

COUNCIL ROUNDUP

Montclair to look at shared services

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Touting regionalization as the way of the future, Deputy Mayor Robert Russo made the cost benefits of shared services a primary talking point during Tuesday's Township Council meeting.

During the Municipal Services Subcommittee report, Russo cited a recent meeting, involving Montclair officials and mayors and fire chiefs from Belleville, Nutley, Bloomfield and Glen Ridge as reason for Montclairites to keep their eyes on potential regionalization. While the concept was met with some resistance by several of the parties present at the

initial joint meeting, organized by Essex County Freeholder Brendan Gill, Russo spoke optimistically that studies looking further into regionalization will be conducted and that subsequent meetings of township managers and fire officials will be held.

Russo cited North Hudson Regional Fire Services, a joint venture involving Guttenberg, North Bergen, Union City, Weehawken and West New York, as evidence that the concept works. When the regional fire department was first formed about a decade ago, there were a number of issues such as five fire chiefs being on the payroll. Now that this number has been whittled down to one, Russo said that those towns are beginning to see cost savings.

Montclair and surrounding communities could have similar financial gains, Russo opined.

Seeing Montclair as the center of such an arrangement, Russo said Montclair would be able to charge some neighboring towns for services as a revenue source. By limiting high-level positions, regionalization would also save on salaries.

"If it's not pursued, I see it as somewhat of a failure that towns won't get together," said Russo.

Third Ward Councilman Sean Spiller referred to a recent Essex County Municipal Exchange Team meeting as a reason for pause. During the exchange team meeting, unanticipated costs such as IT systems relating to a similar venture in Princeton were discussed. On top of potential expenditures, Spiller also wondered whether Montclairites will be able to enjoy the same level of service with regionalization.

"I think there are a lot of reasons why we should, but there

are certainly some cautions as to why you should look at it very carefully when we do," noted Spiller.

In addition to joint fire services, 4th Ward Councilwoman Renée Baskerville requested that Township Manager Marc Dashiield look into an agreement with Essex County regarding the filling of potholes on county roads. Dashiield said that he would, and that the municipal Community Services Department has addressed potholes as time has allowed in the meantime. Extensive patchwork is unlikely to occur until weather becomes less volatile in the spring, however, the township manager said.

Read the full roundup at www.northjersey.com/montclair.

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**BOB RUSSO**