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The Montclair Township Council, minus Councilor-at-Large Rich McMahon

The first meeting of the Montclair Township Council in three weeks was a conference meeting in which five second-reading ordinances and five resolutions were passed, a first-reading ordinance was moved ahead, and department directors made presentations on issues concerning them. The September 29 meeting covered numerous issues and topics over the course of three hours and change.

Lackawanna Plaza Supermarket

The fate of the Lackawanna Plaza area, particularly the Pathmark supermarket, was on the minds of some residents in public comment. Robin Woods was afraid that several of Pathmark's customers could be left without an option for grocery shopping and that the employees would be left without jobs, further hurting the local economy. She found the atmosphere at the Lackawanna Station shopping center spooky, with most of the businesses gone and with Dunkin Donuts about to be forced out.

"You can live without Dunkin Donuts," Mrs. Woods admitted.

"I can't," Mayor Robert Jackson said to laughter.

In seriousness, Mayor Jackson said that while Pathmark may close on November 21 as Mrs. Woods said, there's no definite plan to stay with that date. He added that Hampshire, the shopping center's owner, bought the lease, allowing the council to control what goes in there. He hopes that Montclair can get a better grocery store at the site,

saying that Pathmark didn't live up to expectations. Fourth Ward Councilor Renée Baskerville noted that Ira Smith had emphasized the inclusion of a grocery store at the site, and the council plans to look at setting up a shuttle system in the near future to bring local residents to other grocery stores in adjacent towns until there is a new store at the site. Pine Street resident Elizabeth Milner suggested that the empty space could hold a market for local craftspeople in the interim.

Leaf Blowers

Robert Middleton of Highland Avenue spoke with the understanding that the leaf-blower restrictions may be loosened, and he objected to the possibility, asking that the council stress the rules to contractors and enforce them. Several other residents also made their objections to loosening the rules clear, with Pat Kenschaft saying that their gasoline engines contributed to climate change and that they were a public nuisance with their noise, which she noted awakened overnight workers during mornings when they were trying to get some sleep. Her husband, Fred Chichester, opposed them for health reasons, saying they kicked up dust and dirt that aggravated his allergies.

Parking

Also, Orange Road Sheila Boyd, who lives near the Valley & Bloom project, complained that she was unable to park on her street due to all the construction vehicles parked there and could not get a variance to park on her rental property, in part because she is a tenant. Mayor Jackson said that he couldn't help her with the variance but said that the township could try to get the trucks to park elsewhere.

Township Attorney Ira Karasick said that there was no program to designate residential public parking and pointed out that the planned hotel across the street from Boyd's home would only make the parking situation worse in the short term. "After the construction is over, we'll look for permanent solutions," he said, "but until then, that street's going to be narrowed by the work." He added that working something out with LCOR, the developer, to reserve spaces in the deck was a possibility.

Fire Department

Various department heads presented progress reports and also projects they were pursuing, in part with an eye on the 2016 municipal budget. Fire Chief John Herrmann said that the fire department was looking at acquiring new equipment such as a ladder truck and fire engine and discussing the particulars with Acting Township Manager Tim Stafford, and he also said that he is looking at getting a maximum of 91 staffers, with 21 firefighters per group and four firemen on each apparatus, which he said would be advantageous. Herrmann said he would like to restore a training officer to train firefighters to respond to more varied situations, and he added that getting equipment grants has been easier than getting grants for extra staff.

Herrmann also expressed an interest in getting two code enforcement officers. Tying in the leaf-blower issue, First Ward Councilor William Hurlock asked about code enforcement officers possibly going after such violations on weekends. Stafford said that work schedules for code enforcement officers could be staggered.

Building Permits

Planning Director Janice Talley addressed the council on building permit turnaround. She said she tries to keep the staffing level up in the building office, and that extra inspectors need to be available when there are a great deal of



Montclair Fire Chief John Herrmann

applications and permits to handle. But turnover has been a problem; when someone leaves, it could lead to delays. In the Planning Department, there have been delays because of efforts to fill the gap because of a part-time zoning officer who was working only six hours a week. (Another part-time zoning officer has alleviated the backlog.) Third Ward Councilor Sean Spiller said that residents have come to him complaining that they don't know what's needed for a permit and have to provide additional information, and he said that the process should be streamlined. Mayor Jackson suggested that the department could bring in more revenue by charging a premium for permits that need to be expedited.

Other Issues

Director of Community Services Steve Wood and Township Engineer Kim Craft had a cornucopia of their own issues, telling the council that his department found a site for a new rock salt dome and was waiting for its approval, the cost estimated at \$405,000. Mayor Jackson said he'd spoken to the county engineer, who said he'd be willing to go in with Montclair on it, but he said that the county would have to put in rock salt. Wood also said he spoke with township arborist Steve Schuckman to look at Watchung Plaza, Nishuane Park, Crane Park, and the area at Church Street and Orange Road on getting perennial flowers to provide floral color all year long, with a plan on possibly contracting the work and maintaining it in-house, which would allow the Department of Community Services to maintain it more frequently. He also told the council that the project to improve drainage at the dead end at Warman Street would be set out to bid the following day, September 30.

Both he and Craft updated the council on the Rutgers street evaluation project. She said the reports are being generated now but a glitch in the software that doesn't allow the township to constrain financial projections. She tried entering an annual budget of what the township wants to spend money on in a year – a figure of \$3 million – but the computer keeps producing a higher number based on what the total cost of all the projects should be. Mayor Jackson said that he would be happy not to have to spend another dime on computer software, saying that it doesn't take a computer to evaluate street conditions.

Among the items passed by the council were a second-reading ordinance setting parking time limits on Tremont Place between Oxford Street and Tuxedo Road to two hours between 8:00 A.M. and 6:00 Monday through Friday and a resolution appointing resident and TV producer Evan Cutler to the Communications Advisory Committee. Cutler was present, and he said he'd like to use his producing skills to improve TV34. All ordinances and resolutions passed unanimously, 6-0; Councilor-at Large Rich McMahon was absent.