



**TOWNSHIP OF MONTCLAIR
OFFICE OF THE TOWNSHIP MANAGER
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STEPHEN D. MARKS
TOWNSHIP MANAGER

MEMORANDUM

To: Chief Robert Duncan, Montclair Fire Department
From: *SDM* Stephen D. Marks, Township Manager
Date: February 5, 2026
Re: Fire Department Table of Organization and Minimum Daily Staffing

I am writing this memo and directive as Municipal Manager under the authority of NJS 40A:69A-95 (Powers and duties), NJS 40:69A-96 (Municipal Budget), 40:69A-98 (Power to make personnel appointments), and Montclair municipal code §3-25 (Annual budget), §27-2 (Promulgation of rules and regulations), §27-7 (General powers and duties of the Township Manager), and §27-10 (Internal organization of the Department).

As you know, on July 9, 2025, the New Jersey Department of the Treasury announced rate increases for the State Health Benefits Plan of 36.5% for the 2026 calendar year. As a result, the Township of Montclair left the State Health Benefits Plan and went to an Aetna fully insured plan to avoid employee health insurance increases in the SHBP for future years. However, the anticipated expense for employee health benefits is still expected to increase from \$10,969,416.56 (2025 budget, sheet 3b (2)) to \$14,578,943.28 (IMAC letter dated December 10, 2025), which is an increase of \$3,609,526.72.

As you may also know, N.J. state law establishes a two (2%) percent cap on the municipal property tax levy (NJS 40A:4-45.45, et seq.) and a two-and-one-half (2.5%) percent cap on municipal appropriations (LFN 2025-19 and NJS 40A:4-45.3, et seq.). In 2025, the municipal property tax levy was \$62,590,915.35. If the employee health benefits increase was incorporated into the municipal budget without any other increases, it would exceed the municipal tax levy cap by \$2,357,708.41. This figure does not even take into consideration any other increases from employee collective negotiation agreements (i.e. union contracts) or any other increases in operating expenses (i.e. inflation, etc.). Therefore, it is incumbent upon the Township to seek cost savings or additional revenue to cover rising expenses.

On September 15, 2025, I issued a memo to all municipal department heads and executive staff announcing a hiring freeze for non-essential personnel and asked that each department head prepare three (3) budget scenarios for the 2026 calendar year including a 5% reduction in spending and appropriations. And, on November 25, 2025, you made a budget presentation which included three (3) scenarios, including one with a 5% reduction in spending.

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On May 14, 2025, the Township of Montclair engaged NJ Community Solutions, LLC to prepare a comprehensive report on the Montclair Fire Department which examined organizational operations and structure, including the table of organization, the location and response times for fire stations and the shared service agreement with Glen Ridge. You and I met with the consultants several times to furnish information about the department, show the consultants municipal facilities and community hazards, and answer questions. We even had an opportunity to review the draft report and meet with the consultants regarding their findings. On January 15, 2026, I forwarded an electronic copy of the report to the entire Mayor and Council, the Township Attorney, Township Clerk and you for everyone's respective consideration. Finally, on January 30, 2026, the consultants presented the report to the Finance Committee (Mayor Dr. Renee Baskerville, Councilor Eileen Birmingham and Councilor Rahum Williams).

Due to reasons of economy and efficiency related to the 2026 municipal budget and in consideration of the options contained in the NJ Community Solutions, LLC report, I respectfully request and direct the following:

1. Beginning March 5, 2026 and until further notice, the Table of Organization for the Montclair Fire Department shall be set at one (1) Fire Chief, two (2) Deputy Chiefs, four (4) Battalion Chiefs, eight (8) Fire Captains, twelve (12) Fire Lieutenants, forty (40) Fire Fighters, one (1) Fire Official, one (1) Supervising Fire Inspector, and one (1) Fire Inspector.
 2. Beginning March 5, 2026 and until further notice, one Fire apparatus (presumably Ladder Truck #2) shall be "Browned Out" or taken out of service when there is insufficient staffing to operate the ladder truck due to vacations or other absences.
 3. Beginning March 5, 2026 and until further notice, the minimum daily staffing for the Department shall be set at 14 members. Due to "two-in/two-out" OSHA regulations it is assumed that Fire House #2 shall have a minimum of four on-duty members at all times.
 4. Due to recent and anticipated retirements, it is not expected that any demotions will be necessary.
 5. The NJ Community Solutions, LLC comprehensive report recommends that the Montclair Fire Department (re)establish an Auxiliary Fire Fighter program to augment and/or supplement the Department. Fortunately, Montclair municipal code §27-12 already establishes Auxiliary Fire Fighters. I respectfully request and direct that you investigate and take necessary steps to re-establish this program.
 6. Finally, the NJ Community Solutions, LLC report recommends that the Montclair Fire Department investigate and explore the establishment of "Automatic Aid" agreement(s) with neighboring jurisdiction(s). I respectfully request and direct that you contact neighboring Fire Departments to determine if they are interested in engaging Montclair in "Automatic Aid" agreement(s).
- c. Mayor and Council