



The 2019 preservation awards announced



One of this year's preservation awards is 20 Clinton Ave. - Thomas House.

Montclair Historic Preservation Commission members have picked their winners for the 2019 historic preservation awards.

The commission will hold its 2019 Historic Preservation Awards Program at its upcoming meeting, Thursday, May 30, 7 p.m. in the Council Chambers on the first floor of the Municipal Building at 205 Claremont Avenue.

The commission is pleased to present the following awards:

Bricks & Mortar Preservation Award

- **Residential: 20 Clinton Ave. - Thomas House**

Homeowners John and Elizabeth Thomas and Francis C. Klein & Associates Architects will be recognized for the reconstruction of a historically accurate porch that returned this 19th-century house to its original charm. In keeping with the historic period, the homeowners and Francis C. Klein & Associates also removed the 20th-century additions of a classical pediment, sunray transom window and lighting fixtures. The fish scale and diamond shingles coexist happily with the new metal seam roof. In addition, the removal of the shutters further enhances the Queen Anne character of this house.

- **Residential: 21 Plymouth Street and 41 Plymouth Street**

Developer Sustainable Sanctuary Homes, LLC and Sionas Architecture, P.C. will be recognized for the rehabilitation of these two vintage Montclair homes, one from the 1890's and the other from the 1910s that have been renovated and rehabilitated into multi-family dwellings. Paul Sionas and Sustainable Sanctuary Homes have adaptively reused two prime examples of Montclair's architecture. Restoring and improving the two exteriors reinforces the domestic character of Plymouth Street, reminiscent of the time when one family homes lined the street. Removing aluminum siding, improving the driveway, adding substantial landscaping and removing medical office space has vastly improved 21 Plymouth Street. The work on 41 Plymouth Street maintains its Colonial Craftsmen stucco exterior while offering modern amenities in two units. This type of adaptive reuse is encouraged and ensures that Montclair's streetscapes will maintain their attractive charm and character.

- **Non-Residential: 222-230 Bloomfield Ave.**

Property owner WE MCL Holdings, LLC, design firm Green Stories, LLC, architect Mark Bess and American Terracotta LLC will be recognized for the restoration and replication of the historic façade of this building. Hidden beneath aluminum siding, the team has worked to remove the non-historic elements and restore the façade to its prior condition. American Terracotta, LLC replicated historic terracotta elements. The restoration of the façade maintains the historic building in the Town Center Historic District and improves the commercial area.

- **Non-Residential: 237-249 Lorraine Ave. - Warner Building**

Property owner Michael Pavel and architect Jarmel Kizel will be recognized for their restoration of this Harmonizing building in the Upper Montclair Historic Business District. The restoration of the historic building and the sensitive new addition to the rear retains the historic character while providing modern amenities.

- **Institutional: Montclair Public Library - Bellevue Branch**

The Bellevue Avenue Branch Library, designed by Francis A. Nelson, a Montclair resident working in the New York architectural firm of Nelson and Van Wagenen, is a Carnegie funded library dating from 1913. It is listed on the New Jersey and National registers of historic places and the local historic district of Upper Montclair Business District. In 2016, the Montclair Public Library decided to repair the historic “Austral” windows which are a character-defining element of the building. Working with Mary Delaney Krugman, Preservation Specialist, these patented self-balanced windows were repaired and returned to working order. Dell-Tech was selected as the restoration contractor because of their experience with rehabilitation of historic windows. Ms. Krugman and the project team of Morse Associates of Poestenkill, NY and DBC Preservation Architecture of Glenmont supervised the entire restoration. Historic paint samples from the building were uncovered and the Austral windows were returned to their original condition. The finished project has enhanced one of the most important buildings in the Upper Montclair Historic District.

Preservation Service Award

- **Friends of Anderson Park**

Anderson Park is an oasis of greenery and tranquility adjoining the Upper Montclair Historic Business District, the Boonton-Greenwood Lake commuter train line and the residential areas of Oakcroft and North Mountain Ave. An Olmsted Brothers designed landscape gives Anderson Park a naturalistic setting with informal plantings and winding pathways. Scott Kevelson, president and founder of the Friends of Anderson Park, a non-profit conservancy, has worked tirelessly to promote the natural, cultural, historic and educational qualities of the site. Their stewardship includes maintenance and replenishment of the original Olmsted plantings. Since 2006, they have planted 160 trees and 60 shrubs, including a rose bed, in cooperation with the Essex County Parks. They host an annual “Music Under the June Moon” event, plus numerous educational incentives such as the short-story contest and art projects. Nominated to the State and National registers in 2009, through the efforts of Lianne Renner, Anderson Park with Scott Kevelson at the helm, continues to surprise and invigorate the current residents of Montclair.

- **Lianne Renner**

Lianne Renner has shown a passion & commitment level to Montclair ‘s history and preservation over many years. This includes special projects (e.g. researching, compiling and presenting the History of The Bellevue Theater) or her Friends of Anderson Park ongoing community outreach (e.g. annual historical walking tours of Upper Montclair Village and Anderson Park). She regularly attends township meetings and community functions to further historic preservation understanding and practice. She is one of Montclair’s most ardent advocates of Historic Preservation.

Preservationist of the Year Award

- **Donato DiGeronimo**

DiGeronimo is a Board Member of the Montclair History Center and a partner with Montclair State University to preserve the diverse and varied histories of Montclair. He is a font of information about Montclair history from one corner of the town to the other, a booster of Montclair's history through his involvement and leadership in scores of civic committees over the years, Donato is a homegrown historian helping to capture and make more widely known the multiethnic history that has made Montclair into a culturally rich community.

Preservationist of the Year Award - Special Recognition

- **Rev. Royal F. Shepard, Jr.**

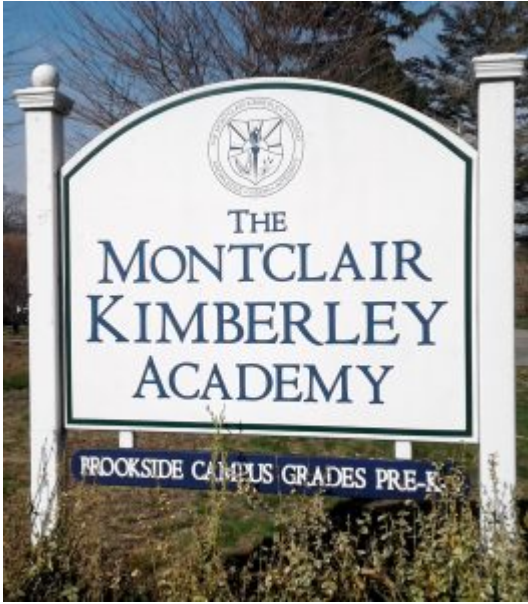
Shepard will be recognized for his special contribution to the Township of Montclair. Mr. Shepard was sworn in as Township Historian by the Township Council on July 23, 1996 and served in the role until 2004. During this time, he also served on the Montclair Historic Preservation Commission beginning in March 1999 and serving as Vice Chair of the Commission from February 2000 until his resignation from the Commission in December 2002. He also served as a Trustee for the Montclair Historical Society (now the Montclair History Center).

Shepard was born and raised in Montclair, loved the history of the Township and shared his knowledge of the history with many. In 2003, he published the book "Montclair" with his daughter Elizabeth Shepard. In addition, he provided contributions to the Montclair 125th anniversary book, *Montclair 1868-1993*, and *Montclair Millennium Book 2000-2002*.

Shepard also created the Montclair History Roundtable, a forum to discuss the Township's History, led walking tours, conducted presentations, and served as a regular contributor and historic verifier for the Montclair Times.

Shepard passed away earlier in 2019 and the Montclair Historic Preservation Commission is proud to recognize his many significant contributions to the Township's history.

The Montclair Historic Preservation Commission (MHPC), established by ordinance in 1994, is responsible for protecting Montclair's architectural heritage and increasing public awareness of the unique historical and cultural dimensions of the Township's buildings, streetscapes and landscapes. For more information, please visit the MHPC website [HERE](#).



MKA gets parking lot, cafeteria approval



The planning board approved Montclair Kimberly Academy's application for reconfiguration of its driveway, parking lot and a new cafeteria. TINA PAPPAS/FOR MONTCLAIR LOCAL

By Tina Pappas
for Montclair Local

Backups along Orange Road will be alleviated once a parking lot and driveway are upgraded at Montclair Kimberly Academy's Brookdale Campus. The Montclair Zoning Board of Adjustment approved the school's application for changes to the parking lot and pick-up and drop-off lanes. Montclair at its April 25 meeting. Also planned for the school is the addition of a cafeteria/auditorium. The school is located at 224 Orange Road. The plans include a double lane loop for drop off and pick ups, a reduction in the number of parking spaces and the addition of more greenery at the school, which will increase privacy for local residents. Cars backing up along Orange Road and Warren Street have been problematic for some time with the current one-way double circulation patterns at the school.

The one-lane driveway would become two traffic lanes in the pick-up and drop-off school area, said Alan Lothian, traffic engineer.

The parking lot would be reconfigured from 83 spaces to 70 spaces, removing seven parking spaces closest to Orange Road. The proposed electric charging station will be in the southern parking area.

A six-foot fence will be installed along the northern property line.

Landscaping changes include the addition of two landscaped berms along Orange Road; one between the northern and central driveways and one between the central and southern driveways.

The number of pole light fixtures would be reduced from 22 to 14, said Leonard Savino, site engineer. The timeframe for afternoon pick-ups was also drafted. Bus loading time will be at 2:15 p.m. and located at the far end of the cafeteria/auditorium addition. Parents would then enter the site and line up in the double-lane driveway near the school entrance. Buses would leave by 2:20 p.m. and parents by 2:45 p.m. Staff remaining on campus for another hour.

The proposed driveway will be located less than 200 feet from an intersection, which the board approved. A waiver was approved of parking spot aisle widths of 22-foot instead of 24-foot. The board also approved a 70-space lot instead of the 83 space requirement.



Montclair's PlanetCivic goes statewide



Just in time for the November election, the Montclair-based group PlanetCivic on Friday expanded beyond taking on just local issues to statewide ones. The group, founded by township resident Javier Guardo, has set up a New Jersey page on its website and will be seeking feedback on state issues.

"This means you now belong to PlanetCivic's Montclair community as well as its New Jersey community, and you can cast votes and propose initiatives in both groups," Guardo said in an email on Friday.

He launched PlanetCivic earlier this year as a mechanism for residents to bring issues to the attention of the Township Council, but has now decided it is time to go statewide.

"Our state political system has been at a stalemate for too long," Guardo said. "As New Jersey heads to the polls this November, voters deserve action on the issues that matter most to them. PlanetCivic provides a way for you to demonstrate to your candidates and elected leaders the level of support behind your ideas at this pivotal moment."

The group's New Jersey page already has information regarding proposed initiatives regarding "stopping the PennEast Pipeline, resisting the Concealed-carry Gun Reciprocity Act, fast-tracking the Gateway Project, re-entering the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative."



Council passes SALT resolution, hears grant requests



Township Engineer Kim Craft described the projects that the municipality is seeking grants for at the Montclair Council's conference meeting Tuesday night. LINDA MOSS/STAFF

By LINDA MOSS

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Saying that proposed federal-tax changes will be devastating for New Jersey residents, the Township Council weighed in on the issue Tuesday night by passing a resolution against the legislation that will eliminate so-called "SALT" deductions.

The local governing body at its conference meeting unanimously voted for the resolution, which urges Congress to protect the deductibility of state and local taxes, SALT, from federal income taxes, a feature that's been part of the federal tax code for more than 100 years.

"I emphatically vote yes, because I believe the federal government is ruining our state by doing this, Congress and our president," At-large Councilman Bob Russo said. "I think we have to send a message to them. It is absolutely outrageous what they are doing."

That action came after the council held a hearing where representatives of more than a half dozen entities, local nonprofits as well as the township, made their pleas to receive Community Development Block Grants. The municipality has applied for grants for five projects, including improvements to Rand Park, seeking

roughly \$97,000 for that alone.

Representatives of United Way of Northern New Jersey, COPE Center Inc., the Montclair Neighborhood Development Center, HOME Corp, Start Out Fresh Intervention Advocates, known as S.O.F.I.A., Brother to Brother, Succeed2gether and the Interfaith Hospitality Network also addressed the council explaining what they would do with the grant money they are requesting, initiatives ranging from help for the homeless, anti-opioid addiction programs, after-school tutoring, and safe-dating courses for young women.

The CDBG program is run by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and funds local community-development activities.

While attending to those local issues, Russo and Third Ward Councilman Sean Spiller said that they wanted to make a statement about the controversial tax-reform legislation that the U.S. Senate passed last week. Experts say that removing SALT deductions will particularly hurt residents in New Jersey, New York and California, where residents pay high local and state taxes.

Earlier this week, state Governor-elect Phil Murphy, New York Governor Andrew Cuomo and California Governor Jerry Brown held a joint press conference to announce their plans to team up to derail the legislation, possibly by challenging it in court.

The municipality's resolution, and critics of the proposed tax reform, contend that without SALT deductions New Jersey residents will be subject to double taxation.



Fourth Ward Councilwoman Renée Baskerville was in festive garb at the Township Council's conference meeting Tuesday night. She had come from a holiday event at the Charles H. Bullock School.
LINDA MOSS/STAFF

"The deduction is especially important for middle-income homeowners, as 50 percent of the deductions claimed by taxpayers making \$50,000 to \$100,000 are for property taxes," the resolution said.

It asks New Jersey's Congressional delegation "to oppose, with voice and vote, any proposal to eliminate the fair and reasonable SALT deductibility provision" from the Federal Tax Code.

"This is something that is pretty straightforward for all of us here in New Jersey, in terms of obviously asking Congress to look at what's happening at the federal level ... to ensure that New Jersey's best interests are ... [considered] going forward," Spiller said.

Even First Ward Councilman Bill Hurlock, who has said he abhors township resolutions on national issues, voted for Tuesday's SALT one.

"I don't usually vote on these types of things, but I will vote yes in this instance," he said.

During the CDBG hearing, Township Engineer Kim Craft outlined the projects that the municipality is seeking funds for. In addition to adding barrier-free improvements to Rand Park's playground, the township is proposing the repaving of: Fulton and Miller streets, at \$170,000; Hitchcock Place, at \$76,000; and Woodland Avenue and Wheeler Street, at \$229,000.

Mayor Robert Jackson questioned the cost estimates, saying that they seemed "extraordinarily" high.

HOMECorp's Acting Executive Director David Gill made a pitch for roughly \$69,000 to replace 23 windows at that group's affordable-housing residence on Williams Street, which is nearly 100 years old.

The United Way has applied for \$100,000 to create a new driveway for its building on South Fullerton Avenue, which currently only has one driveway for entrance and exit.

Brother to Brother, led by executive director Joe Davis, for the first time ever applied for a CDBG grant. Davis told the council that his organization is seeking \$25,000 to create a summer, night-time mentoring program for males from the six to the eighth grades.

That program would be held from 5 p.m. to 8 p.m., and aims to help build self-esteem for boys and keep them busy during summer nights, Davis told the council.



Fight continues for 96-year-old's property subdivision



Longtime Montclair resident Samuel Debnam, spoke to the council on May 1, regarding an application to subdivide his property, which was not passed by the planning board. Several local residents came out in support of Debnam's application during the council meeting.
TINA PAPPAS/ FOR MONTCLAIR LOCAL

By Tina Pappas

for Montclair Local

Community members appealed to the council to grant a property subdivision on behalf of a well-known senior citizen so that he could afford to stay in Montclair where he raised his family.

An application for the subdivision was denied at a Feb. 26 planning board meeting after a tie vote resulted in preventing the approval for the property subdivision at 448 Washington Ave. Ninety-six-year-old Samuel Debnam, who many residents regard as a long-time pillar of the community, sought the subdivision so he could sell half his property to a developer for the construction of a one-family home. Debnam said the sale of half his property was the only way he could afford to stay in the township after exhausting his reverse mortgage.

The subdivision, presented by developer Mitchell MacGregor, required planning board approval to allow a change from the required 60 feet to two 50-foot-wide lots. Debnam's attorney Alan Trembulak, in his arguments for allowing the 50-foot properties, referred to the planning board's recent recommendation to the council that the lot width in the Forth Ward neighborhood change from 60 feet to 50 feet. The application had initial support from planning board chair John Wynn. However, after some residents voiced opposition of the subdivision contending sunlight and density would be changed on the block, several planning board members ultimately voted against the application.

Community members recalled to the council how the Debnam family had helped them throughout their lives. Mayor Robert Jackson said he also had a connection with Debnam, whose parents helped raise him. Charles Williams, longtime resident and former legislative director to Lt. Governor Sheila Oliver, called for the council to investigate the grounds of the application's rejection.

"He's a World War II veteran," said Williams. "How is it that other locations with similar lots were approved? How does it get determined? Developers come from all over the place and they pass right through."

Roger Terry, former councilman, also spoke on Debnam's behalf, stating Debnam has served the community

for decades and deserved proper consideration.

Debnam presented photos of other similarly-sized lots on his street that had been subdivided, and showing that sunlight would not be compromised as a result of the subdivision. He also refuted comments about the potential for students who walk to school to be put in danger if the subdivision brought in more traffic, stating students on his block get bused and do not walk. He said he cannot sell his home due to the reverse mortgage, which became exhausted, and that he is in need of money.

“I served the town very well,” he added.

Jackson called Debnam “an icon to this community” and greatly respected.

“Any sense of injustice applied to that family hits me personally because I view it as my family,” the mayor said. “This is a family that has made a tremendous impact on our community.”

Jackson stated he was not accusing planning board members of any wrong-doing, but reiterated that he and Wynn would continue to have discussions and look into why the application failed to pass.



Montclair approves new affordable housing administrator



By Kelly Nicholaides

for Montclair Local

The Montclair Mayor and Council approved an \$18,900 contract on Sept. 4 with [Community Grants, Planning & Housing LLC](#) to serve as an administrative agency for Montclair’s affordable housing stock.

The company will oversee 129 affordable housing units built through the Housing Trust Fund located at Siena, Valley & Bloom, Residence and other locations throughout town.

The Cranbury-based company replaces the former administrative agency Piazza & Associates. The contract includes \$8,150 to maintain the affordable housing waiting list of more than 3,000, town planner Janice Talley said. Additionally, the governing body approved an updated Housing Trust Fund spending plan through 2025.

“The new company will reach out to each occupant annually to make sure they still reside there. During the first year, new protocols for the waiting list will be added, including making communications in digital and online format. There’s a large inventory of units and the new company will better serve and respond to people on the waiting list. There’s also new procedures for local preference to get into certain units,” said Talley.

Montclair has 600 affordable housing units, but only 129 fall under the Housing Trust Fund. The rest were built through public money through the state’s affordable housing program and are open to residents throughout the state. They include residences at The Siena, Montclair Mews, Bay Street Commons, Montclair Residences and Montclarion II.

The upcoming Seymour Street development housing will include an affordable housing component with preference to Montclair residents.

Montclair NAACP Housing Committee Co-Chair William Scott said the waiting list of 3,000 people seeking housing from Montclair and beyond reflects the ongoing issue of too little supply for the demand.

“If you’ve got 25 affordable housing units and a waiting list of 3,000, you’re not advancing the ball,” Scott said. “Montclair has roughly 14,000 housing units, around 40 percent renters, and thousands who cannot afford the rent. Montclair renters are at the mercy of the market.”

[READ: Water company served with violation notice](#)

[READ: Parklet opens Saturday](#)

Effecting change through advocacy helped Montclair provide up to 20 percent affordable housing set asides with each development. The NAACP chapter has successfully lobbied for the higher percentage for some zoning areas like Lackawanna, but high rents and rent increases will continue to be an issue without municipal rent controls, Scott noted.

Montclair adopted the Housing Trust Fund Spending Plan on Oct. 8, 2002. Amended plans were approved on Aug. 5, 2009 and Jan. 26, 2012, according to the resolution.

The Council on Affordable Housing granted substantive certification to the township in 2009. Since then, the township proposed a consent order with Superior Court to permit collection and expenditure of development fees for affordable housing as indicated in the updated spending plan that projects fees and expenditures through 2025.

The new spending plan approved this week includes projected revenues of \$1,203,000 through 2018. The town will spend \$225,000 to rehabilitate 15 units and dedicate \$182,885 to render units more affordable to

households earning 30 percent or less of the median income by region.

Montclair collects developer fees for commercial and residential construction, which go into the Housing Trust Fund. The rates are 1.5 percent of equalized assessed value per house, 2.5 percent for non-residential construction. All development subsidizes new affordable units, as well as the rehabilitation plan for existing units, Talley explained.

Details of the contract with CGPG to administer the affordable housing on the 129 units include sections on affirmative marketing, household certification and affordability controls, processing requests from unit owners, enforcement, and recording of project files, inventory, bank accounts and monitoring reports on resale and rental units.

The median rent is \$1,422 in Montclair. Low and moderate-income household guidelines in Montclair are \$44,000 and \$71,000, respectively.



"ALTERNATIVE PLAN" (enlarged)
VIEW FROM BLOOMFIELD AVE. - LACKAWANNA PLAZA

Alternative Lackawanna plan diverts from developers' options



The scene from Bloomfield Avenue of an alternate plan for the redevelopment of Lackawanna Plaza that incorporates its historic train station. The plan was done by Smith Maran Architecture. COURTESY SMITH MARAN ARCHITECTURE & INTERIORS

By LINDA MOSS

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Township Council members have two redevelopment plans in their hands for Lackawanna Plaza, including one

that satisfies the cries of historic preservationists who want the landmark train station at the site incorporated into the project's design.

The council's Economic Development Committee is now studying a redevelopment plan that was drafted by Phillips Preiss Grygiel LLC, a consultant commissioned by the local governing body for the task. That Hoboken-based firm submitted its 92-page plan June 1 for review by the council, which has asked the EDC to evaluate it.

But on June 1 the council also received an alternative redevelopment plan for Lackawanna Plaza, which was created by Smith Maran Architecture & Interiors LLC. That Montclair-based firm is the township's redevelopment-design consultant. While the EDC won't abandon the Phillips Preiss plan — which it plans to amend — for the one from Smith Maran, it has it in hand to look at as an example of redevelopment that fully integrates the historic station into its design.

The redevelopment plan commissioned by the council mirrors the proposal that Pinnacle Cos. of Montclair and Hampshire Cos. of Morristown have for Lackawanna Plaza, a roughly 8-acre site on Bloomfield Avenue that straddles Grove Street. The property is now home to a nearly vacant shopping center that once housed a Pathmark, which closed in November 2015.

The site was originally a train station, which has been designated a historic landmark by the township, state and federal officials. The Pig & Prince restaurant occupies the station's former waiting room, and train sheds and even a watering trough for horses remain intact.

a Smaller footprint

The Phillips Preiss Grygiel plan as written would permit the developers to do what they want to do: erect what critics claim is a massive mixed-use project, with 350 apartments and a large supermarket that they say would destroy or dwarf many of the station's historic elements.

By contrast, the alternative plan has a smaller footprint, thereby creating more open space and not blocking the view of the station. It also incorporates the historic station's features, such as its train sheds, into its design. And it concentrates the two planned buildings' masses in their center, as well as presenting different options to accommodate anywhere from 280 to 384 apartments, depending on whether the development rises from four to seven stories. Those higher stories would be set back from the exterior of the buildings.



Pinnacle Cos. and Hampshire Cos. proposed massing for the redevelopment of Lackawanna Plaza. COURTESY OF SMITH MARAN ARCHITECTURE & INTERIORS

Several EDC members said they like certain portions of the Smith Maran alternative and may seek to incorporate some of them in the Phillips Preiss Grygiel plan when they revise it.

"Regarding the 'alternate plan,' there are components that I like, such as increased open space, preservation

of some historic elements, etc.,” said Third Ward Councilman Sean Spiller, who is an EDC member. “Of course, however, keeping the density down as well as the height down is also important. We will continue to review and discuss.”

‘We’re not limiting ourselves to anything’

Fourth Ward Councilwoman Renée Baskerville said the EDC is considering all the input it has received as it studies the Phillips Preiss Grygiel redevelopment plan.

“We are not limiting ourselves to anything at this point in time,” Baskerville said. “We know very much that we’ve listened to what people are saying, and I think it’s safe to say that we agree that we want to expand the open space, as much open space as makes sense for the community, and pretty much that we don’t want to necessarily exceed four stories, although nothing is necessarily off of the table.”

Ira Smith and Erik Maran, principals of Smith Maran, describe their alternative redevelopment plan as a conceptual one. It is only 22 pages, and includes many renderings contrasting their ideas to the official Phillips Preiss Grygiel redevelopment plan.



The alternative plan creates more open space in front of Lackawanna Plaza than the plan from the project’s redevelopers. COURTESY OF SMITH MARAN ARCHITECTURE & INTERIORS

Smith Maran works closely with the EDC, in part reviewing and commenting on preliminary design submissions, according to Smith. The firm had been invited to sit in on several meetings of the Township Planning Board’s redevelopment subcommittee regarding Lackawanna Plaza, as well as attending community visioning workshops on the project. Smith Maran was to produce an alternative plan to incorporate feedback from all those sources, “try to resolve some of the seemingly competing interests for the site,” and report back to the EDC, according to Smith.

“This is a conceptual plan that tries to deal with many of the things that the developer is interested in and many of the things that the public and the visioning folks have been interested in,” Maran said.

Smith Maran did several versions of its plan, and in the final June 1 iteration the EDC asked for examples of how many residential units could be put in a building with heights that varied from medium- to high-rise.

“In the ‘alternative plan,’ which places the facade of the grocery store at the back edge of the platform shed closest to Bloomfield Avenue, the overall footprint for development on the west parcel is reduced,” the plan states. “With this reduced footprint, holding all development to four stories yields approximately 280 residential units.”

The alternative plan says that adding one to two floors on limited portions of the redeveloper’s four stories would make room for 352 residential units. Adding one final floor, a seventh floor, would bring the number of apartments up to 384.

“This increase would help offset the additional costs related to shifting construction from wood frame to steel, [which is] required above four stories,” the alternative plan says.



The Smith Maran alternative plan is superimposed over the redevelopers' plan. COURTESY SMITH MARAN ARCHITECTURE & INTERIORS

Pushing the supermarket farther back from Bloomfield Avenue, and incorporating the station's open-air platform shed into the facade of the new grocery store, would about double the open space, to about 1 acre, created in front of the building versus the developers' plan. In addition, a staircase leading to Grove Street can be restored and put back to use, and the water trough could be saved and reactivated as a fountain, according to the alternative plan.

The alternative plan accommodates a 65,000-square-foot supermarket, which is what Pinnacle has proposed. But in the alternative plan, the grocery store's footprint is a rectangle rather than a square.

Kathleen Bennett, chair of the Montclair Historic Preservation Commission, said that elements of the alternative plan seem more workable and reasonable than the Phillips Preiss Grygiel redevelopment plan. The commission has been championing the so-called adaptive reuse of the Lackawanna station as an integral part of the redevelopment, making it the focus of the project.

“It [the alternative plan] maintains the spaces that we're concerned about and it maintains the sight lines,” Bennett said. “I think it's a more viable massing than what Pinnacle has proposed, that's my opinion. And I think it would be more workable, has more options to work with ... The point is, there are other options to this site that Smith Maran seems to have.”

But she added, “Quite frankly, the developer is not under the obligation to work with Smith Maran as their architect. They have their own architect.”

Bennett also said two township officials told her the Smith Maran plan “would not fly” because of its height.



In the shadow of redevelopment boom, township battles with upkeep of vacant properties



This home on Willowdale Avenue is one of 71 homes registered with the township as being vacant. Although neighbors who live near one of these homes complain that are not being well-maintained, the number of vacant properties has actually dropped since 2017.
KELLY NICHOLAIDES/ FOR MONTCLAIR LOCAL

BY KELLY NICHOLAIDES

for MONTCLAIR LOCAL

The amount Montclair paid out to attorneys that deal with vacant property issues increased by 36 percent last year, illustrating what some residents say is a problem in the township.

There are currently 71 registered vacant residences, empty for 30 days or more, in Montclair. But that number is actually down from the 82 registered vacant properties back in 2017.

Properties that are vacant for 30 days or more must be registered, in accordance with a 2013 ordinance governing vacant and abandoned residences. The registration fee is \$500 for the first six months. First, second, and subsequent renewal fees are \$1,500, \$3,000, and \$5,000, respectively. Properties actively marketed for sale or rent, and containing all building systems in working order are excluded.

The highest number of registered vacant properties, 30, are located in the Fourth Ward, while the Second Ward has 20, the Third Ward has 13 and the First Ward has eight.

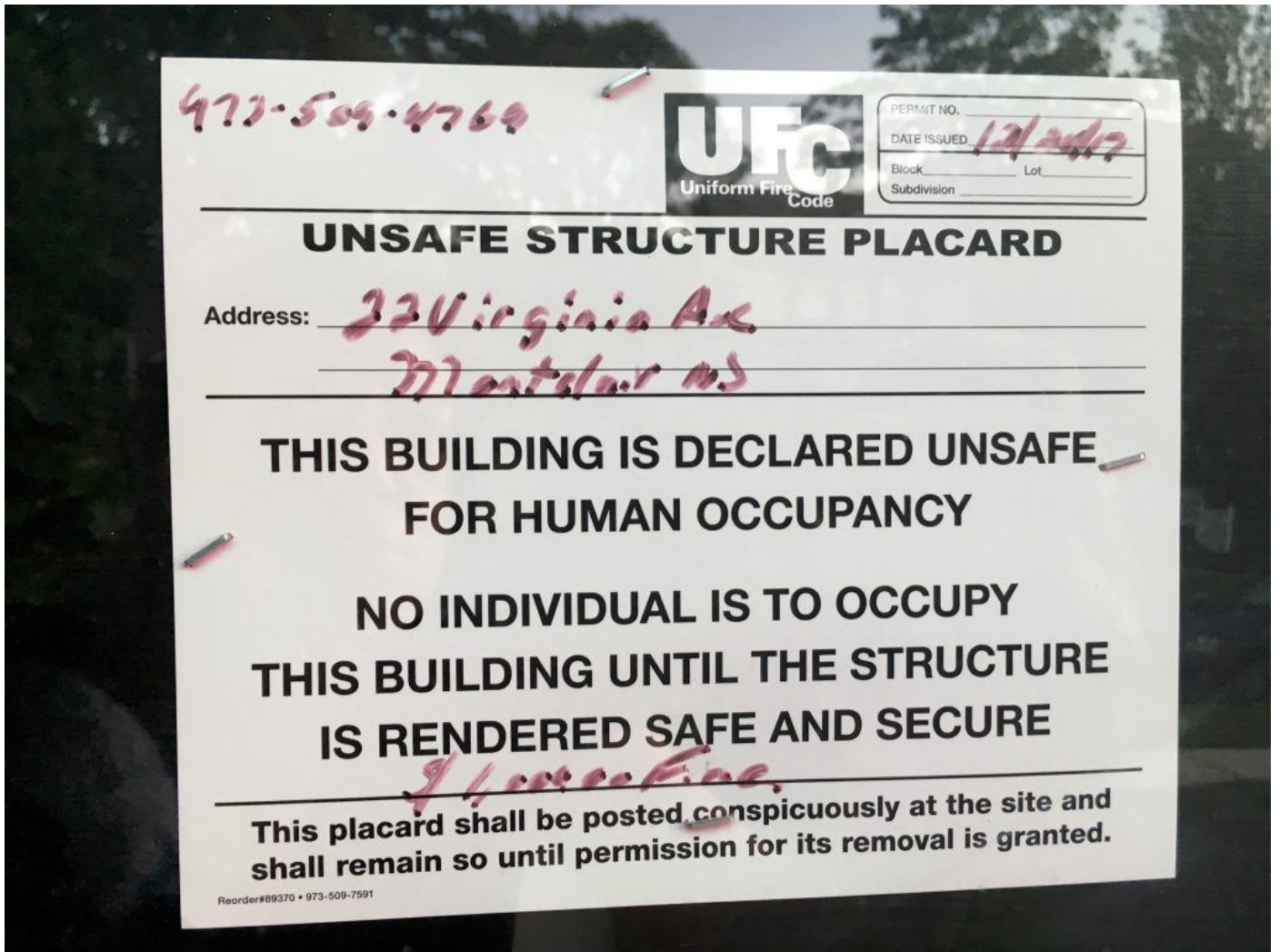
Thirty-one of the 71 properties have active construction, said Katya Wowk, township communications director.

“Our goal is to ensure the safety and security of the community by enforcing local and state codes to make sure the properties are maintained,” Chapter 249 reads.

Santarcangelo Law, LLC has been “advice and counsel, to do litigation and related work” related to Montclair’s vacant housing since 2016. The current agreement shows, the firm charges Montclair a rate of \$80-\$160 an hour.

The firm exceeded the amount in its \$65,000 professional services agreement by \$23,254 last year, with a busy last quarter, township officials said. So far in 2019, Montclair has paid \$34,125 as part of the 2019 agreement for \$65,000 in professional services.

“Normally someone will call and complain about tall grass and other maintenance issues. Code enforcement then tries to locate the owner,” said Wowk. “The law firm represents us because we may often take property owners to court or we’re are communicating with bank lawyers.”



A sign reflects that this home is vacant and unsafe for inhabitants.

When a property is not being maintained, particularly with lawn work and snow removal, the town completes the work and bills the property owner. If the bill is not paid, a tax lien is placed on the property. If the property is sold, the buyer must satisfy the lien.

Tax liens averaging \$250 each for snow removal at nine vacant residential properties after a March storm were approved by the council in May. The homes are located on Oakcroft, North Mountain, Virginia, Watchung, Claremont, and North Fullerton avenues and Grove, Elm, and Chestnut streets.

A drive around to the addresses listed for the recently approved tax liens revealed signs of abandonment or extended periods of vacancy: overgrown grass, chipped paint, padlocks, overflowing mailboxes, and letters shoved into doors. Neighbors spoke on condition of anonymity.

An Elm Street resident said a dumpster on a neighbor's driveway has been there for two weeks, with no activity. Weeds crept around the single-family house, throughout front and back yards, and along the grass bordering the public sidewalk. "Nobody has lived there for almost a year. The house was just sold two months ago. The whole property is an eyesore. I cut the grass once, but I'm not doing it for free," he said.

The 2,902 square-foot Elm Street home was built in 1900. It was sold for \$285,000 in 2018 and is assessed at \$261,600, down from \$327,900 last year, according to tax records. Taxes of \$13,969 are up to date on the property.

Built in 1897, a Willowdale Avenue house bears a collapsing porch roof. It was empty three years ago when a neighbor said he moved to the street he described as quiet.

“There’s been a lot of activity there over the last couple of weeks. Montclair Fire Department or code people were there every day, and it was boarded up,” said a neighbor. “I heard a couple of homeless people were [staying] there. I’ve seen people hanging around, on and off, but minimally, in the last year or so.”

A Uniform Construction Code placard indicates the Willowdale house has been deemed “unsafe for human occupancy” since January. To satisfy a judgment with an estimated \$619,945 sale, the Essex County Sheriff’s Department posted a June 11 public auction notice. The house was purchased for \$160,000 in 2001. The house is assessed at \$255,000, down from \$301,100 last year, tax records show.

A manicured lawn and floral landscaping at a Virginia Avenue home shows effort to maintain and market the property. It will be listed for sale through HUDhomestore.com, but signage also shows that it has been unsafe for occupancy since 2017. The 1,686 square-foot single family was built in 1925. Broken bricks line the entrance steps. The structure is assessed at \$28,300, down from \$113,100 in 2017. The 2018 property tax bill was \$6,235 and taxes are paid up to date for 2019.

Recently a Claremont Avenue resident who identified as “Renee” at a mayor and council meeting inquired about two Greenwood Avenue properties. “They’ve been dilapidated almost 10 years and have remained largely unkempt the entire time. Given the recent redevelopment of the area, and with two festivals, so many people going back and forth, there was so much garbage. It’s really an eyesore. Four years ago, there was a dead cat there for six or seven days,” she said, adding that the town promptly removed the carcass after being notified.

Town officials told her they would find out about the properties’ status.

The vacant properties program is self-sustaining. Montclair collected \$352,250 in registration fees related to vacant properties in 2017, \$182,500 in 2018 and \$54,400 so far in 2019, Wowk said.

Following registration of vacant residential properties, the owners must provide access to the township for exterior and interior inspections. In addition, the building must be enclosed and secured against unauthorized entry. A sign indicating the name, address and telephone number of the owner, or the owner’s authorized agent, must be affixed to the building. Boarding up of open and broken windows is allowed for no longer than 45 consecutive days. Fines for violations of the rules and regulations range from \$500 to \$1,000 for each offense and are assessed daily, according to borough code.

An estimated 200 municipalities have vacant property registries. Investors sued Gloucester County in 2017, claiming its vacant property registry is unconstitutional and charges exorbitant fees. The New Jersey League of Municipalities has stated that case law supports the towns’ registries.

“The [registration] program succeeds by pushing owners to rehabilitate properties and get them off the list. When properties are brought back into use, the township sees higher assessments,” said Wowk.



Last day for tree, branch pickup tomorrow



*Over 90 trees caused power outages throughout the township.
Courtesy Ira Smith*

Due to the significant amount of tree debris generated by the March nor'easters, Montclair will provide a special collection of miscellaneous tree debris.

This tree debris must be placed at the curb by Monday, April 2.

Because of the significant quantity of debris that is anticipated, an accurate collection schedule after this date cannot be determined, but it is expected that complete removal of debris may take several weeks.

Once the special collection is underway, and as each street is cleared of debris after April 2, the date of collection will be noted and the crews will not return to that street for additional debris. Residents must make their own arrangements for disposal at that time.

Tree debris to be collected:

- Branches: A branch is any tree, bush or shrub part less than 1 inch in diameter. Branches must be cut in manageable lengths of 3 to 10 feet and must be stacked neatly to facilitate disposal. Branches may also be set out in biodegradable paper bags.
- Wood chips/chunks, tree bark, acorns, nuts, tree droppings, etc., must be placed at the curb in biodegradable paper bags or rigid containers not weighing more than 50 pounds each.

- Logs: Logs are defined as any tree part 1 inch or larger in diameter. Logs are not normally collected as vegetative waste, but logs up to 6 inches in diameter will be collected during this special storm cleanup only. Residents must make their own arrangements for disposal of logs larger than 6 inches in diameter. To facilitate collection, keep log piles separate from branch piles. Different crews and equipment will be collecting the different debris.
 - Stumps will not be collected. Residents must make their own arrangements for disposal. All tree debris must be placed at the curb but not in the street. Violators will be subject to fine by Code Enforcement.
- Residents may also call the Department of Community Services for more information at 973-509-5711.



Businesses approved for Willow and Walnut



The O A Peterson Construction Company, 78 North Willow St., has been in business in Montclair since 1914. The owner, John Petersen, revisited an application that was approved by the planning board in 1999, to add a second floor addition to his building. The board also approved a change in use from retail to mixed martial arts for a lot at 113 Walnut St.. The application's parking variances were also approved.

PHOTO BY TINA PAPPAS

By Tina Pappas
for Montclair Local

The Planning Board approved an expansion to O A Peterson Construction Co. on North Willow Street and the addition of a martial arts studio on Walnut Street.

The properties are owned by John Peterson, a family-run business since 1914, making it one of the longest operating businesses in Montclair. On May 7, the board approved the addition of a second level be added on 78 Willow Street property, a change in use for his 13 Walnut Street property from a retail space to a mixed martial arts studio and a parking variance.

The application was previously approved in 1999, when Peterson then sought to add a second floor addition to the building, but didn't construct it. The updated application involves his three properties that provide 4,346 square feet of office space, 8,080 square feet of storage space and parking for the O A Peterson Construction Company. The third lot contains two separate commercial spaces totaling 920 square feet, one of which was formerly occupied by the Montclair Bread Company.

Alan Trembulak, applicant attorney, said the 950-square-foot, second-floor addition and the martial arts space would require more parking. He assured the board that adequate parking spaces would be provided to both locations. John Peterson said his son Adam, owner of a martial arts studio, was seeking to move his business into the retail space, with parking available in the lot across from the office building.

The variance would permit total of 24 parking spaces whereas 42 spaces are required. The change of use from retail to a martial arts gym increases the parking demand by six parking spaces.

Concerned with parking, several board members pointed out that the street had a farmers' market, several new restaurants and the addition of a microbrewery. In response, Adam Peterson said that he would inform his customers on accessible parking through signage, newsletters and brochures, and that there would be sufficient parking spaces provided. He said most of his students live nearby and would be either walking or riding their bikes.

Timothy Klesse, site architect, presented plans for the building addition, which include a stucco facade to match the side of the building and a coat of paint to its base. Trembulak said the property was not designated an historic site and added that he did not feel board members had the right to dictate the architectural design. An elevation drawing was provided to the Historic Preservation Committee, however.

John Wynn, board chairman, made a motion to approve the application, but with the condition that patrons and employees of the businesses would need to be informed that the available parking in the Peterson lot would be mandatory. Another condition would be another parking review if new owners were to take over the spaces.

Peterson agreed to the conditions, including striping and patching both of the North Willow Street lots, which would include handicapped parking and bicycle racks. Board members voted in favor of the application with the exception of Deputy Mayor Robin Schlager, due to her concerns over parking issues that she felt would arise with a martial arts studio moving into the area.