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Third Ward Councilor Sean Spiller with constituents at his November 23 community meeting

Third Ward Councilor Sean Spiller held a community meeting on November 23 at the Montclair Library, where he briefed constituents on the latest developments in parking, street improvements, and redevelopment, and their issues. As always, constituents had their own concerns and their own takes on the issues Councilor Spiller addressed.

The councilor began with a rundown of various ongoing topics, parking being the most pressing of them. He explained that the Nelson\Nygaard Consulting Associates was looking at how Montclair's public parking could be best utilized, saying that the consultants were determining what rates to charge where, how to get more cars off the street through the effort to incentivize parking on the decks (especially the Fullerton deck, which is not widely used) and what rates to charge where and when, depending on how often spaces are used and peak times of use. Councilor Spiller explained that the findings, due out in early 2016, should enable the township to make the most out of the parking available and possibly create more parking, such as building more decks. He also informed the constituents in attendance that Montclair was moving aggressively to replace the meters with new, advanced meters that will allow people to pay by means other than coins and will be easy to repair or replace when defective.

Resident Haywood Woods told the councilor that, in the meantime, that there should be greater communication among parking enforcement officers regarding broken meters and whether anyone can park there. Councilor Spiller agreed there should be more consistency. He added that there should be a clearer interpretation of parking rules, such as whether the two-hour limit applies to parking in any space on the street or just the one space, and whether it's permissible to simply move from one space to another after two hours. A Fullerton Avenue resident said that her

side of the avenue on her block has no meters, which encourages commuters to park on her block and take up space. She also said that parking at an event for the Wellmont Theater make it impossible for her to go anywhere, lest she lose her street space, which she pays a permit for. "There has to be a way to limit people that are parking there for other reasons," she said.

Councilor Spiller understood her concerns and explained that the objective of the consultants was to strike a balance between residents and also between residents and out-of-towners who frequent Montclair's restaurants and attractions. He answered her concerns about increased parking for the Wellmont in anticipation of an arts district that would be anchored by the theater, saying that the developers would like to see an additional parking deck built but that there might be possible opposition from some residents. As he did at his September meeting, he reminded constituents that the Hahne's parking lot remains unavailable while the lot's owners, who want to build an assisted-living facility there, keep it closed will in a lawsuit with developer Dick Grabowsky, who is suing them..

Redevelopment remained a major concern, as Portland Place resident Maggie Joralemon noted that the Planning Board was supposed to vote on Phase 2 of the redevelopment of the western gateway area until developer Brian Stolar came up with a different proposal for the block, which no one knows the details of. She said she wanted to know what was up with the proposal, which had involved building a new self-storage facility, and she feared that Stolar was gaining too much power through land acquisition. Councilor-at-Large and Planning Board member Rich McMahon, who was in attendance, told her that no one on the board had seen anything either, and nothing has been approved. But resident William Scott, a member of the Montclair Housing Commission who has been a frequent and active attendee at municipal redevelopment meetings, sought to know why a developer like Stolar has the option to "pull a plan off the table and not allow a decision to be made" on a project. He said that residents should be given more consideration when developers pull plans at the last minute at meetings, letting residents sitting at a meeting and waiting interminably for nothing. Scott also complained that Stolar has had trouble adhering to the 20-percent threshold in the affordable-housing inclusionary zoning ordinance.

Scott also inquired about meetings of the Township Council Economic Development Committee, asking Councilor Spiller (who is a member of the committee) why meetings of the committee weren't open to the public. He explained that the committee needs to meet in private to get a better understanding of the issues, which are then presented and aired in public after the committee has gone over them. He said he thought it was preferable that different boards and commissions in Montclair act independently and do not take orders from the council. He said he believed that Planning Board meetings have helped to guide the council, especially with regard to public comment given at such meetings, calling it a drawn-out but good process that "gets us to a more balanced end product that's more effective and better suited for our township." He conceded that he didn't know why Stolar's plans were pulled at the last minute, saying that the Planning Board would have to answer that question.

Councilor Spiller also said that work was continuing on the crosswalks, as many of the old fake-brick crosswalks have been replaced, and he also said that Essex County's study of Bloomfield Avenue might lead to a narrowing of the lanes to facilitate through traffic and left turns while making it safer for pedestrians as well. He touted ongoing work at rebuilding streets and other infrastructure, and he noted how many items have been added to the budget by paying down the debt and saving money on interest – money that can be spent on services, such as community policing, without necessitating a municipal tax increase.