

2021 Montgomery Township Committee Reorganization Remarks

DEPUTY MAYOR MARVIN SCHULDINER

Good evening. I want to thank all of you for attending our online reorganization meeting, particularly all of the dignitaries who are here tonight. A special thank you to Assemblyman Andrew Zwicker for swearing me in as Deputy Mayor and a special hello to Assemblyman Roy Freiman. I am again truly honored that my colleagues have chosen me as Deputy Mayor for this year. Thank you! It is a privilege and honor to welcome my friend and neighbor Shelly Bell to the Township Committee. I also look forward to my continued work with Mayor Keenan and Committeepersons Gural and Huang.

2020 was a challenging year, no question. COVID took too many of our friends and neighbors from us and sickened dozens. We actually had fewer COVID cases and deaths relative to our neighboring towns in large part due to the efforts of our Health Officer, Stephanie Carey. Thank you, Stephanie. Most of our residents also followed the guidelines when in public such as social distancing and wearing of masks, and that certainly helped. We are all responsible for each other, so thank you for looking out for others. The Township had to quickly shift operations to a more remote setup. Thanks to the efforts of our administration, Donato Nieman and Michael Pitts, that transition went smoothly. Employees worked from home. My office hours were cancelled. Meetings of all kinds moved online. Many projects ended up on the back burner as we focused on our most important function, public safety.

2021 is not starting much better. We sadly had an increase in the number of deaths from COVID after a long period of no deaths. We continue to do business remotely. The demands on our food pantry are at an all-time high.

But we still have work to do here in Montgomery. This year, my primary objectives are:

- Redeveloping the Routes 206 and 518 intersection. After the changes in the retail environment and the impact COVID has had on the commercial real estate market, we need to reassess the potential for the intersection. COVID has changed many things.
- Expanding open, transparent and inclusive government. We want to update our website to be more user-friendly and accessible for all. We will strive to incorporate the Open Cities Project principles to ensure as much information about your government is available at your fingertips.
- COVID exposed another thing in our town – that many of you in Montgomery have inadequate internet access, which in 2020 became as necessary as electricity and water in your homes. Future demands for universal broadband access will only increase. I will be spearheading an effort to see what can be done to improve digital access for all of our residents. Assemblyman Zwicker is leading a similar effort at the state level and I look forward to working with him on this endeavour.
- I also plan on re-establishing evening office hours, initially by Zoom, to directly address any concerns our residents might have. I had to suspend that once COVID hit and we closed the building in April. Please reach out if you have any needs I can help with.

I would be remiss if I did not mention the attempted coup that happened yesterday in our nation's capital. Last year at our reorganization meeting, I spoke about the incivility in politics. That incivility has now spread to broader American society. This should scare each and every one of us. I mentioned last year how my wife was physically and verbally attacked at the NJ State House and on social media.

Inequity still plagues this country and state. The killings of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, among many others, are still unresolved. Our own hometown of Montgomery is not immune to this either. Bias and intimidation incidents happen here as well. To our youth, to our elected officials, to our citizens. Even one incident is too many. This simply must stop.

Our democracy is based on civil discourse, the rule of law, equal protection, making informed decisions, and respect for all opinions. Somehow, many people seem to have lost the ability to perform critical thinking. Lying has become the norm in many places. Representative government does not work at any level without critical thinking, seeking the truth, compassion, and avoiding confirmation bias. Public service must be about advancing the common good – what’s best for the most people. We are committed to those principles.

Before I wrap up, I want to again urge anyone who is food insecure to please reach out to either our food pantry or to Monty Cares, a consortium of community groups. You can reach out to Monty Cares for other needs at montycares.org. No one in Montgomery should be worrying about where their next meal is coming from or whether they have a roof over their head. Help is available regardless of legal status.

In closing, I again want to thank you for putting your confidence in me and my colleagues to lead our town. I look forward to doing good things for Montgomery in the next year!

---Good evening. It was my honor to serve as Mayor of Montgomery Township for 2019 and I look forward to serving another year in this capacity. I’m proud of the progress we’ve made as a municipality in partnership with many of you here today. I thank my colleagues Marvin Schuldiner and Catherine Gural for their service. I look forward to learning from the expertise and skills of Kent Huang and Devra Keenan who are joining us as Township Committee members. We will work together to move this community forward.

Thanks to all the guests who are here with us tonight. I would like to especially welcome Assemblyman Roy Freiman and Assemblyman Andrew Zwicker. Thank you as well to Freeholder-elect Melonie Marano, former Montgomery Deputy Mayor Brad Fay, Montgomery School Board President Minky Chenette, Montgomery School Board member Phyllis Bursh, Rocky Hill Mayor Bob Uhrig, former Franklin Councilman Rajiv Prasad, Franklin Councilman-elect Ram Anbarasan, and Raj Bath from Governor Phil Murphy’s office. I would like to thank the many leaders of the Democratic Party in Montgomery, Somerset County, and beyond for

their support. I would also like to thank my brother Abbas for joining us from his home in San Francisco as well as extended family from Chicago and New Jersey. Of course, my public service would not be possible without the support of my husband Dan and daughter Zareen.

Over the past year, we have had many accomplishments. One was a redesign of the Montgomery Municipal Center project to incorporate feedback from stakeholders in the community. This has been a labor of love for those on the redesign committee as we envisioned what the future should look like in Montgomery. I'm very thankful to the volunteers and professionals who are ensuring that this investment in Montgomery Township yields dividends for many years to come.

We also organized Town Hall meetings, including one to educate the public on the Master plan and development taking place. It is my firm belief that residents should be inspired to be actively engaged in their community, and the first step towards this involvement is education. Speaking of education, I am so impressed by the young people in our community. They are doing wonderful things and in seeing their example I feel hopeful about the future.

Very dear to my heart were the community building conversation we held, from a session with our Police Department and those from Montgomery who have special needs, to an intercultural holiday party, and community breakfasts that marked some of the more challenging issues we are all facing, including the rise of anti-Semitic violence in our area. Through these efforts we have made clear that Montgomery is a welcoming place where we value those from all backgrounds and experiences.

This brings me to my own experience. Though much of my time as mayor has been wonderful, there have certainly been challenges. The truth is we have a long way to go in terms of representation of women and minorities in government. Out of 565 municipalities in New Jersey, only 78 have women mayors. A recent article in the New York Times states that "female mayors were more than twice as likely as their male counterparts to experience psychological abuse and almost three times as likely to experience physical violence." As a

woman from a minority background, I have faced online abuse that I have felt compelled to report to our police department, an example being a message that said, “may unhappiness, illness, & death plague you” and went on in a similar vein.

In light of these challenges, it is especially meaningful to see the support from the community this evening. I am thankful to all those who have paved the way for me to be able to serve in this capacity. I feel privileged to live in a community that is welcoming of difference and has trusted me to serve as a leader. I hope that in the upcoming year many of you will reach out and connect with me, my fellow Township Committee members, and those who work for the township and police department. Ultimately, we are all here to do what we believe is best for Montgomery Township. Thank you!