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The Montclair Township Council

The Montclair Township Council took one step closer to finalizing the 2014 budget at its May 20 meeting, in which Township Manager Marc Dashield went over amendments to the township's spending plans. Because the changes are increases offset by cuts, the municipal levy will not change, meaning a zero percent tax increase.

Among the increases included in the amendments were \$1700 for the planning department, \$5000 for buildings and grounds departments, an undetermined amount for code enforcement, a \$14,000 increase in animal control to cover a volunteer coordinator position to add volunteers to the department and reduce costs, a \$112,000 recalculation of Social Security contributions, and an \$85,000 increase for the library. Dashield said the increases for planning and buildings and grounds were to cover New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection fees (including a fee for a storage tank permit) and the code enforcement increase was to cover software for a township-wide management program, which has not yet been selected.

The decreases include a \$20,000 reduction of funds for the Adult School of Montclair, along with a \$125,000 reduction in pension contributions for regular employees and a \$219,000 reduction of fire and place pensions. Mayor Robert Jackson was quick to point out that the decreases were made based on a formula change in how pensions are funded, not due to less funding. Dashield also noted a \$165,000 fund balance added to the parking utility as a cushion for snow removal in the early stages of winter should the winter of 2014-15 be as brutal as the previous one.

The council approved the amendments in a resolution passed unanimously, with a vote on the budget and a public

hearing preceding it set for June 17.

Longstanding problems with street repaving and the Nishuane Well reared their ugly heads as the public comment allowed citizens to express their concerns about them. Resident Jennifer May of North Fullerton Avenue submitted a petition signed by resident of her block to repave North Fullerton between Watchung and Wildwood Avenues, with one resident having abstained, May said, because of a fear of a tax increase. Councilor-at-Large Rich McMahon, who said that a repaving wouldn't require a tax increase, said that the council was working on a list to prioritize the most necessary street repairs.

Fourth Ward Councilor Renée Baskerville added that the township is e-evaluating the method in which streets are prioritized. "We do have a uniform way of determining this," she said of the way streets are given priority for repaving "and it's not just, you know, people go get a petition ad summon the councilpeople to traverse that area. There has to be something that 's gonna work for all of us." Mayor Jackson said that he hoped a firm would be in place to set up a system of prioritizing and paving streets, and Third Ward Councilor Sean Spiller said that the new system being looked at would give people a better idea of when they could expect their streets to be taken care of, with an independent contractor impartially prioritizing them.

"We've been dedicating more resources to this than has been done in awhile to address the problem," he said.

In a show of good humor, Ms. May had her daughter distribute cookies to the ten elected and unelected council members. The cookies were made to look like the imperfections in North Fullerton Avenue.

Less humorous were the complaints about the Nishuane Well process, with resident William Scott saying that the public has not been given to an opportunity to respond to the document on the township's website that may not have enough accurate information about the well and adding that there is no proper process to allow people to interact with the township over the options for it. He said that the residents had no proper opportunities to provide input or getting their questions answered correctly. He said the public had to know well in advance when the public would be allowed to comment on moving forward.

Mayor Jackson said that he expected Water Director Gary Obzarny to conduct and information session on the well at the June 10 council meeting, which will allow the council to determine where to go in terms of process and in moving forward. "Part of it is," the mayor told Scott, "we're also going through decisions, and our thinking is being informed through this process as well . . . we're learning as you are and as everybody else is." He said the council would determine from their how to proceed.

"We're not going to make this decision under cover of night," the mayor said.

Frank Rubacky of Upper Mountain Avenue brought the issue of the planning board meeting of the previous night over the revisions to the proposed master plan with regard to parking. Planning Board Chairman John Wynn, Rubacky said, was issuing a challenge to residents to think of solutions, particularly with Upper Montclair, and Rubacky calculated that the town was bringing in about a hundred dollars a day from permanent parking, which didn't seem right to him. He proposed doing a test by charging a flat rate of five dollars a day. Councilor McMahon said that people could park there for that much with the park mobile app already after 10 AM. The Traffic Parking Advisory Committee is connoting to look into ideas to expand parking, the councilor added. "We are on this case," McMahon said.

Also, the board approved on first reading an ordinance to clear up a confusing real estate case involving a property on Mission Street. The township had foreclosed on a tax lien on 20 Mission Street in 1983 but the owner paid the outstanding balance two years later without knowledge of the foreclosure. When the owner died, his heirs found they couldn't sell the property as the township held the deed to it. The ordinance would allow the heirs to sell the property and receive the money with a promise from the new owner to being the property up to par before receiving title for it. Township Attorney Ira Karasick said this was the best and only legal way to resolve the issue, and everyone involved was on board with the arrangement. It passed unanimously.

The council also issued a proclamation honoring Tierney's Tavern for being in business for eighty years. The tavern is sponsoring an all-day music festival on May 31.



Frank Rubacky making public comment at the Montclair Township Council's May 20 meeting



Montclair Councilor-at-Large Rich McMahon reading the proclamation honoring Tierney's Tavern on its eightieth anniversary, with Tierney's family and staff looking on.