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The Montclair Township Council entered March like a lamb, holding a conference meeting on March 1 that lasted only an hour. The council unanimously passed twelve resolutions, including measures authorizing an amendment to the temporary 2016 budget increasing the capital Improvement fund from \$187,500 to \$300,000 and adding an \$850,000 capital outlay for the water utility fund, approving the acquisition of a new truck for the Department of Community Services, the suspension of parking fees for designated areas during the upcoming Montclair Film Festival, and entering in to a professional services agreement with Smith Maran Architecture for redevelopment-related services. Some of the discussion at the meeting, though, centered around non-agenda issues brought up by Fourth Ward Councilor Renée Baskerville.

Dr. Baskerville asked about a resolution slated for a vote on March 15 authorizing payment to sub-recipients for the 2015 Community Development Block Grant (CBDG) program. Acting Township Manager Tim Stafford explained that Essex County had changed its procedure for distributing the funds in an effort to comply with Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Department regulations. Sub-recipients must apply to the county through the township rather than to the county directly. The township would distribute funds to the sub-recipients and, in turn, be reimbursed by the county. Dr. Baskerville asked which department would distribute the funds; Stafford said that the Planning Department would handle it. She said that it would add an additional task to an already overwhelmed Planning Department, but Stafford assured her that the Finance Department would help process the payment. He admitted that, as an extra step, it would take a little longer, but it was per regulations. Third Ward Councilor Sean Spiller added that it would be a challenge to find the funds to lay out. Stafford said that he'd already covered that with Chief Financial Officer Padmaja Rao.

“She said we should put it in the budget as a grant in the grant fund, and then when we get the monies, we do an insertion and you’ll see those items on the agenda down the pike,” Stafford explained. “When we get approval, when we make payment, we then submit to the county, the county sends us the money, you’ll see a resolution to insert that in the budget.” The township is to be awarded \$164,650.



Members of the Montclair Township Council display the \$164,650 check from Essex County to Montclair for community development block grants.

Dr. Baskerville also asked about the delay with restoring the electricity for businesses in the Stammelman Building at the intersection of Bloomfield and Glenridge Avenues, where a fire at Jerry’s Antiques and Estates in January caused the power to be shut off in adjacent stores and the families in the upper-floor apartments to be displaced. Councilor Spiller said that he and a meeting with PSE&G representative Everton Scott earlier in the day and that Stafford talked to PSE&G, contacted the owner, and spoke to the property manager to see what the holdups are. Neither the councilor nor the township manager could provide an update, because Stafford said he hasn’t discerned what the building manager wants. He hopes to forward the building manager’s emails to Scott and is trying to facilitate a connection between PSE&G and the Stammelman Building’s management. Mayor Robert Jackson added that as many as eighteen families have been displaced from the upper-floor apartments.

Dr. Baskerville also recalled that she had asked back in March 2015 about efforts to make the township’s annual Easter celebration, featuring Mr. Bunny, more accessible to the different wards. She had suggested the acquisition of a tent that could accommodate large crowds at the Easter event at Edgemont Park, as opposed to the smaller shelter house, and she wanted to know about the cost of a tent and where the township was on the issue. Noting that Santa Claus visits all the wards at Christmas time, Dr. Baskerville stressed the importance of improving the reach of the Easter event and said that Mr. Bunny could ride throughout the town on a fire truck, like Santa Claus at Christmas.

Unlike in 2015, when the Easter celebration discussion devolved into [a shouting match between Dr. Baskerville and the township manager](#), Stafford politely said he would look into the tent issue and also speak to the Recreation & Cultural Affairs Department about her fire truck suggestion. The date of the event itself, though, remains unclear; according to the article on the township’s Website, it is scheduled for March 19, the day before Palm Sunday, but the

article's headline gives the date as March 12.

Mayor Jackson also brought up some issues of his own. When Stafford brought up a resolution authorizing a purchase of two vehicles for the Building Department – one of which would replaced a totaled vehicle – slated for a vote March 15, the mayor expressed opposition to the resolution. He said he has seen vehicles that stay in the lot and he wants more analysis of how often they are used.

“Before we buy new [vehicles], I have to make sure we're using the ones we have efficiently.” Both Dr. Baskerville and Councilor-at-Large Rich McMahan agreed.

Mayor Jackson also asked Stafford about adding sensors on parking meters to reset them. Stafford said that he would revisit the issue in six months on the advice of the vendor, who recommended that they township wait and see which meters are more used than others to determine where sensors would be best placed. The sensors themselves have not been purchased yet.

Parking also came up in public comment when resident Stephen Levitt spoke about the petition being circulated by residents near the Wellmont Theater to get Montclair to do something about the illegal and overflowing parking around the venue. Levitt said he took the mayor's advice and talked to the Police Department. Levitt said he asked how it comes about that Seymour Street is closed every time the Wellmont is open. He was told that the police officer on duty makes the decision.

“He must makes the decision pretty early in the day, ” Levitt said, “because they bring barriers over there. I'm questioning whether the individual policeman has the authority; I don't even know whether the Police Department has the authority.” Levitt pointed out that closing a street to help a private business is different from closing a street for infrastructure repairs, and he suggested that the council put closings of Seymour Street for specific days and times on its agenda and vote on them after a consultation with the police, as it has done in relation to the Montclair Film Festival, so people would at least know about them. Township Attorney Ira Karasick said he would investigate the issue further.