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Montclair Chief Financial Officer Padmaja Rao delivers news on the reduced debt at the November 24 Montclair Township Council meeting while resident Sandy Sorkin (left) takes notes.

The Montclair Township Council held a brief conference meeting on November 24 at which it hosted the township's chief financial officer, Padmaja Rao, who presented favorable news about Montclair's finances.

Finances

Rao began by saying that, since the end of 2011, the township had reduced its debt from \$223 million then to \$183 million in November 2015, which caused Mayor Robert Jackson and the councilors to break out in applause. Rao also reported that the township was able pay down \$11.5 million through the budget in the process. Mayor Jackson said that the 22 percent reduction in the debt was significant because it allowed Montclair to dedicate less money to the debt while paying it down, providing some financial momentum. Rao also said that 59 percent of general obligations bonds would come due in five years, the remainder coming due in ten years, which she was favorable toward debt reduction.

In public comment, resident Sandy Sorkin agreed that Rao's news was wonderful, but he had an issue with the fact that her report had not been posted on the township's website. Rao had given hard copies of a slide presentation to the council, and Sorkin said that the public ought to be privy to the information that the council had only just received. Sorkin added that this was an example of "secret reports" with details that the public couldn't see.

"I think that you should have the same complaint that I have, that this should have been available before the meeting,

so you wouldn't have to sit here and read it to ask your questions," Sorkin told the council. He commended the \$40 million debt reduction but asked how much of it was canceling unissued bonds that were authorized. Mayor Jackson said that the amount of issued debt went down by about \$204 million to \$164 million, so it's the same spread as the drop in debt that was issued.

"I've heard this in the past," the mayor said, "where people have said, 'You're not really reducing outstanding debt, you're just canceling other debt, and that is absolutely not the case.'"

Senior Activities & Resources

Resident Adriana O'Toole also spoke in public comment, lamenting the lack of a senior citizens' center and the diffuse nature of senior activities, which are scattered about town. O'Toole said it was shameful that so many other municipalities have senior citizens' centers, all fully staffed, while Montclair does not, and she said the senior-bus service was inadequate, providing a scattered schedule and insufficient information about where in town it goes. Mayor Jackson said he resented the idea that Montclair was not senior-friendly, insisting that his council had strived to get a new senior bus and provided senior activities at the library and adding that council members regularly attended meetings of the Senior Citizens Advisory Committee to establish a rapport with seniors.

Deputy Mayor Robert Russo, as a senior citizen himself, stressed that the council was trying to get a seniors' center established, and O'Toole responded that she was not blaming the council in particular, but she noted that the town has a history of giving older residents short shrift. Fourth Ward Councilor Renée Baskerville said she was "excited" about the increased efforts to remedy that situation.

Montclair Fire Department



Montclair Fire Chief John Herrmann at the November 24 Montclair Township Council meeting

Fire Chief John Herrmann addressed one of the six resolutions up for a vote that evening (no ordinances were voted on) authorizing the purchase of a new Pierce-Arrow ladder truck for the fire department. Chief Herrmann said that the existing ladder truck was twenty years old and the fire department had pretty much all possible use out of it. Third Ward Councilor Sean Spiller noted the "significant savings" the chief had achieved in proposing to buy the truck through the Houston-Galveston Area Council Cooperative Lease Purchase Program, and Chief Herrmann pointed to a \$79,000 savings through a lower interest rate than the available bond rate along with a discounted pre-payment of the

chassis. Chief Herrmann added that he was aiming to replace fire apparatuses at a fifteen-year cycle, with an apparatus replaced every three years with some of them going into reserve status.

Second Ward Councilor Robin Schlager asked when the new ladder truck would be delivered and also asked about the fate of the old truck. Chief Herrmann explained that it would likely be auctioned through used-apparatus vendors, and that the new truck would take about a year to build; he also responded to Dr. Baskerville's question about the ladder's reach, saying that, at 105 feet, it should reach eight stories. Deputy Mayor Russo expressed concern about the truck possibly having problems, and he wanted to know what the warranty was for a Pierce-Arrow truck. The chief said that different components were covered by different warranties and that he has never had problems with Pierce-Arrow vehicles. He told the deputy mayor that he could get him particulars on the warranties involved.

"Just remember," Deputy Mayor Russo said, "if it doesn't work, you can go to the lemon law," noting that the law protecting consumers from purchases of failed vehicles also extends to purchases of municipal vehicles. The resolution passed, 7-0, as did a resolution awarding a contract for the purchase of new fire hydrants through HD Supply Waterworks in Edison.

Construction of the MC Hotel

Also, the council addressed the question of a possible closing of Orange Road between Bloomfield and Hillside Avenues to accommodate construction of the MC Hotel. Township Attorney Ira Karasick said that the street would close "only on infrequent occasions" in a 12-18-month period, with a single lane open in one direction most of the time. The start of the construction period hasn't been determined, but Karasick said it depends on the council approving a series of agreements he was planning to discuss with the mayor and councilors. Councilor Spiller praised Karasick for working with the hotel developers to ensure that the entire portion of Orange Road isn't closed, and Karasick was also addressing the parking issues for the residents along that stretch of Orange Road.