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Former Clifton councilwoman forms citizens' watchdog group

By Tony Gicas
Staff Writer

CLIFTON - A former City councilwoman will make good on a promise made last winter when she vowed to form a grassroots group which informs and empowers Clifton residents.

In January, after her re-election bid came up short in on Election Day 2014, Mary Sadrakula said she would spend the next several weeks forming a citizen's watchdog group and continue to fight for the causes she believes in.

"I have a major investment in this city and intend to remain an active member in the local political scene," she said at the time.

Nine months after penning the guest editorial, Clifton Watchdog will host its first meeting and plans to follow it up with a debate between the three special council candidates vying for one open seat in November.

The group's first meeting will be held on Oct. 13 at 7 p.m. inside the Allwood Library branch.

Sadrakula said the debate, run by the League of Women Voters,

is planned for Oct. 29 at City Hall. Two of the three candidates confirmed they will attend. Sadrakula said the nonpartisan organization will aim to keep elected officials accountable for their actions and the local government "free from the influence" of special interest groups.

"Clifton Watchdog is a vehicle for the residents and taxpayers of Clifton to make their voices heard," she added. "The group will aim to make Clifton's local government more transparent and advocate to eliminate incompetence, waste and abuse."

The former councilwoman added the Clifton Watchdog website will serve as a resource center for information about Clifton's local government the group obtains via OPRA (Open Public Records Act) requests.

"Since I've been off the council, people still call me and say they're afraid to speak out," Sadrakula said this week. "I hear time and time again that their voices are not being heard. I think this group will be very successful and I think there is a big need for it."

Sadrakula likened the effort

to that of the Clifton Taxpayers Association, a grassroots organization founded in 1989 by then planning board commissioner, Thomas Grido.

The CTA, which ultimately boasted hundreds of dues-paying members, was formed to combat rising municipal taxes during the 1980s.

"Our group is strictly a vehicle for the residents to have their voices heard," Sadrakula added. "I'm looking forward to helping people in any shape or form that we can. I'm very excited about it. I think it's well-needed and the time is right for it."

Clifton Watchdog, which is open to anyone interested in participating, has already attracted about 30 residents, Sadrakula said.

The community group will form a board of directors, voted on by its membership.

"I'm hoping to get some young people who just moved here involved," she said. "It's our City, it's our place and our voices are not being heard."

Email: gicas@northjersey.com