

Montclair plans budget, reduces debt



staff photo by nicholas katzban

Sean Spiller updates residents on the state of Township finances.

'Tis the season for the Township Council: budget season.

During his 3rd Ward community meeting this past Monday, councilmember Sean Spiller told residents how the municipal government is preparing for a new fiscal year.

Spiller said that right now, the new budget is in its first stage, during which heads of all municipal departments put together their own proposals based on what was spent last year, and employee concerns.

"Over the last number of years, we've added a lot of things to the budget, but haven't driven up the cost in terms of tax increases," said Spiller. He explained this has been accomplished by way of an "aggressive" debt reduction plan.

"I think a lot of the times, when you hear about debt reduction, what you hear is you're slowing the amount of debt," said Spiller. "We're not talking about that. We're talking about decreasing the debt itself." He noted that by reducing the amount owed, the costs of debt management services are lowered because the interest payments on that amount are lessened.

The councilmember noted that Hurricane Sandy in 2012 added to municipal costs and debt significantly, but that after three years, federal aid is beginning to arrive and offset the money that Montclair and other municipalities spent to cover damages from the storm.

Meanwhile, the township is looking into the development of a unified senior center, through which elder residents could visit one centralized building for all services, rather than separate, privately owned locations for each need.

"The Senior Citizens Advisory Council [SCAC] will be coming to [the council] with a concrete 'ask,' including a budget, and what services they'll be offering," said Spiller.

One attendee, who declined to give her name to The Montclair Times, told Spiller the plan sounds "like the same old thing again: 'we're going to do something for you.'" The woman said she has been to several meetings of the SCAC, and heard the plan come up repeatedly, but "doesn't see where it's going."

Before Spiller could answer the woman's concerns, another attendee, Adriana O'Toole, said that, as an advisory council, the SCAC "cannot do anything but advise."

According to O'Toole, another organization, Aging In Montclair, or AIM, has become a 501(c)3 nonprofit group, which can take action as a private entity with the help of grants.

Spiller supported the comments of both residents, and confirmed that a private entity could take ownership of a more inclusive senior center. He named the United Way of New Jersey Building on South Fullerton Avenue as a possible site, but clarified that the council will not totally fund a private development such as the proposed senior center.

However, Spiller said the council can offer a certain amount of funding to nonprofits, provided it is satisfied with an organization's plans and receives funding through other sources as well.

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