



Director of Community Services Steve Wood and Township Engineer Kim Craft at the August 25 Montclair Township Council meeting

The Montclair Township Council's August 25 meeting was relatively short, with only half an hour needed to pass the the six pending ordinances, the new ordinances and the eight resolutions on the agenda. But it lasted for another half hour after that when Mayor Robert Jackson brought up the matter of delays on infrastructure projects, especially the work on Park Street and the area around Montclair High School. Township Engineer Kim Craft and Director of Community Services Steve Wood had been in the gallery since the meeting formally started, indicating that they knew Mayor Jackson wanted to press the issue, as it was not on the agenda.

The mayor asked Craft and Wood when new intersection lights at Park and Chestnut Streets would be installed, and Craft said she would have to meet with the contractor the following day for an answer. She also conceded that the new signals may not be installed in time for the first day of school on September 8, but she noted that the foundations are in and that the work should produce only minor disruption when it is undertaken. Craft said that she talked to the police department about the phasing of the new lights, with plans to have a phase for pedestrians during arrival and dismissal times. The phasing would otherwise remain the same as with the old signals.

Mayor Jackson broadened his concerns to the repaving of Park Street itself from Chestnut Street to Bloomfield Avenue. He said that no work had been done on that section for three days, and he predicted a "doomsday scenario" if it isn't completed by September 8. Acting Township manager Tim Stafford said that the milling would be done on August 27 and 28 by the Riverview company with paving completed by August 31 or the morning of September 1 by the Tilcon company. Michael Cifelli of Cifelli & Sons, one of the contractors involved with the project, said that arrangements had been made to get the work done two weeks earlier and it was "all planned out," but an issue with PSE&G caused a delay and disrupted the schedules, which the parties were able to sort out at the last minute.

Wood said that the repaving was scheduled for earlier in the month but that PSE&G came in at the last minute and caused a delay, and Riverview moved on to the projects. He added that Community Services had nothing to do with

side deals made between the contractors involved in planning out the work.

Mayor Jackson, having followed the complicated issues involving scheduling, said that parents, teachers and Montclair High School principal James Earle wouldn't care "one iota" about any of that if the repaving was not done in time. "I don't know what we have to do to ensure Plan B, Plan C, if we all have to get shovels and do it ourselves," he said. "It has to be done before school opens, there's no other way around it." He was frustrated that the contract for the signal was awarded in June and the new signals are not in place, and said a discussion was needed to address contracts awarded for work subsequently delayed.

And Park Street wasn't even the only infrastructural issue. The mayor also asked about the storm drainage that collects at the dead end of Warman Street, Craft told the mayor that the cost to drain the water that ponds at the end of the street and carry it to an existing system would be about \$85,000, with hopes that could be included in the 2016 capital budget. The mayor was frustrated by the fact that nothing has been done about it in a decade, and Stafford said he could try to talk to the acting Chief Financial Officer and see if some money could be moved around to get it built this year. When Wood explained that there were legal issues involved with easements and private property, Third Ward Councilor Sean Spiller said it was one of those issues that never seems to move forward, and hoped for something to happen soon.



The dead end at Warman Street, circa 2013, with the sort of puddle a new drainage project is meant to alleviate.  
Image courtesy of Google.

The mayor was also concerned about the pace of replacing the fake-brick crosswalks at the intersection of North Willow Street, which is an area heavily trafficked by students and school buses. Craft said she hopes to get them done by mid-September and noted that she resisted efforts by the contractors to delay it into October. Deputy Mayor Robert Russo suggested that contracts should guarantee a start date and an end date for projects to ensure their completion, and Mayor Jackson said that one problem was the township gets locked into contracts and has to endure delays that occur, and he said that conditions have to be included in future awarded contracts going forward. Township Attorney Ira Karasick said that could be done, along with penalty clauses for delays that aren't caused by extreme weather.

"We see that again and again and again where they start, and they say, 'Well, there's a problem,' and then we can't go back and get somebody else," the mayor said of contracted infrastructure firms. He suggested project conditions that require contractors to start within a certain time after a contract takes effect.

Also, frustration continued with PSE&G for how the utility replaces pavement in cuts into the streets. Wood said that PSE&G does a better job with surfacing the patches but does not compact the pavement properly underneath, causing a dip in the streets. Councilor Spiller said that the council needs to act on the ordinance passed to require utilities to restore the streets, and Deputy Mayor Russo suggested following Jersey City's lead and putting a moratorium on non-emergency utility street cuts as a way of bringing the issue to the fore.

Among the ordinances and resolutions that were considered — all passed unanimously — a pending ordinance setting minimum and maximum salaries for non-union employees was passed, although Fourth Ward Councilor Renée Baskerville suggested that the maximum range for Deputy Township Manager Brian Scantlebury, at \$74,458, should be increased to \$80,000. Stafford agreed and promised to bring forth an ordinance raising it per Dr. Baskerville's recommendation at the September 1 meeting. A pending ordinance establishing spaces for food vendors near the intersection of at Chestnut Street and North Fullerton Avenue for the school year, was passed with the understanding that the food vendors who successfully bid for these spaces are responsible for keeping the area around their spaces clean. The council also passed pending ordinances establishing a four-way stop zone at Pine Street and Claremont Avenue and on-street handicapped parking, as well as a resolution directing that both ordinances take effect immediately.