

Community meets four candidates for the Board of Directors

By *Mikhailina Karina*

Two women and two men – all retired from professional careers, representing all four towers, with more than a century of combined experience in financial and project management for non-profit, corporate, and government entities – are vying for three openings on Montebello’s Board of Directors. All of them recently downsized to condo living – two in H and two in J units – and appreciate Montebello’s sense of community, robust financials, and extensive amenities. Heather Click, Tom Harrelson, and Monica Sangbong joined incumbent and board treasurer Jon Kandel in answering questions from the residents during the Sunday night Meet the Candidates event.

All four were experienced, confident public speakers knowledgeable about the issues, and clear communicators. The meeting lasted two hours.

About six dozen residents – mostly the same people who attend other Montebello events – asked questions about governance, communication, participation, and finances. For the fourth year, Elections Committee co-chair Joel Miller emceed the event with welcome touches of humor (see page 4).

Monica Sangbong, who lives in Building 1, is a newly retired Foreign Service diplomat with experience in human re-

sources, architectural planning, and civil engineering project management. If elected, she said she would work to improve communication and relationships between the board and the residents.

Building 4 resident Tom Harrelson is a retired senior executive from the

fees. He summarized his approach as KIST: keep it simple and transparent. His other guiding principle is the old journalism school maxim: the 5 W’s and an H – who, what, when, where, why, and how – for gathering information and making decisions.

A retired registered nurse, Building 2 resident Heather Click has been active on the Grounds Committee since its creation in 2017. She has served on three home owners associations in Georgia and North Carolina as well as in leadership positions in professional organizations. A people person, she said she carefully listens and gather information before making any decisions.

Board treasurer Jon Kandel, who lives in Building 3, is completing his first year on the board. Also a recent newcomer to Montebello, he still has the “wow factor” over the quality of life in this community. Recently, he has been the chief explainer of the Community Center Master Plan with information sessions and documents. Retired from a career in graphic arts and printing, he served on the board of his Fifth Avenue cooperative in New York.

The first question came from Steve Clark, who asked how the candidates would resolve conflicts during board discussions.

Kandel responded that in general, the board does not have conflicting opinions and most of the votes are unanimous. He pointed out that each board member takes “an oath to do what’s best for Montebello,” even if it



From top left: Tom Harrelson, Monica Sangbong, Heather Click, and Jon Kandel.

Photos by Dian McDonald

Maritime Administration and a long career in international and domestic commercial and government entities. His goal as a board member is to “enhance our vibrant community” by lowering costs and condo fees and enhancing the joy of living here. He favors a zero-based budgeting approach – justify everything that goes into the budget, cut out the fat, and not slap arbitrary



Neighbors gather to meet the candidates for the Board of Directors. Photo by Joel Miller

might go against personal beliefs.

Three other candidates said they would be good listeners and try to resolve any differences in person. Click agreed with Kandel's point, adding that disagreements can be resolved by the parliamentary procedures, which provide guidance for discussion and motions. Even if you can't change someone's opinion, "it ultimately comes down to a vote."

Several residents asked the candidates on which committees they would like to serve as a board liaison. Harrelson responded his extensive background in finance would be a good fit for the Finance and Budget Committee. Kandel said he could use his printing and graphics knowledge to work with *The Times of Montebello*; he would also like to be on the Grounds Committee, but fears his lack of "green thumb" would be a deal breaker. Click said she'd like to continue working with the Grounds Committee, but also get involved with the Communications Committee because communication is "so critical to the success of any endeavor." Sangbong said she likes to challenge herself and would be open to serving on any

committee, but is particularly interested in the cost-savings committee.

Jane Anne Gleason asked the candidates their thoughts for increasing owner participation in voting and surveys.

Click responded that the recent special ballot on capital improvements yielded an "excellent turnout" of 55 percent of owners. But she added that half of all owners voting "still isn't good enough. Why didn't the other half cast ballots?" She didn't have an immediate answer, but said that "if more people are involved in decision-making, then more people will be happier with decisions."

Sangbong said the board needed to be more demographically inclusive. If people see themselves reflected in the board, they would be more likely to participate and serve on committees, she said. As an African-American, Gen X woman, she said she'll be a bridge to attracting people from other age groups and backgrounds.

"Simplify, simplify, simplify," said Harrelson. "Do away with paper ballots." A proponent of web-based voting, he said a simplified election process would make it easier for residents

wintering in Florida or summering in Maine to participate in elections. Likewise, he'd like to eliminate much of under-the-door flyers regularly distributed by the management in favor of more electronic communication.

"Voting is not the problem," said Kandel. "It's overall apathy." Monte-

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bello has never had 500 people respond to any of the online surveys over the past three years. He recognized that a chunk of residents is too busy to serve on committees, and others are presumably content with how things are going. “We have to dig deep to find people to join committees and run for the board,” he said. In fact, he asked 12 people to run for the board and was turned down by all of them.

The next question, from Erwin Jacobs, was about adding seven more automated external defibrillators (AEDs) to the community.

“I am in favor of anything that saves and improves lives,” said Sangbong. Harrelson and Click also said they were in favor of having the devices in each building. Kandel agreed in theory, but saw potential problems with the devices’ locations in lobbies and the amount of time it would take to implement them in a medical emergency.

Hugh Schwartz asked about the relocation of the amenities during the Community Center renovation. Kandel said the board has not yet made any decisions about temporary amenities and will rely on committees and resident input to come up with specific solutions. At this point, he said, both swimming pools, the bowling alley, and the fitness center will be open during construction. For best accessibility,

trailers for other amenities will be near Picnic Hill.

Long-time board member Guido Zanni asked whether each candidate was willing to devote at least 20 hours a week to board service. Everyone responded with an enthusiastic “yes.”

Another member of the audience asked the perennial question: how will you improve the perception that the board is not receptive to new ideas and changes?

“I won’t say the board is not receptive,” Click responded. An important part of the relationship between the board and the people is listening, including, and respecting, she said. “I consider myself a problem-solver and will make sure your concerns are heard.”

Having worked as a human resources officer, Sangbong said she’d developed thick skin and learned to see things from different vantage points.

“All of us are people persons,” Harrelson said. “We listen to people. That’s how we get information. We are all customers of the board and the management.”

“There is a misconception to how Montebello is organized,” Kandel began to explain. The management is responsible for running Montebello and all initial ideas come from management and committees – the board responds

to these initiatives. “It is imperative to get people to join committees.”

Another question about demographics came from Audra Whitley – how will you bridge the gap between generations?

None of the candidates have children living in their home and no one had any specific ideas for attracting younger people and families. Two mentioned the proposed fire pit on the Picnic Hill as something younger people seem to enjoy at other area complexes. Click said the Promoting Montebello Committee was in the process of creating materials to tout Montebello’s attributes to potential homeowners of all ages.

“What will you do to keep the condo fees down,” asked Joyce Davila.

Harrelson reiterated his zero-based approach to budgets. “There is not much fat in the budget,” Kandel said. Expenses and costs go up each year 3 to 4 percent with the cost of living, he said. Both Click and Sangbong agreed the board has done a good job of maintaining reasonable condo fees.

Candidates’ bios and ballots were mailed to all owners and are displayed on easels in each tower and the Community Center. People can cast their proxy ballots at any time between now and March 7. 📄

Board approves resolutions to move the Community Center renovation forward

By Mikhailina Karina

In a record-short special session meeting on Tuesday night, the Board of Directors unanimously approved three initiatives to move the Community Center Master Plan to the next phase.

Directors Doug Kennett and Raymond Goodrich participated via conference call; directors Lynn Tjeerdsma and Lauren Pierce were absent at the 15-minute meeting. A dozen regulars attended the meeting, sitting in their usual seats.

Following last week’s ballot to approve funding for six capital improvement projects in the Community Center – elevator, south entrance walkway, west entrance ramp, Picnic Hill, and two additional bathrooms – the board voted to add them to the Community Center renovation.

The second resolution approved resident-driven updates to the master plan proposal: drop the sitting area and the windows on the eastern side, add regular stairs to the lower level, relocate the bathroom on lower level, add

a partial partition separating the game room from the hallway to the locker rooms, add electrical floor outlets in the lounge, extend Picnic Hill ramp to picnic tables, and add a level surface around the fire pit.

The final resolution authorized management to obtain costs for consulting and design services from Kern Group Architects within the next week. 📄

Opening monologue ... um, introductory remarks

By Joel Miller

Welcome. I'm Joel Miller, former co-chair of the Elections Committee. My wife, Elaine, is the chair of the committee. I resigned as the co-chair in order to spend less time with my family.

This election is officially open. The ballot box will be at the Community Center desk starting Tuesday, but proxy envelopes may be deposited into the association mailboxes located in each building's lobby at anytime.

This is the fourth year that I am enjoying the opportunity to moderate the special evening known as Montebello's Meet the Candidates Night. Some will see my situation as another good reason to argue for term limits.

No one – not a single one – of us Montebello owners was actu-

Jersey, scavenged for near-toxic nourishment at roadside Dunkin' Donuts, Belle de Tacos, and the like. And let's admit it, nothing anybody should eat was ever handed to a person through

to the fields and factories ... and to comfort and feed them as they return tattered and torn at dusk.

But I digress (I have always wanted to say, "but I digress").

So what are we doing here tonight? I know I'm here as part of a youth movement, but what are these four doing here tonight? In a nutshell, they are here to show what they have in the way of experience, energy, vision, and chutzpah to offer us in exchange for the opportunity to work 1,000 hours a year for no money, no travel, no glory, and not even the obviously needed therapy.

The format for this event has not changed. Bearing in mind that the candidates were yesterday, are today, and will be tomorrow our next-door neighbors, I invite you to submit legibly written questions, as many as you like...but one question to a card. You may direct your questions to one or all of the candidates. All questions will be read except those which are clearly duplicates or any which seem to be personal attacks. After all questions have been addressed, the candidates will have a chance for a closing statement.

This year we have four candidates for the three

openings on the Board of Directors: Heather Click, Tom Harrelson, Jon Kandel, and Monica Sangbong.

They come to us with a variety of talent and experience, and you are faced with the difficult task of deciding who will best fill the needs of the Montebello community for the next three years. We are counting on each other to ask the questions that will allow us to get to know each of them. 🍷

Photos by Dian McDonald



Event moderator Joel Miller



ally born here. So I think it is safe to say that we are a roomful of immigrants who for various reasons have chosen Montebello as a destination. My story is probably typical.

Elaine and I were separated from our children as we scaled the wall (the wall known as the Green Monster in Fenway Park's left field) and we began our trek down Route 95 in a caravan of traffic that began in Boston. We survived the perils of sharing pathways with dangerous drivers from New York and New

a car window. But we did finally arrive here and began to pursue our New American Dream: to leave productive and gainful employment and make our way here to take advantage of the limitless opportunities afforded by our new life of non-employment. For the past five years we have had the pleasure of meeting, dining with, and recreating among so many new friends here, some of whom join us each morning to watch the little white bus take the gainfully employed Montebelloans off