



Montclair Council casts wary eye on drone use



LINDA MOSS/STAFF

Third Ward Councilman Sean Spiller and Fourth Ward Councilwoman Renée Baskerville both voiced concerns about the municipality employing drones at Tuesday's Township Council meeting.

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Montclair is considering adding a new device to its toolbox: drones. But not all the Township Council is on board yet.

Several council members reacted with skepticism and questions on Tuesday night when it was disclosed that buying drones was part of a \$3.475 million bond ordinance that the local governing body was voting on at its meeting.

The council adopted the ordinance, which will pay for townwide capital improvements, but it remains to be seen if any drones are purchased in light of the issues raised at the session. For example, Councilman-at-Large Bob Russo said it should be a policy decision made by the council, not by any municipal department, whether or not the township should use drones.

Several New Jersey municipalities have taken action to restrict the use of drones within their borders, including Garfield and Toms River.

Fourth Ward Councilwoman Renée Baskerville, who abstained from voting on the bond issuance, brought up

the drone issue after reiterating her dismay that the various municipal departments heads didn't do individual presentations to the council this year about their capital-budget needs. The bond ordinance mentions the drones but doesn't break out exactly how much would be spent to buy them. Baskerville wanted to know who had decided what was included in the bond ordinance and what the drones would be used for.

Mayor Robert Jackson said that the municipal public works department was considering using drones to inspect snow-removal sites in the winter to make sure that contractors were doing a good job. It would be "a more efficient way" of managing and seeing what a contractor is doing rather than sending a town employee out to check, according to the mayor.

"I also believe that the police department is looking at it for potential at a jazz festival, or some big event ... as a way of monitoring events, again, more globally," Jackson said. "It may or may not happen, but we include it [in the bond ordinance] just in case it does."

Third Ward Councilman Sean Spiller joined with Baskerville and Russo in expressing concern over the drones. Spiller asked Township Attorney Ira Karasick if the municipality would need guidance for regulating the drones, saying that a lot of other towns are trying "navigate" their use.

"I think it's very important that before we actually we start any serious use of drones, either by the government or by individuals, we do need to come up with some regulations," Karasick said. "Many towns are already tackling this issue ... There are a lot of ordinances being created now. Essentially there are privacy issues. There are issues of the drone actually hitting somebody, causing danger, etc. There are also federal laws that apply to the airspace. So all those things take into account, I've been working on that."

Karasick said he would speed up his research if the township was contemplating acquiring drones.

Russo said if any town department is considering using the devices, "that's somewhat of a policy decision." He also recounted his experience with drones.

"I was recently on the beach in Asbury and a drone came right over, I don't know what this drone was doing," Russo said. "I had a big issue with the drone ... It could have fallen and hurt people ... It's a whole new world of 1984. So let's get more input on this before we do anything."