

## Seymour Street residents concerned about Montclair development



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The fate of Plymouth Parking Lot is of particular interest to residents in the area of Seymour Street.

Montclair residents are concerned about potential redevelopment in the area of Seymour Street, particularly in the Plymouth Parking Lot, and 3rd Ward Councilman Sean Spiller hosted a community meeting on June 3 to answer their questions.

As Township Planner Janice Talley explained at the meeting, the area, which comprises the Wellmont Theater, former Social Security Building and adjacent township parking lots, was part of the Montclair Center Redevelopment Study - which also includes properties along and around Glenridge Avenue and Lackawanna Plaza.

Though the properties in the area were designated areas in need of redevelopment earlier this year, an error in a public hearing being appropriately announced in public notices has resulted in a new public hearing, scheduled for June 22, according to Talley. While it is the township's intention to move forward with a redevelopment plan for the site, the Planning Board will hear additional testimony at the June 22 hearing, Talley said.

No redevelopment plan has yet been started for Seymour Street, according to Talley. As the process for Seymour Street is behind that of Lackawanna Plaza, residents can expect community outreach to begin sometime this fall, she

said.

Residents asked Spiller about the status of the township's attempts to acquire the former Social Security Building. The township's \$1.4 million bid to purchase the building from the federal government earlier this year was rejected.

Spiller said the township and federal government disagreed over the valuation of the property, with the township believing that the property needed significant work before being usable. The property is now up for auction, he said.

### **Not in the cards**

Several of the residents at the June 3 meeting had attended the May 4 Planning Board meeting. At both meetings, those in attendance were particularly concerned about the possibility of a parking deck being constructed at the Plymouth Parking Lot.

The concerns had a basis in language in Montclair's Master Plan, which states that surface lots are not an ideal use of land and that decks may better accommodate Montclair's many cars, but Spiller told residents the current council has no desire to construct a deck on the municipally owned lot.

Residents said they were frustrated by their experience at the May 4 meeting, when a crowd waited for about 90 minutes as the board made minor corrections to the Master Plan's unified land use and circulation element. Talley and Ira Smith, a Montclair architect who serves as a consultant for the Planning Board, explained that board meetings are typically not conducted in such a way, and that they happened to have attended a meeting at which the board was wrapping up the element's draft - a process two years in the making.

A resident asked what the township would be able to build on the property, which is zoned as OR-4 or R-4. Talley said that zoning does not apply to municipal property.

Smith opined that a redevelopment designation provides residents with more influence than they otherwise would have, as it triggers a public hearing process.

When asked what future steps are to come, Talley said residents should not expect any updates in July or August. Public workshops regarding the area will most likely start up in September, she said.

Residents interested in challenging the redevelopment designations for Montclair Center are encouraged to submit written statements to either the Planning Department or Clerk's office in advance of the June 22 meeting, Talley said.

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