

Council chooses McMahon over Baskerville for deputy mayor



Fourth Ward Councilwoman Renee Baskerville was passed over for deputy mayor on June 25. FILE PHOTO

By Jaimie Julia Winters

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A resolution on Tuesday's night agenda to appoint Councilwoman Renee Baskerville as deputy mayor never made it out of closed session.

After returning from executive session at the June 25 meeting, Mayor Robert Jackson asked if there was a nomination for the deputy mayor's position instead of naming Baskerville. Councilman Sean Spiller put forth a motion "for the purpose of discussion" to appoint Councilman Rich McMahon as deputy mayor instead. Councilman Bill Hurlock seconded the motion.

A quick roll call followed, with Baskerville and Councilwoman Robin Schlager voting no, Councilman Bob Russo and Jackson abstaining, and Spiller, Hurlock and McMahon voting yes, resulting in McMahon being named the next deputy mayor.

Baskerville said she was blindsided, confused and hurt by the vote.

The resolution in the night's agenda packet read: "Be it resolved by the Council of the Township of Montclair, in the County of Essex, that commencing July 1, 2019, Renee Baskerville hereby is appointed deputy mayor."



Rich McMahon will be the next deputy mayor. FILE PHOTO

Baskerville said that when she and the mayor/council ticket won in 2016, it was mutually agreed upon that they would rotate the position of deputy mayor through the wards starting with the first and ending in the fourth and that the order of deputy mayor would be Hurlock of the First Ward, Schlager of

the Second Ward, Spiller of the Third Ward and Baskerville of Fourth Ward.

McMahan and Russo are councilmen-at-large, meaning they don't represent a specific ward, but the town as a whole.

When she questioned the order of the rotation in 2016, Baskerville claims that Hurlock advised her that even though she would be last in the rotation, she would be the deputy mayor during the next mayor/council election, which will occur in May 2020.

Baskerville said she thought she had the support of most of the council, even up to Tuesday's vote. Now her trust in her colleagues is waning, she said.

Specifically she called out Russo on his abstention and Hurlock's vote for McMahan.

"If their word means nothing [when it comes] to me, it means very little when it comes to matters of the township," Baskerville said, holding back tears. "I was lied to. I am concerned with the character of my colleagues."

Hurlock said he would not respond to Baskerville's allegations and called her behavior "self-serving."

Russo said he abstained from voting for McMahan and couldn't vote for Baskerville simply because her nomination was not on the floor.

"I would have supported you, Renee," Russo said.

At that point, McMahan said into his microphone, "Thank you and good night," and Jackson made a motion to adjourn the meeting.

The role of deputy mayor in Montclair system of government is to act in the place and stead of the mayor in the event of the absence, disability or illness. The deputy mayor cannot make

appointments or succeed the mayor in the event that the mayor's office should become vacant.