

THE MONTCLAIR TIMES

Montclair representatives call for state, federal reaction to climate change

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Following last week's public urging by President Barack Obama for reduced carbon emissions and an increased investment in energy efficiency, Essex County and municipal representatives, local environmental leaders and members of Montclair's business community gathered at Montclair Fire Headquarters today to cope with the concern at the local level and request state and federal action.

"Climate change is not just an environmental issue," District 5 Freeholder Brendan Gill said. "There are tangible impacts on public health, safety and commerce. We don't have to look any further than Hurricane Irene or Sandy to see adverse weather conditions are becoming more frequent and increasingly affecting our daily lives."



Brendan Gill

Gill, who represents Montclair on the Board of Freeholders, and organized the event, said that the event was an opportunity for government officials, environmental activists, and the business community to coalesce on a common issue. The timing of the joint press conference, Gill said, was important for two reasons.

For one, in the aftermath of Obama's most recent call for environmental change, the president's office has reached out to local elected officials for community support, Gill said.

Climate change has also been on the forefront of the consciousness of many people, Gill said. Just last week, flash floods caused delays on the Montclair-Boonton Rail Line - an instance, Gill opined, of an extreme weather condition. Additionally, Gill cited polls indicating that 95 percent of the national science community believes efforts should be done to reduce carbon emissions and 65 percent of American citizens want something done.

Montclair Sustainability Officer Gray Russell echoed Gill's sentiment, saying that the conference was a bit about striking while the iron is hot, and preventing the planet from getting hotter. Montclair has long been a leading municipality in environmental initiatives, observed Russell, and Wednesday served as an opportunity to both reinvigorate those efforts and call for state and federal officials to follow suit.

The township, in 2010, received recognition from the state Department of Environmental Protection as a "climate showcase community," Russell said, for its efforts in purchasing alternative-fuel vehicles, the construction of the green Charles H. Bullock School and other endeavors. Other efforts have included \$170,000 in state- and federally-funded lighting, heating and ventilation improvements at seven municipal buildings that have, in recent years, saved Montclair \$65,000 annually in utility costs, Russell said.

Deputy Mayor Robert Russo was mayor early last decade when Montclair purchased six natural-gas-powered vehicles, several of which are still in operation. At the time, according to Russo, many elected officials had their heads in the sand when it came to climate change, a practice that Russo said cannot continue. Township Councilman-At-Large Rich McMahon echoed those sentiments.

Fourth Ward Councilwoman Renée Baskerville, a pediatrician by trade, said that she was particularly concerned by how increased temperatures and air pollutants impact vulnerable children.

Walking the Walk

Beyond exploring green options for homes and vehicles, addressing climate change will require behavioral changes among citizens, former Mayor Jerry Fried said.

Decades of federal decisions have made Americans dependent on fossil fuels and practitioners of inefficient lifestyles, said Fried, who cited the residential developments away from cities that has created long vehicular commutes.

Montclair is unique, Fried said, as its infrastructure was built prior to the popularity of cars and was, instead, built around walkability and access to trains. Fried predicted that future generations will create a strong demand for such walkable suburban communities.

Cyndi Steiner, executive director of the NJ Bike & Walk Coalition said that Montclair's upcoming development, called "Valley & Bloom," is already in the process of extending alternative modes of transportation outside of transit villages through its partnership with the coalition. Emphasizing shuttle services and the promotion of bicycle use, Steiner said that the development will look to reduce traffic flow toward transit areas such as Bay Street and Walnut Street.

In terms of behavioral changes, Essex County Environmental Commission Co-Chair Jennifer Duckworth said that Montclair has been vigilant in reducing buses idling near schools. Moving forward, Duckworth said, communities countywide are making efforts to reduce idling of all vehicles in excess of three minutes.

Common Good

Montclair Center BID Executive Director Luther Flurry quipped that some people were wondering why a

business representative would be active in green initiatives. Flurry claimed that the two focuses were not mutually exclusive.

Meredith Nole, owner of American Efficient Lighting in Montclair, spoke to attendees about the need for citizens to collectively reduce energy demands. Nole displayed an example of a high-efficiency fixture.

Nole is far from the only green-conscious business owner in Montclair, Flurry said.

Roughly 10 years ago, Flurry told The Times, two or three Montclair Center businesses focused on environmental initiatives. That number has grown to about 40, Flurry said, with merchants practicing everything from energy efficiency to not using Styrofoam containers in restaurants.

Last year, Montclair Center launched a pedestrian and parking kiosk system with estimated walk times geared toward promoting walking as opposed to driving around Montclair's mid-town. Recently planted trees on South Park Street, when fully grown, will offer a 80 to 90 percent canopy, also with the environment in mind.

With an increased public awareness, Flurry said that many customers, particularly those in Montclair, have come to value green business and seek it out.

Observed Flurry: "Doing good is part of doing well."

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<http://www.northjersey.com/news/environment/town-makes-call-for-change-1.1015937?page=all>