

2019 Montgomery Township Committee Reorganization Remarks

MAYOR SADAF JAFFER

Good evening everyone,

It is an honor to be sworn in as Mayor of Montgomery Township with the support of my fellow committee members. I thank all those who have joined us this evening, especially Attorney General Gurbir Grewal for taking the time to conduct my swearing in ceremony today. Thank you as well to other special guests including Assemblyman Andrew Zwicker, Assemblyman Roy Freiman, Middlesex County Freeholder Shanti Narra, Somerset County Freeholder Brian Levine, Somerset County Clerk Steve Peter, Prospect Park Mayor Mohamed Khairullah, Rocky Hill Mayor Robert Uhrik, former Rocky Hill Mayor Ed Zimmerman, Franklin Township Councilman Rajiv Prasad, former Montgomery Township Mayor Louise Wilson, former Montgomery Township Mayor Cecilia Birge, former Montgomery Township Mayor Don Matthews, former Montgomery Township Deputy Mayor Brad Fay. Their service and dedication to the public good is truly admirable and I've from their example. In preparing for my new role as Mayor, I have also been inspired and heartened to learn from the many dedicated professionals in the administration and the police department, as well as the volunteers on local boards and commissions who help Montgomery thrive. I thank them for all that they do. Finally, I would also like to thank my family including my husband Dan, daughter Zareen, and mother Batool who have joined me this evening. Thanks as well to my dad Mushtaq and brother Abbas who are watching online. Hi Dad! Their support and guidance make it possible for me to pursue my goals.

It is a fact often repeated that Montgomery is a great place to live and work. Yet, I find it important to reflect on what makes it so. From my experience in local community organizing and public service, I have concluded that it is indeed the people who make Montgomery great. The people of Montgomery are kind, caring, and generous. I see my role as Mayor to not only serve the people of this community but also bring them together for purpose of the common good and to promote the synergies that result when we work together.

Let me now briefly outline my priorities as Mayor for 2019. I will aim to increase transparency, improve communication, and promote diversity and inclusion through community building. To that end, I plan to reactivate a budget and finance committee with participation from members of the public. I also plan to establish a working group on communications, so that we make sure we are reaching all members of our community. Communication is also essential to promoting civic engagement so that all those who live and work in Montgomery know how to make their voices heard and take their seats at the decision-making table. Finally, I will continue to support and facilitate the anti-prejudice and community building events I have been organizing for the past year under the banner of Montgomery Mosaic.

It is wonderful to see so many people from different backgrounds here this evening. When I was first running for office, someone asked me why there weren't more South Asian Americans seeking elected office. I replied that if you enter a room and don't see anyone who looks like you, you might think perhaps it isn't the place for you. I hope that by becoming the first South Asian woman to serve as a mayor in New Jersey, I can serve as resource for those who want to get more involved in their community but might not know how to do so.

On that note, I ask that each of you think about ways in which you could serve. Are there skills or experiences you have that could benefit others? On the municipal government side, there are many volunteer opportunities on boards and commissions. Even if you aren't officially appointed, you can serve as an advisor for the benefit of the community we all hold so dear. I would also urge you to consider running for office at some point. Government at all levels needs fresh ideas. In that vein, I congratulate and welcome Deputy Mayor Catherine Gural and Committeeman Marvin Schuldiner. I know you will bring passion, energy, and thoughtful consideration to your new roles. I also look forward to serving with Committeeman Ed Trzaska and Committeeman Kamran Quraishi. I believe we have the opportunity to be an example of cooperation and success in municipal government.

My selection as Mayor marks a change in majority party. Yet, I would like to state that my respect continues to grow for all those who choose to serve in local government, irrespective of their party affiliation or lack thereof. We are truly privileged to live in the society and community in which we do. I hope that we can see our differences as opportunities for growth. As the feminist poet and civil rights activist Audre Lord wrote, "It is not our differences that divide us, it is our inability to recognize, accept, and celebrate those differences."

I am confident that 2019 will be a year of celebrating the impact we can make when we come together to serve our community.

Thank you.