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The Montclair Township Council

The Montclair Township Council tackled a mishmash of issues in a relatively short conference meeting on April 7. Among the issues discussed were parking on Lorraine Avenue, aggregate purchases of electricity, and one resident's unfortunate issue with sewage backing up into his house because of a blocked municipal sewer main.

Parking

First Ward Councilor William Hurlock brought up an ordinance on first reading to limit parking on the eastern side of Norwood Avenue (there is no parking on the western side) to four hours between 8: 00 AM and 6:00 PM between Lorraine and Oakwood Avenue, and hoped to have a draft ordinance in time of the next meeting. It ended up being passed on the spot during the conference meeting after two residents explained the situation in public comment. They said that many people park there for fifteen hours and impede drive access as well as worsen driveway sightlines. They were afraid that, with the schools and churches in the area, an accident was bound to happen. Councilor Hurlock moved to read the ordinance and put it up for a vote immediately, and it passed unanimously by voice vote. The public hearing on the second reading is tentatively scheduled for May 19.

Sewer Backup Insurance Issues

Also in public comment, resident Bryan Place of Park Terrace addressed the council regarding a January 25 backup in the municipal sewer main behind his house most likely caused by tree roots, ruining his basement and several gifts from a baby shower for his newborn child. Place praised the Water Bureau for cleaning out the basement and the

contamination, and he said he was given a form to file a claim for the damages. After filing the claim and hearing nothing, though, he went to Acting Township Manager Tim Stafford and contacted council members to find out the status of his claim, only to get a letter from the Garden State Joint Insurance Fund, or JIF, denying his claim on the basis of the fact that the township is not liable for the sewer main disruption due to “uncontrollable acts of nature.”

“That’s game over for me, more or less,” Place said. He did say that the township assured him that he was not liable or at fault and was very nice about it, but he can’t get his insurance to cover it because the blockage in the pipe happened upstream from his property.

Place said Stafford tried to reach out to him, and Stafford said he could contact the JIF and make sure that the proper investigation of the incident was done to make sure the investigation was done appropriately. Deputy Mayor Robert Russo, for his part, was appalled. He admitted that even though the township was not legally obligated to rectify the situation, there was a moral obligation. He didn’t know what could be done, hoped that Stafford could do something about it, because of the tragic nature of the incident. “What do we have insurance for?” Deputy Mayor Russo rhetorically asked.

Councilor Hurlock, noting that tree limbs were the likely culprit, said that the insurance company characterized it as an act of God, which he felt was inappropriate as it was neither a hurricane nor a snowstorm, and he had had a conversation with Water Bureau Director Gary Obszarny about this. He also wanted Township Attorney Ira Karasick to investigate further to see if anything could be done about this. Place, one of Councilor Hurlock’s constituents, thanked the council for their help.

Energy Aggregation

The council also passed a resolution binding Montclair to purchase electric generation services through a bid from the Essex County Aggregate Energy Procurement Cooperative Pricing System (ECAEPC) to reduce energy costs, which prompted Third Ward Councilor Sean Spiller to inquire about the proposed aggregate electric purchase for the residents. Montclair Environmental Affairs Coordinator Gray Russell was on hand to provide answers, explaining that would save money by providing for a bulk purchase of electrical power and use a higher content of renewable energy to generate it. Russell said he chose Gabel Associates of Highland Park to help with looking at a possible residential aggregate electric purchase, and he added that he needed a charge from the council to get Gabel to proceed with a study to determine if there is a possible electricity aggregation program that could save residents some money on power and get it from a more environmentally friendly source.

“If you all feel that that’s worth pursuing,” Russell said, “then this consultant would . . . assist us in publicizing this and then, at meetings like this, answer questions from the public.”

“So,” Councilor Spiller said, “we would be asking you to move forward with getting us the information, to see if it’s even feasible, and to see what the parameters are around how it would work.

“That’s right,” said Russell.

Stafford said he had been meaning to meet with Russell to get this proposal moving but he hasn’t done so, thus accepting responsibility for why the township hasn’t moved sooner on it. Mayor Robert Jackson said that he was having “a real hard time” allowing Russell to move forward before he even met with Gabel Associates and learned what the firm would propose. Russell pointed out that he and the Montclair Environmental Commission had chosen Gabel after going through the process to find the best consultant, but the mayor still wanted the council to hear from Gabel representatives. Stafford hoped to include them in the May 5 conference meeting agenda.

Montclair Planning Board



Montclair resident Jason DeSalvo (left) thanks the council for his appointment to the Planning Board while Acting Township Manager Timothy Stafford looks on.

Also, resident Jason DeSalvo was unanimously approved for appointment to the Montclair Planning Board as a first alternate member. DeSalvo was at the meeting, and he thanked the council personally for the appointment.