

2018 Montgomery Township Committee Reorganization Remarks

COMMITTEE MEMBER PATRICIA GRAHAM

Good Morning and Happy New Year! Thank you all for coming today and a special thanks to all of our honored guests.

I would also like to congratulate Mark on his appointment as Mayor this year. His appointment is well deserved, as is Christine's appointment as Deputy Mayor. I congratulate her as well. Both Mark and Christine are talented professionals and I look forward to their leadership this year. Of course I also look forward to continuing to work with Ed as well.

I would also like to congratulate Ms. Jaffer on her election to the Township Committee. Welcome. I look forward to working with you.

In their remarks Mark, Christine and Ed have covered many of the highlights of last year and the significant issues facing our town this year. So I will keep my remarks brief.

Budget, of course, remains our most significant challenge each year. Every year we face annual increases in costs over which we have no control -- such as pension and healthcare costs. And we now have the added challenge imposed by the new federal tax code. But, even though our costs increase, it is our obligation to craft a fiscally responsible budget that limits the burden on our taxpayers as much as possible. We will continue to do so.

Another of our most important endeavors -- and an area of special interest for me -- is our continued dedication to the preservation of Montgomery's open space. I believe that the continued acquisition of Montgomery's open space is one of the most significant ways in which Montgomery can control its future and maintain the bucolic character of the town. I have served as liaison to Montgomery's Open Space Committee for several years and I continue to be impressed by the work and dedication of that group. Using Open Space funds, the Township acquired several more tracts of land last year. The three most recent are:

- An additional 35.6 acre tract to expand the beautiful Cherry Brook Preserve;
- A 34.5 acre tract off route 518 in Skillman -- this acquisition was particularly significant because the land is in the sewer service area and was actively being marketed to developers; and
- Another 15.5 acre tract in Belle Mead, which was acquired from Kehilat Shalom. This acquisition is the product of years of work by the Open Space Committee, township staff and the Township Committee.

In the coming year, we will continue our work to preserve open space, and to maintain and promote the use of our open space by Montgomery's residents.

Last year I also had the pleasure to serve for the first time as liaison to the Montgomery Veteran's Memorial Committee. That Committee working, with many volunteers, organized several important veterans' events last year -- including our first Township Memorial Day Ceremony in Montgomery Veterans

Park, our Veteran's day ceremony, with the addition this year of an educational component and historical reenactors, a special memorial dedication for Lt. Ashley Henderson Huff, and the accomplishment of Montgomery's designation as a Purple Heart Township. It was an honor for me to work with the MVMC last year.

Montgomery is also extremely lucky to have such a high caliber, professional Police Department. The Township works very closely with the Police Department and I appreciate the difficult and dangerous work that our police officers do every day to serve our residents.

Montgomery is a township of volunteers. I continue to be impressed with the many, many residents who dedicate their time and energies to Montgomery's committees and boards and to various projects -- all to make Montgomery and even better place to live. The work of the Board of Health, the Planning and Zoning Boards, the Environmental Development Commission, the Recreation Committee, our firefighters and EMS, our girl scouts and boy scouts and too many other boards, committees and community groups to mention. I feel blessed that so many people care so much about our town and devote their energies for the good of our community. And their dedication shows. As everyone sitting on this dais will tell you, Montgomery is a wonderful place to live.

Finally, I would like to recognize the great talents and skills of our Township Administrator, Donato Nieman, our clerk Donna Kukla and our new CFO, Mike Pitts. They and all Montgomery's Department Heads and staff keep the Township running smoothly and efficiently to serve the residents of our town. I am grateful for the opportunity to work with all our talented professionals. And of course I

greatly appreciate the wise counsel and hard work of our excellent Township Attorney, Kris Hadinger.

I am grateful for the opportunity to continue to serve on the township Committee and I look forward to the year ahead.