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The wheel turning round and round brought the Montclair Township Council elected in 2012 back to begin another round for the start of another four-year period in 2016. Mayor Robert Jackson and the entire council were re-elected in May, with only Third Ward Councilor Sean Spiller having faced opposition; on July 1, Township Clerk Linda Wanat swore them in to their new terms. When Mayor Jackson – the first Montclair mayor re-elected directly by the people since the voters began choosing mayors directly in 1988 – pledged in his oath to fulfill his “many duties,” he and others laughed a little, perhaps out of awareness that Montclair’s council-manager system gives the mayor very little executive power.



With his wife Cheryl holding the Bible and four of his children looking on, Montclair Mayor Robert Jackson is sworn in by Township Clerk Linda Wanat for a second four-year term.

In his equivalent of an inaugural address, Mayor Jackson said he hoped to continue focusing on the goals and issues that matter to the voters, such as keeping taxes low, securing financial stability and lowering the debt, and repaving streets. He also thanked the township staff for their support.

“This is a challenging time, and it’s a challenging position to be in,” he said, but I think it’s one in which we are called to be in at this particular time.”

The councilors all delivered positive, upbeat messages about the state of the township. First Ward Councilor William Hurlock said he was pleased with efforts to reduce the township’s debt and fix its infrastructure, and said he was hopeful the council would continue the work it started four years earlier. He added that the day, July 1, was of personal significance for him, as it was his wedding anniversary and the anniversary of his son’s baptism, and that the honor of being chosen to represent his ward on the council made it extra special. Second Ward Councilor Robin

Schlager, beginning her second consecutive term on the council and her third term overall, said it was wonderful to have seen Montclair move ahead and prosper in the past four years. “Our town is thriving,” she said. “Stores and shops are busier than ever, our streets and parks are alive with music, [we have] film festivals and art fairs . . .our 11 public schools are thriving, and our kids are doing amazing things.” She noted the *New York Times* recently listed Montclair as the most sought-after town in New Jersey for young families.

Councilor Spiller said it was a real testament to the patience of his and the other council members’ families that they have supported them, what with all the hours the council has put into their service. He lauded the township’s staff for keeping Montclair going, as well as the residents for their activism and volunteerism. “While we may not always agree on every issue,” he said, people who . . . are volunteering their time are doing so because they have the best interests in Montclair in mind, and we do work together, and it’s so important . . . I think that success that we see [is] because we do work together and try to come forward with a great product.” Fourth Ward Councilor Renée Baskerville, who was sworn in to her third consecutive term, said she was “honored, humbled and moved” to be able to continue serving a town that has a large quantity of residents with abundant skills to offer to make the town better.

The at-large councilors also offered their comments. Rich McMahon said he was pleased to work with a like-minded group of people that was “well-intended” to make Montclair a better place. Robert Russo, still on the council but stepping down as deputy mayor, said he hoped to use his fifth and final term in elective municipal office by serving as an elder statesman to help the council achieve its goals.



The Montclair Township Council poses after the 2016-20 reorganization meeting.

The council set about briefly reorganizing for the 2016-20 term. Councilor Hurlock was elected deputy mayor, replacing Robert Russo in that position, and he said he was humbled to be bestowed the honor of filling Councilor Russo’s shoes; the outgoing deputy mayor then gave Deputy Mayor/First Ward Councilor Hurlock a sketch drawing of Robert Kennedy that Mr. Hurlock had admired.



Montclair First Ward Councilor William Hurlock, the township's incoming deputy mayor, receives a sketch of Robert F. Kennedy from Councilor-at-Large Robert Russo, the township's outgoing deputy mayor, as a gift.

The council also appointed Councilor Schlager as both liaison to the Planning Board and as a Second River Joint Meeting representative, while Councilor Russo was appointed as a Third River Joint Meeting representative. On the subject of the resolution continuing salaries of the mayor, the councilors, and the department directors, Dr. Baskerville asked if it were possible to revisit the salaries for the council, or if only the council that follows is authorized to do so. Township Attorney Ira Karasick said the council was allowed to raise its own salary, but that the resolution was statutorily required. He said the council it could be revisited later. Councilor Russo noted that the salaries for the council are only \$7,000 a year, and that it was deserved compensation for their work, and Karasick noted that the mayor and councilors spend more doing their jobs than they make from them.

“We certainly don’t do it for the money,” Councilor Russo said.