

## **Montclair library honored, budget hearings continue at Tuesday meeting**

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The Montclair Public Library took center stage during the Tuesday's Montclair Township Council meeting.

Council members honored the Montclair Public Library's Bellevue Avenue Branch centennial with a proclamation read by 1st Ward Councilman Bill Hurlock. During public comment, Edward Robin, president of the Friends of the Bellevue Avenue Library, credited community support and volunteerism for keeping the branch running since 2011, after budget cutbacks temporarily shut the branch.

Township Clerk Linda Wanat said that the library's outreach to her when she first moved to Montclair made it, in her opinion, "one of the best parts of Montclair."

Hurlock and former 1st Ward Councilman and current Deputy Mayor Robert Russo said they have used the library for meetings. Russo said that, through the years, the branch has become more than a library, and is a community center.

Shortly after the proclamation, Montclair Library Director David Hinkley presented this year's budget. This year, the library is requesting a restoration of previous township funding of \$85,000. The increase would bring Montclair's total allocation to the library up to \$3,134,312, according to Township Manager Marc Dashield.

The figure is still \$700,000-plus less than the library received from the town in 2008, according to Hinkley. The library director credited the Montclair Library Foundation for helping raise funds in recent years to replace dollars cut by the municipal government.

The additional funding would, in part, help the library add Monday hours from 6 to 8 p.m. at the Main Branch and Friday hours from 2 to 6 p.m. at the Bellevue Avenue Branch.

If approved, then the library's total hours at the Main Branch and Bellevue Avenue Branch to 60 and 32, respectively, nearing their previous highs of 62 and 35, respectively.

Hinkley said that Montclair's libraries are well-respected outside the township for their progressive approach, and he thanked employees sitting in the audience for going above and beyond their required duties.

"Montclair is served well," Hinkley said. "Very well."

Fourth Ward Councilwoman Renée Baskerville asked if the library has any plans to provide programming for local seniors. Hinkley said that it is the library's intention to restore its senior space and services. Second Ward Councilwoman Robin Schlager asked for the status of the café inside

the library and whatever fees are generated through there.

As the café and its predecessors are limited in terms of foot traffic, Hinkley said that the fee for the café has been waived to help the café make ends meet. Hinkley said that the waiver was logical as the café adds to the library in other ways. He noted that the café has a yearly contract with the library, and terms could change in the future.

### **Budget hearings for court and utilities**

The Montclair Municipal Court and water and sewer utilities also had budget hearings.

This year, the Municipal Court's budget is set to increase by \$11,350 to \$703,814. The increase is due to a 2.05 percent increase in wages from \$634,154 last year to \$647,154 this year.

The court's total revenues total \$1.6 million, according to Dashield, meaning that the court pays for itself.

One of last year's goals, according to Dashield, was to decrease the court's parking violation backlog - an effort the township has seen improvement in. The backlog in 2013 was 1,076 cases as compared to 3,959 in 2012.

Municipal Judge Kenneth Strait indicated that the elevator providing access to the court has been in disrepair. Dashield added that, while repaired on multiple occasions, the elevator is antiquated and a new elevator is needed.

Strait said that, if the elevator is not fixed in a timely fashion, then the administrative office of the Essex County Vicinage could require that the court temporarily relocate, an expensive proposition.

This year's Water Utility budget is set to decrease by \$24,257 to \$6,814,257, due to a \$92,060 decrease in salaries and a \$50,000 decrease in debt service. With revenues totaling \$887,650, the Water Utility will run taxpayers \$5,926,607.

The Sewer Utility budget is set to increase by \$110,627 due in large part to a \$100,000 increase in fees to the Passaic Valley Sewerage Commission.

With total revenues of \$510,708, the Sewer Utility will cost taxpayers \$4,420,467.

Water Bureau Director Gary Obszarny said that one of his primary focuses during this past year has been to identify and address infiltrations in the municipal sewer pipes. Drains, catch-basins and even personal slop-sinks have been discovered infiltrating the lines, causing backups during heavy rains. Obszarny said that manhole covers with holes that make them easier to lift also cause infiltrations.

Last year, Obszarny's department replaced 180 manhole covers and anticipates replacing another 200 this year.

In terms of replacing pipes, Obszarny said that the township has roughly 100 miles of piping and that he'd recommend pipes being replaced by at least one mile per year. Replacements, as Obszarny would envision, would immediately precede road overlay projects by the township.

Capital projects such as the elevator and requests by the library for energy-saving equipment are not included in this year's operating budget, Dashield told The Times. They will be examined for this year's capital improvement budget.

## **Up In Smoke**

The Township Council approved on second reading an ordinance banning smoking from municipal parks and outside the Municipal Building, Montclair Police Headquarters and Municipal Court, the Public Works Yard, and the Water Bureau.

Baskerville, who introduced and championed the ordinance, lauded her colleagues for including e-cigarettes in the ordinance as, in her opinion, their exclusion would have made children think that they are acceptable.

New Jersey Global Advisors on Smokefree Policy Executive Director Karen Blumenfeld congratulated the Township Council on the ordinance, adding that Montclair joins Orange, East Orange, South Orange, West Orange, Fairfield, Irvington, Maplewood and Nutley as Essex County municipalities with similar bans.

Essex County, Cedar Grove and Glen Ridge also have bans, albeit less restrictive, according to literature provided to The Times by Blumenfeld.

The ban entitles the township to obtain free signs and stickers for its parks, Blumenfeld said. The executive director added that she typically advises municipalities to make bans known in the Recreation Department portion of municipal websites, and to inform parents that they may not smoke during their children's events.

The ordinance was approved 6-1 with Councilman-at-Large Rich McMahon serving as the lone vote opposed. McMahon said that smoking is a legal activity and that he found the ordinance unduly restrictive.

## **What's for lunch?**

Also approved during Tuesday's meeting was an ordinance limiting the number of food trucks able to park and operate near Montclair High School.

As reported by The Montclair Times, the township will sell permits to vendors for two spaces on the north side of Chestnut Street and one on the east side of North Fullerton Avenue. The ordinance was seen by council members as a compromise after a Montclair Police Department officer determined that the usual five trucks around the school posed a safety hazard.

McMahon said that he did not see how three trucks were less dangerous than five and that the ordinance was, again, unduly restrictive.

Russo proposed that the council implement the ordinance and amend it in the future if necessary.

The ordinance passed by a vote of 6-1, with McMahon opposed.

## **MPD's Mobile Command Unit**

The Township Council approved a resolution awarding the purchase contract for a Montclair Police Department "mobile command vehicle" to LDV Inc. of Burlington, Wisc., for an amount not to exceed \$169,404.

The custom-manufactured 2014 Ford F-550 will provide the department with a mobile work station for both community policing and during major events.

The resolution passed 6-1, with Baskerville voting "no," citing her belief that the vehicle may not be the best way to conduct community policing.

## **Make Music Day**

Residents of Montclair and West Orange requested during public comment that the Township Council draft a proclamation declaring June 21 as "Make Music Day" in Montclair.

Speakers indicated that many Montclairites already participate in Make Music Day outside of Montclair in New York City. By making a proclamation, Montclair would join about 750 communities around the world recognizing Make Music Day.

## **Proclamations**

Schlager read a proclamation honoring and thanking MHS seniors Sammi Siegel and Elena Tsemberis for doing an inventory of municipal parking lots, determining how they comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act, and making recommendations for the township.

Earlier in their high school careers, Siegel and Tsemberis were among a foursome of MHS students who successfully campaigned for a female presidential debate moderator.

In a separate proclamation, Baskerville and the Township Council proclaimed May Preeclampsia Awareness Month, recognizing a disorder that affects pregnant women and their unborn babies.

## **School district allegations**

Two members of MEA 250, a group of Montclair School District unionized employees who also reside in Montclair, read a statement claiming that the district administration ignores their input, sets unsound educational goals, and over-tests students. The members said that they also took exception to administrative claims that employee contracts were the driver of this year's budget increase, and instead attributed the 4.1 percent budget increase to financial mismanagement by administrators.

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