

## Montclair Volunteer Ambulance Unit seeks \$200k for new radio system

Council roundup

Rich McMahon

A bond ordinance appropriating \$945,000 for the acquisition of new police radios and integration onto the state-run communications system was approved by the [Montclair](#) Township Council this past Tuesday. An emergency resolution was subsequently voted on and approved for the appropriation to take effect immediately.

While the new system promises to address the interference problems the [Montclair](#) Police Department has experienced with its existing radio system, it was revealed Tuesday that the [Montclair](#) Ambulance Unit [MAU] utilizes the same system, encounters the same concerns and will not be able to manage its system without the Police Department.

Township Manager Marc Dashield informed council members that the ambulance unit wants the township to fund its integration onto the same state system that the Police Department is joining, which would cost \$200,000.

While appreciating the gravity of the ambulance unit's dilemma, 3rd Ward Councilman Sean Spiller said that he was surprised that this issue is just being brought to the council's attention now.

Fourth Ward Councilwoman Renée Baskerville requested a review of the ambulance unit's budget so that she may get a sense as to whether the MAU could shoulder all or a portion of the expense.

Councilman-at-Large Rich McMahon, who serves as vice president of the [Montclair](#) Ambulance Unit, said that the unit bills insurance companies, not residents of [Montclair](#) or neighboring municipalities, and that these billings make up between two-thirds and three-quarters of its roughly \$900,000 annual budget.

McMahon said that the \$200,000 would fund the purchase and installation of 16 radios. Should the ambulance unit not switch over to the state-run system, it will not have the means to support its current system by itself. Responding to a question posed by Spiller, McMahon said that there would be no savings realized in trying to combine the police radio purchase with the ambulance radio purchase.



**Not abandoned**

James Jackson, owner of a residence at 29 Harrison Ave. spoke to the council during public comment to express umbrage that his property is placed on the municipal "abandoned properties list."

As reported in The [Montclair](#) Times, the council last year approved an ordinance enabling the municipal government to step in to address properties that have either been abandoned or have been stalled in construction in excess of six months.

Jackson's property on Harrison Avenue appeared in both the public notice section and in an article on identified abandoned properties. Jackson claimed that he first discovered that his home was on the abandoned list after hearing from friends and family who had seen the listing.

Jackson said that his home has been under constant rehabilitation for four years and has yet to be cited for any violation by the municipal Code Enforcement Office. As such, Jackson said, his home does not fit the description of an abandoned property.

Mayor Robert Jackson, who is not related to James Jackson, said that while he trusts that work has been ongoing, noted that the property is without sod, covered with construction materials and has featured a portable toilet, visible for long time. The mayor said that it would behoove James Jackson to make improvements to the exterior of the home, something the resident said he would consider.

Dashield said that James Jackson will soon receive a notice offering him the opportunity to appeal the abandoned designation. As abandoned properties are published in The [Montclair](#) Times before owners are notified, Baskerville requested that in the future, the township send a letter to the home before the property is listed in the newspaper.

Should it be determined that Jackson's home is not abandoned, Baskerville said, a retracted listing may be in order.

## **Halfway there**

The Township Council approved an ordinance amending [Montclair](#)'s code by prohibiting group homes in R1 zones.

Jordon Shelley of Irving Street asked that the ordinance also feature R2 districts as her block is a mix of R1 and R2. Baskerville added that, considering residents of Irving Street were the ones that spurred the drafting of the ordinance, it wouldn't make sense to approve a resolution that does not completely protect their neighborhood.

Township Attorney Ira Karasick said that Township Planner Janice Talley was in the process of exploring what additional considerations would need to be factored in to include R2 zone and that they, too, may be added as areas in which group homes are prohibited at a later date.

## **A Plea to the council**

Two members of [Montclair](#) 250, a group of district employees who also live in the township, spoke during public comment regarding what, in their opinion, has been wasteful spending and negative meetings.

Deputy Mayor Robert Russo asked the members how they would like for the council to intervene as he was wary of interfering with district business.

Spiller said that the council was well aware of the concerns surrounding [Montclair](#)'s schools and that he and his colleagues are being as proactive as possible.

## **Helping vets**

The council approved two resolutions cancelling the taxes associated with two different properties which serve as homes for disabled veterans.

Russo, while supportive of assisting veterans, wondered if the cancellation constituted as an unfunded federal mandate.

Karasick said that one could, instead, look at the cancellation as asking the remainder of [Montclair](#)'s residents to pay a little more than their share to support those who have defended our country.

## **Tree Removal**

An emergency temporary appropriation of \$104,000 was added to [Montclair](#)'s Shade Tree budget to address trees throughout town that need to be taken down. The projects will be funded through capital surplus, Dashield said.

## **Representing [Montclair](#)**

[Montclair](#) High School basketball star Myisha Hines-Allen was honored with a proclamation at the beginning of Tuesday's meeting. The University of Louisville-bound senior will represent [Montclair](#) in next month's 2014 McDonald's All-American Game.

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