for the 2nd Ward seat](#).

PEOPLE TO WATCH

"I am considering it, but haven't made any final decisions. Right now, I am more focused on the Civil Rights Commission (CRC) and Library Board." — **Joe Kavesh**, Trustee of the Montclair Public Library, Chair of the CRC. Kavesh entertained a run in 2012, but withdrew from the race in [March of that year](#).

"I am proud resident of Montclair, but as long as I am serving as chief counsel to the attorney general, the attorney general ethical guidelines preclude me from holding any other office." — **Jeff Jacobson**, who was a candidate for the 3rd Ward councilor seat in 2012. Jacobson was later appointed to the Capital Finance Committee, where he served as chairman.

"I'm always interested in ways to give back to the township. I haven't made any decisions on the 2016 race yet. But will let you know." — **Rich Murnick**, previous [First Ward Councilor](#) (2008-2012) who made an unsuccessful bid for re-election in 2012.

"I have a lot more work to do on the Planning Board as [the Mayor's representative](#) to continue to help him turn around our land use policies. I would assume that when he and the current Council finally make a decision about the next election, it will be very apparent if there's any need, or opportunity for additional service. If so, I'll look over the landscape then as many will who are involved in local politics. But right now, I'm focused really on all the redevelopment plans coming up. The challenge remains to try to balance improved rates, while still preserving our unique character and special quality of life." — **Martin Schwartz**, a [local business owner](#), who in addition to serving on the Planning Board as Jackson's representative had previously served as a representative of the Environmental Commission on the Planning Board. Schwartz had plenty to say in 2012 about [the last election](#).

"I plan on being involved in some capacity but probably not as a candidate." — **Peter Zorich**, who ran for At-Large Council seat in 2012.

NO PLANS TO RUN...OR NO RESPONSE

Shelly Lombard: [Former Montclair BOE member](#) and president, and now, one of the voices associated with [Montclair Kids First](#), did not answer when asked what her intentions were for 2016 Montclair elections.

Jonathan Simon: Montclair [Achievement Gap Advisory Panel](#) chair says "I have no plans to run for any public office."

Cary Africk: The former 2nd ward councilor who served with Mayor Jerry Fried from 2008 to 2012 says he has "No plans to run."

Linda Bowers: She served as Montclair School Action Team chair and has worked hard on the Fun Run, Joe Walsh concert and other school events, but when we asked Bowers she said "Thanks for the nice compliment, but no Town Council for me!"

Jason DeSalvo: "I am flattered, but I have no intentions of running. I love my work on the Planning Board and am strongly supportive of the work our current council is doing and my hope is that they will run together as a slate."

Sefu Fuller: Fuller, who has been involved in Montclair Housing Commission and NAACP, picked up a packet and [talked about a mayoral run in 2012](#), but hasn't indicated plans for this election.

Leann Carlson, who ran with Real Progress in 2012, says she has no plans to run. Leslie Larson is a no. Walter Springer says he is undecided. What about Tim Barr or even Ed Remsen? Insiders believe that if Jackson does not run, you may see the field of candidates widen, much like the long list of 2016 Republican presidential candidates.

[Henry DeKoninck](#), who was enlisted in 2012 by Montclair 2012 and won both recognition of Stanley F. Reed Award for his performance on the campaign, says he hasn't been engaged by any candidate for the 2016 municipal cycle. "Seems quiet so far. I would expect the field of candidates to develop in the next 4 to 6 weeks," says DeKoninck.

What's your prediction? When will the first slate be announced? Will Jackson try for a second term? Will we see musical chairs in terms of slates and an increase in independent candidates? And will issues surrounding education or smarter development emerge as major platforms?