



Montclair Third Ward Councilor Sean Spiller at his September 10 community meeting

Nine people showed up at Montclair Third Ward Councilor Sean Spiller's September 10 community meeting at the Montclair Public Library, but he still got an earful of questions and complaints on many of the ongoing issues in the township — especially parking, paving and the fate of downtown.

Councilor Spiller said the township was moving forward to get data from the parking consultants it is working with, adding the consultants will eventually come back with a list of recommendations. That list will address incentives for increasing the use of parking decks, what meters Montclair should get, where to put them and how to maintain them. Spiller said the town hopes to have a comprehensive plan within the next year.

Concerns about Handicapped Spaces and Fin Expansion

Social worker Victoria Britt, whose office is on Glenridge Avenue, said the increase in handicapped spaces in the Midtown parking lot have eliminated spaces for her clients, while the new handicapped spaces have been underutilized. Despite being handicapped herself, she said that fewer, not more, handicapped spaces were needed. Councilor Spiller explained that Montclair was sued for an insufficient number of handicapped spaces. The additional spaces were part of the settlement. Spiller said the township was looking at locations for more parking decks.

Britt said the parking around Glenridge Avenue was only going to get worse with the planned expansion of Fin restaurant. She suggested the Forest Street parking lot, owned by JP Morgan Chase, be used. Councilor Spiller explained the Planning Board oversees projects such as the Fin expansion and parking concerns have to be addressed in any application. The Planning Board will review a parking plan for Fin at its September 21 meeting. Spiller said the town could acquire more lots and provide valet parking at existing lots as part of a larger strategy.

Another Glenridge Avenue merchant, Suzanne O'Connor, noted the Midtown spaces lost to handicapped parking were permit spaces, so she's had to use metered spaces and set an alarm to regularly renew her time. She feared the study could take too long. The councilor was sympathetic, saying such studies usually take awhile because of all the

particulars involved — such as the need to study holiday-season parking — but insisted the council is trying to expedite the study. He said the township’s decision to eliminate permit spaces rather than metered spaces was something that Britt or O’Connor could get immediate attention for by contacting Deputy Township Manager Brian Scantlebury.

On the subject of meters, Spiller said the council wanted to get the right meters in the right areas to get the most out of them. He also addressed O’Connor’s issue with renewing meter time through her phone app, noting that although he has had no issues with the app, he guessed that two-hour restrictions on spaces are meant to encourage frequent customer turnover for businesses, and might be the reason for such difficulties. Despite efforts to address immediate parking issues, Councilor Spiller said that issue ultimately has to be part of a singular solution that addresses all major parking concerns.

Downtown Area Called a “Dump”

One resident, who lived on Orange Road, went into an expletive-ridden tirade about the area around Orange Road and Church Street, calling the downtown area a “dump” and a “s—hole.” The resident cited the 35 vacant storefronts in Montclair Center and complained about the yelling, screaming, brawling, loitering and illegal parking. She said the parking problem could be alleviated by re-opening the Hahne’s store parking lot.

“So whenever anyone comes to visit, what do they see?” she asked. “Potholes, empty stores, and an empty parking lot sitting there chained. We’re treating our visitors like s—, we’re treating our residents like s—, and my taxes have gone up, and my neighborhood is horrible, and we’re treating our small-business people like s—. So to me, that’s a crisis situation.” She added that she would move out of Montclair if she thought she could sell her house in good conscience.

Councilor Spiller said parking at the Orange Road deck will provide enough parking for the Valley & Bloom development, the smaller building being just about done, and for the area at large.

Fate of Assisted Living Facility Murky

Another resident specifically asked about the Hahne’s parking lot and the Kensington assisted-living facility (ALF) proposed for it, Councilor Spiller said the ALF developer and Hinck Building owner Dick Grabowsky are [fighting in court](#) over the fate of the property and the owners of the lot possibly closed it to parking as an act of spite.

“That’s a right they have,” he said. “We do not have the ability to go in and say, ‘You have to open [your lot].’” Councilor Spiller later said there should be a ruling on the property’s fate soon. If the Kensington developers win, the project goes through. If Grabowsky wins, the proposal might be presented anew to the council. Grabowsky charged there was a conflict of interest involving former Mayor Jerry Fried and Councilor Spiller’s predecessor, Nick Lewis regarding approval of the ALF development.

Street Pavings and Funky Crosswalks

Councilor Spiller said efforts to repave Montclair streets were continuing, with some streets receiving new curbing thanks to extra money from state and federal grants. Resident John Falcone asked about Plymouth Street, with its bumps and decimated curbs. Spiller admitted it was a mess and said the township engineering department has been following a formula to maximize their resources. Though the council can’t tell the engineering department to pave specific streets, it can stress and highlight certain streets for the department’s consideration.

“The biggest thing we have in our control is making sure we keep putting a lot funds behind this,” the councilor said. And that’s our goal.”

Spiller also cited the repaving of crosswalks in the ward, replacing fake-brick appliqués that had been there before. He added he would like to see more creative art work for pedestrian crossing walks, and he showed his constituents

examples.



A pedestrian crossing with stylized wine bottles, glasses and grapes. Image courtesy of Councilor Spiller. This is the sort of crosswalk art the councilor is interested in bringing to Montclair.



A "zipper crossing." Image courtesy of Councilor Spiller.