



COVID-19: In times of crisis, residents ask to hear more from mayor, council



While the mayor and council gave residents some words of encouragement concerning the COVID-19 pandemic at the broadcast-only council meeting on Tuesday, residents asked why their elected officials have not been sending out messages to the public.

SCREENSHOT COURTESY OF MONTCLAIR TOWNSHIP

BY JAIMIE JULIA WINTERS

winters@montclairlocal.news

While some towns and their leaders are issuing daily messages to residents amid the COVID-19 pandemic, some Montclairites are criticizing the leadership here for remaining mostly quiet.

“Where are the Montclair politicians representing this town? I’ve heard more from local New York jurisdictions

than this one. Maybe I am on the wrong channel but where is the leadership here?" said one Facebook poster.

Although residents can sign up for daily alerts or go to the township website to read about happenings such as closures and the number of cases in the township, the mayor and council have not been part of those alerts.

Over the last two weeks, residents who logged on or had signed up for notifications through SWIFT 911 learned that parking restrictions were suspended, the May 12 election would be mail-in ballot only, township offices closed and the March 24 mayor and council meeting would be held remotely. And on March 24, the township reported: "The township Health Department reports that as of this afternoon, the confirmed number of COVID-19 cases in Montclair is 21; four individuals did not survive the illness."

"Where are the words of encouragement from our elected officials?" asked a caller to Montclair Local who wished to remain anonymous.

Montclair's TV34 which airs government meetings and programs daily having to do with local happenings, seniors or history, does not have a scheduled message on COVID-19 by the mayor or council.

Two weeks ago and then again on March 15, Montclair's Director of Nursing, Health and Human Service Peggy Brodowski did post videos, available on the township YouTube page, with advice on how to keep safe during COVID-19.

At the end of March 24 council meeting, closed to the public but broadcast on Youtube and TV34, the mayor and council did send out messages to residents mourning the loss of two residents, reminding residents of social distancing, to stay safe, and that as Montclairites, they would get through COVID-19 together.

In other towns, officials are getting their messages out to residents via social media and videos, some simply shot on their phones. Rutherford's mayor and council rotate posting videos on Facebook and daily debriefings in emails with updates and encouragement to residents. In Millburn, the mayor there has been sending out recorded phone messages about three times a week.

In Lyndhurst, the mayor announced the first person to test positive for COVID-19 there in a video on Vimeo, and reminded residents to support one another and offered encouragement. They are also using an OEM app to get real time information out to residents.

In Carlstadt, the mayor is using a town Facebook page to post videos and to announce updates. Eleven other New Jersey towns had videos from local elected officials posted on Vimeo on March 24.

Montclair Mayor Robert Jackson did not respond to an email, sent prior to Tuesday night's council meeting, asking why there had not been any statements from the mayor and council during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Another email sent to all the council members was responded to only by Councilman Sean Spiller and Councilwoman Renée Baskerville, the two candidates in Montclair's May 12 mayoral election.

"They are right," Baskerville said. "There has been a lack of or no communication as a body with our

residents.”

As a medical doctor caring for children and families for 37 years, she said she told the council she would be available to create video messages, because “the coronavirus pandemic is certainly the greatest public health challenge that any of us has experienced, we should be more in touch with our residents,” she said.

Baskerville has been posting advice on Facebook but said that the mayor and council should have united messages going out to not only advise but to inspire residents as well.

Spiller told Montclair Local that he created a COVID-19 video statement that plays on TV 34 on a loop. [The video](#) is also posted on his Facebook page along with “tons of information,” he said.