

TOWN OF ELBRIDGE  
TOWN BOARD MEETING  
March 28, 2024

Minutes for the March 28, 2024 meeting, held by the Elbridge Town Board. Supervisor Richardson called the meeting to order at 7:03 PM and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

**PRESENT:** Vernon Richardson, Supervisor  
Doug Blumer, Councilor  
Floyd Duger, Councilor  
Todd Platten, Councilor

**RECORDING SECRETARY:** Danielle Karlik, Town Clerk

**OTHERS PRESENT:** Joe Frateschi, Town Attorney, Deputy Clerk Deborah Blasko, Codes Officer Howard Tanner, Don Meixner, John & Mary Ryan, Joe VanLiew, Dan Conroy, Lou McIntyre, Katherine Auer, Lawrence Olivia, June Bechsted, Andrew Davis, Monica Pierson, Devin Reschke, Richard & Marianne Miemietz, Kathleen Long, Alex Saba, Nancy Hourigan, Linda Weinerth, Melissa Babcock, Mr. & Mrs. Howell, Stephanie Harris, Doris Buss, Patricia Gabriel, Tonya Daley, David Haus, Patrick mast, Barbara Hynes, Florence Jewett, Jeannine Jesmer, Kimberly Andrews, Kristen Muench, Bill Baker, Tom O'Brien, Cheryl Mott, Hope Parker, Leah Gartel, George Betts, Ben Thorton, Pam McCarthy, Tom Massett, Danny & Christine Colvin, Maureen Doyle, Ashley Hadden, William Juhl, Casey Brim, Tim Witherbee Jr. Rob Richardson, Kathy & Joe Neuman, Robert & Jill Comstock, Bethany Whitten, Sarah Sauginas, Bill Dungey, Candice & Charles Piedmonte, Doug Phelps, Kathy Ford, Ron Davis, Leslie Carlson, Barb & Dana Anthonson, Lisa Long, David Hiltbrand, David Jewell, Marcia Pierson, Sigmond Pieklik, Gary Allen, Rebecca Novak, Kelly Blumer, James Hughes, Charles Karpinkski, Dan & Dale Karlik, Aaron Bouchard, Erik Conroy, Julie Hickey, Paul Jesmer, Diana Sleiertian, Chris Andreas, Matt & Stacey Ilacqua, Paul & Holly Czarnecki, Corey & Melissa Brim, Nicole & Robert Green, Eric Howard, Alan & Lori Eggleston, George Burkinshaw, Joanne & Andrew Roebuck, Grant & Bridget Whitford, Paula Annesi, Dan MacCollum, Tyler Johnston, Gina Clifford, Amie Dubus, Michelle Humberstone, and several other residents either not signed in or names were not legible on the sign-in sheet.

**ADOPT MINUTES:** On a motion by Councilor Duger, seconded by Councilor Blumer, the minutes from March 14, 2024 were entered into record unanimously.

**MOTION TO PAY BILLS:** On a motion by Councilor Duger, seconded Councilor Platten the General Bills Abstract #03, Vouchers #106-154, in the amount of \$248,004.05 were ordered paid, and Highway Bills, Abstract #03, Vouchers #1036-1052, in the amount of \$14,950.05 were ordered paid with a total disbursement of \$262,954.10.

**GUESTS:**

Kathy Ford - Thanked the Board in advance for listening to her concerns, briefly explained her history living in the Town. Raised her children with 4 rules: stay safe, stay in touch, show respect, and be responsible. Mrs. Ford thinks the Board should follow these rules for the sake of the Community. In 2019 her home was reassessed with a 5% increase, she found this reasonable. She has made no improvements and has removed her

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above ground pool, although she understands increases with normal inflation, her home has now been increased by 82%. She would like to know, who benefits from this?

Mrs. Ford states she understands that the Town has contracted with an outside Assessor and not our Town Assessor which has raised several questions. Mrs. Ford went on further to discuss and question county, school, and town taxes and how this new assessment would double taxes for 2025, in her opinion. Which will also affect her homeowner's insurance.

In further statements, Mrs. Ford addressed concerns for the contracted assessor by the Town assessor, the cost of the Joint water Project, the Tax Levy override, partial audit in 2023, and Town government discord. She compares the current state of the Town to the 2011 School Board issues. It is felt that the community deserves a Board that is fiscally responsible, efficient, and transparent.

Mrs. Ford proceeded to read her list of questions, which were submitted to the Board and will be placed into the 2024 Reval records.

Diana Sleiertian - Thanks the Board for their time and the opportunity to speak.

Addressed Supervisor Richardson and Councilor Blumer in regards to past history. She feels the disrespect she and her father had received will continue, and also go toward the many veterans in the community, if the new assessments go forward by way of tax increases that may affect Veteran families and legacy families out of their homes. She further addressed the "erratic" percentages with given local examples.

Ms. Sleiertian asked questions in regards to the Joint Water project and the effect it would have on those residents outside the limits. Will those not included in the district be paying for the water without receiving any benefits? Many residents do not receive the same benefits as those that reside in the villages.

The question was raised in regards to a letter from the State reflecting Mr. Maxwell's assessments were not high enough. If such a letter exists, where is it and from whom was it sent? Was the Board aware of it, and did they have any plan to protect the residents? Why were the residents not informed of the State's involvement? How much influence does the State have in each assessment? What is the end goal? Several other questions were raised by Ms. Sleiertian.

She feels these assessments are "utterly absurd" and gives examples of the contradictions from a few years ago to the present in regards to her property and how it has been seen. She further goes on to question how much the proposed incoming of MICRON has to do with these assessments and the perceived removal of lower and fixed income families and the State's involvement.

Katherine Auer - Would like to know how the budget has been affected by these appraisals? What will the tax rate, per 1000, be with these appraisals? What was the impetus for the new appraisals? What is the percentage to be levied? How much is the budget increasing, and why?

She feels that by doubling the assessments residents will be put out of their homes and forced out of the Town. Those near retirements are not going to have the money to afford these taxes.

Will the Board overturn these assessments and have the Town re-evaluated?

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Mrs. Auer continues to question, with examples, in regards to the unequal percentages given between properties.

Amie Dubus - Having lived in the Town, moved away and returned, Mrs. Dubus states the Town is a "beautiful" place but what is happening "is not okay". She continues on to say that the community needs to move forward and work with the Town to make changes.

She is not happy with her assessment and explains her property in terms of buying it 3 years ago, reappraising, the surrounding area and facilities, and the new assessment. Notifications for issues and information are not announced enough, and feels we need to have a better system in place to inform and educate our community. Everyone needs to have a vested interest and work together to solve problems and make things better.

At this point Mrs. Dubus asked several questions. Was Mr. Maxwell paid in 2021, 2022 and 2023? Supervisor Richardson stated the reval stated in January of 2023 and everything is done and is being processed. It was asked when Mr. Maxwell started on payroll, to which Councilor Blumer stated he is on contract for \$89,000. Mrs. Dubus asked for the budget from 2023 to be put back up on the website for comparison.

Councilor Blumer cleared up some confusion saying the Town Assessor is an appointed position of the Town with a salary. When asked about how many days the Town assessor works, Councilor Platten stated she is contracted once a week, but she works more than one day a week, Mrs. Dubus asked, how many days a week does she work, Councilor Blumer and Platten answered she is available five days a week. Discussion continued on the subject of the Town Assessor, other Towns she works for and her salary.

Mrs. Dubus inquired as to the other bids that were given to the Board, and what set them apart from Mr. Maxwell's bid? Supervisor Richardson answered by stating Mr. Maxwell was the low bid at \$89,000, others came in at \$165,000, and \$223,723. Discussion then ensued as to why the Town did not go with a middle of the road bid.

In closing, Mrs. Dubus encouraged everyone to work together, and be involved, as well as thanked the Board for allowing her to speak, stating that "this is an amazing place to raise a family".

Keith Fitzgerald - Thanked the Board for listening and discussed the November 10, 2022 meeting minutes, where it was stated data mailers were not required. He asked why mailers were not required when hiring a third party contract to assess the Town when you have a paid assessor? Councilor Blumer answered that the Town assessor would not have to dispense mailers either. He went on further to state that the Town Assessor also quoted a price for the reval at \$127,000 and would take her, at first three years, but then was brought down to Two years. If the Board did not do a reval, our equalization rate would have dropped between 50-60%, which is why the Board decided to contract it out to have it completed in a year instead of a 2 to 3-year period.

Mr. Fitzgerald stated that New York State Assessment standards says that the assessor should reassess in the term that they are contracted for, with the standard set by the New York State Senate. The Board needs to check that standard. He asks once again, how come a mailer is not required when you hire an outside assessor when you have a Town Assessor? He asks that the Board pass a resolution that states if they are to hire an outside assessor that notification be given a month prior to the hire listing the companies being

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vetted so the public can vet them too. He feels if this had happened the current issues could have been avoided. Further concerns with tax rates and assessments were stated. Councilor Blumer went on to explain the annual tax cap rate, how it was placed in the past by Governor Cuomo and how up until the inflation increase in 2024, the Town of Elbridge has stayed below that set tax cap rate of 2%. He continued by explaining that each year's budget has to stay below or at that 2%, regardless of the prior year, and that is an annual decision, not automatically done.

Mr. Fitzgerald has a concern about the notification letter that went out. He states that the numbers given are wrong and based on an equalization rate that has not been established. People should be notified of the potential amount that could hit them.

Supervisor Richardson advised the audience of the upcoming informational meeting to be held on April 2, at the Jordan-Elbridge high school. A representative from the State will be in attendance, and possibly from the County. He further informed the audience that Mr. Maxwell sent the assessment to the State and they disapproved it because it was too low, at 89%, and the State wanted it at 100%, and it had to be raised, per the State. When asked, Supervisor Richardson said that was what he was told, though he had not seen an official letter. Further discussion ensued. When asked the State representative's name, Councilor Platten informed the audience it would be Brendan Lawrence. It was asked if the public could receive a copy of the correspondence in regards to the State's stand on the increase? Supervisor Richardson said he will ask for it.

An audience member inquired if the residents will be aware of the answers to all the questions raised, will they be included in the minutes, will they be sent to the people who spoke, how will the answers be known? There were concerns that the answers to questions will not be available before informal meetings begin with Mr. Maxwell. Councilor Blumer stated that when it comes to the actual assessments, that is something that will have to be gone over with Mr. Maxwell and the Assessor. The tax rate cannot be answered because no budget has been set for 2025 for either Town or school.

A discussion in regards to setting appointments with Mr. Maxwell took place and it was asked how the Board was going to help with that? Supervisor Richardson explained how the office was taking names and contact information and has emailed them to Mr. Maxwell. He went on to further explain the dates for meetings, and those meetings will be extended as needed. Councilor Blumer explained that if you are not satisfied with the informal with Mr. Maxwell, residents could go on to have an informal meeting with the Town Assessor, then on to Grievance day with the Board of Assessment Review, and finally to small claims court if needed. Further discussion took place as to how the Town Assessor would be able to handle all the meetings, and if comparables were available. Councilor Platten advised the audience to contact the Assessor's office and they have forward information on to him and Mr. Maxwell assures him that he has gotten back to everyone that has contacted Councilor Platten directly. Discussion ensued. Councilor Duger asked by a show of hands who in the audience had not yet been contacted? An effort by everyone has tried to ensure he responds, and that if you have concerns that you are able to contact us. Councilor Platten invited those that need to be contacted to stop at

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the end of the meeting to leave information with him and he would forward it to Mr. Maxwell.

The concern from the audience was that if the assessment was done the way it was supposed to be done, residents wouldn't be upset and this meeting wouldn't be needed. Ten minutes to meet with Mr. Maxwell isn't going to be enough for residents to explain and negotiate. It was also brought up as a concern about the professionalism in conversing with Mr. Maxwell, as some felt harassed, and found his manners rude.

Councilor Platten asked the audience how they would like to be informed going forward? Some suggested mailing letters. Discussion took place at this time, until it was raised once more when the answers to the proposed questions might be answered? Councilor Blumer answered the following questions from Mr. Ford's submitted list, he reminded the audience he is not the assessor and some questions he may not be able to answer.

1.) "Why was Mr. Maxwell hired to do the job when we already had an assessor and assistant assessor who stated they could do the revaluation?"

A.) It was less expensive, and it was quicker. If we used internal it would have been \$127,000 and more time.

2.) "When was the actual assessments conducted? And how long did it take?"

A.) It will have to be asked of the assessor who did the assessments.

3.) "What was the direction given to Mr. Maxwell on how he was to conduct the new assessments?"

A.) This Board legally cannot direct an assessor on how to do an assessment. There was no specific direction given other than he was to follow the standards given under New York State law. The Assessor and Mr. Maxwell should be able to answer what those standards are.

4.) "Why was the Town of Skaneateles supervisor called regarding complaints about Mr. Maxwell after he had been doing our assessments?" "Why call and inquire now after we already contracted him?"

A.) It was not recalled why, Councilor Blumer would have to ask the Supervisor.

5.) "How much was Mr. Maxwell paid in 2023? 2024?"

A.) No actual breakdown at this time, but the total contracted amount was \$89,000. Some were paid in 2023, and some were paid in 2024.

6.) "How much did we pay OUR assessor and her clerk in 2023? 2024?"

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A.) We will have to look at the budget or talk to our budget officer. We can get that information posted.

7.) “How much has Mr. Maxwell increased his billing amount, which would increase his bid?”

A.) Mr. Maxwell did not increase his amount. He has a contract for \$89,000. Additional costs were Town costs for mailings that were printed by the County and staff and Board volunteered to stuff envelopes and process mail with no additional cost for labor.

8.) “Since the market values fluctuate, will this town revaluation occur every year? Will Mr. Maxwell continue to do our assessor’s job?”

A.) No it will not occur every year and Mr. Maxwell did the revaluation, not the Assessor’s job. The Board is open to other companies or other alternatives.

9.) “Has the uniform percentage been decided, and if not, when will we know?”

A.) The equalization rate for 2023 is at 81%. The rate will not be set for 2024 until the final assessment roll. The purpose of the revaluation was to get the Town back to 100%. If we do nothing, it is the understanding that the equalization rate will fall to 67%. This is determined by New York State. As Supervisor Richardson reported the report has to be submitted to the State. The initial report was submitted to the State, and if kept, the equalization rate would only be 89% and did not match the market values the State has for this area. Therefore Mr. Maxwell re-evaluated and re-submitted the report to get the Town to 100%.

10.) “What is the current notification system we are using to notify ALL residents in the town of any changes or decisions that may have an impact on the community or our tax dollars?”

A.) Notification has been a challenge. New York State law states that notification has to be published in a widely circulated newspaper. We use the Post Standard. In addition, we post in the Eagle Observer, post offices, website and electronic sign. Mailings are costly, time consuming and get tossed out. It can be asked if posting can go to the other available electronic signs around the Town and possible apps researched.

11.) “Did we have a partial or full audit in 2023?”

A.) A full audit is done every year. Positive remarks returned.

12.) “The staff hours at the Town hall have been reduced, but is it true their salaries have increased?”

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A.) Hours have not been reduced, they have changed slightly. The staff gets and increase in wages every year just like anyone else does. This Board are taxpayers too and has no interest in raising taxes.

13.) "Is it true that income limits for senior exemptions have risen?"

A.) Income levels for seniors to be eligible has risen. So seniors can make more income and still get an exemption.

14.) "How much is the water project projected to cost us annually, after state aid? How much of a tax levy increase are we looking at for this project?"

A.) Supervisor Richardson answered this question prior. General taxpayers will have no additional taxes, only water users will see an amount on taxes.

15.) Why was the Local Tax levy override established?"

A.) Since Governor Cuomo established the 2% cap. The Town Board has only utilized it once due to the last few years of double digit inflation. Even as assessments go up, it does not mean that the tax liability will necessarily go up. Examples were given at this point.

**COMMUNICATIONS:** The Joint Water Project is waiting on 3-4 critical easement agreements to be signed. The hope is to have these by the next meeting so that bids can begin this year.

**OLD BUSINESS:**

- James Hughes – Elbridge Motel. Mr. Hughes has requested to be placed in a B1 zoning so that he may maintain his business as a short-term rental motel. The Board stated that the zoning would need to be changed to accommodate this request. The Board should send this proposal to the Planning Board so they may make a recommendation and then proceed from there. Codes Officer Tanner will attempt to get Mr. Hughes on the agenda for the April 9th Planning Board meeting.
- Councilor Blumer is still working on the travel policy.

**COMMITTEE REPORTS:**

Councilor Duger: Appreciation is given to Director Patrick for the setup of the Community Center for this evenings Board meeting. Thanked the Highway and office staff for the extra help they are giving with the questions and concerns from the public. AEDs have been ordered. Casey Brim assisted with the source to order from and hopefully they will be available in the next couple of weeks. Recreation Club has been set up for paying out umpires for Little League. Youth baseball has around 200 registered and will begin at the end of April. Practices have already started.

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Seniors meet on Tuesdays and Fridays for luncheons, as well as special luncheons. Senior Club is planning for their first trip in early May to Letchworth State Park.

Councilor Duger continues to work with Councilor Blumer on the Comprehensive Plan for the Town of Elbridge that also involves both Villages. A public informational meeting will be held to review this plan.

Every 5 years the Town works with the County towards a mitigation plan. Working alongside the Highway Superintendent this discussion will most likely take place in August and is to plan for mitigation in disaster situations.

Jordan Library will hold a dedication of the bookshop to Greg and Shirley Drummond on April 13<sup>th</sup> at 10:00 AM.

Councilor Blumer: No Planning Board meeting this month, but a steady stream of activity will be coming up in the future. A developer is interested in buying some land on Sandbank Road for possible housing.

Rough draft of the Comprehensive Plan is done. Working on the final, with a chapter on climate resilience. Once finished the final draft will be available on the website and there will be a public meeting to discuss it. This plan has been funded with grant monies.

Councilor Platten: Nothing to report for Court or Assessing. The Environmental Commission met on Tuesday and will file a report with Councilor Platten.

Supervisor Richardson: Has left voice mails with concerns about the 80 megawatt solar farm proposed for 400-acre property in the Town. Have not heard anything back. Supervisor asked Codes Officer Tanner if he had heard from the fire departments on how to handle a solar battery fire should one occur? Councilor Blumer responded that he attended a meeting with the County and there is no way to put them out, they have to burn out, which poses a great concern. There is a lot this Board cannot do as it is all regulated by the State. Codes Officer Tanner stated that Norbert Solar on Wheeler Road has offered assistance. Discussion ensued. Councilor Blumer has asked the Town Attorney to assist with research on legislation that may help. Supervisor Richardson will look into who the company is that has proposed this solar farm.

**AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION:**

Maureen Doyle – asked to have her statement on record that Mr. Maxwell did return her call after some urging and was not nice. She asked him for comparables on her two properties and he responded with a less than nice tone. When asked where she could get the comparables, he gave examples for the farm land, but stated she could talk to him at the informational meeting for the house. Mrs. Doyle is not comfortable that she will get very far, especially after comments made, she is “not comfortable we will be successful at all in the informational or moving forward.” She asked how much can you get accomplished in ten minutes for one property, let alone two? Mr. Maxwell was not nice on the phone or helpful.

Councilor Platten urged everyone if they were not happy to take it to the next step. Councilor Blumer explained the steps again.

A discussion took place in regards to finding comparables, and the location of the available books located at the Assessor’s office. Councilor Platten stated he has asked the Assessor’s office to scan them so they can be available by email.



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Mrs. Gina Clifford concurred with Mrs. Doyle that Mr. Maxwell was rude with her as well. She asked if there would be an agenda for the April 2<sup>nd</sup> informational meeting, how the Board planned on running it, who would be there, and what will be available to everyone who attends?

Supervisor Richardson answered that there would be tables of information from both Mr. Maxwell and the Town Assessor, who will both be at the meeting as well as a representative from the State and possibly the County. Mr. Maxwell will explain the assessment process and Assessor Garner will explain the roll and process of the assessor.

Mrs. Clifford asked, if there is a disagreement with Mr. Maxwell can you then talk with the Town Assessor?

Councilor Blumer answered once it has been turned over to the Town Assessor it is under her control. The steps were discussed again, and questions were asked in regards to the qualifications of the Board of Assessment Review. The audience was informed that advertising to fill positions on the Board of Assessment Review were placed and interviews were performed. The members of that Board have knowledge, receive training and are residents of the Town.

Discussion ensued with regards to land classification and the difference between methods of those classifications. Supervisor Richardson invited the audience to attend the meeting on April 2<sup>nd</sup>.

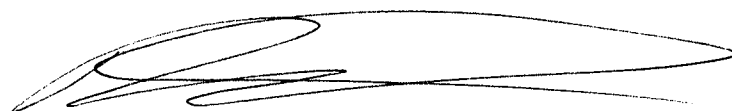
The Joint Water Project was briefly discussed, and Supervisor Richard explained that lines would be replaced on Kingston, Village of Elbridge, Hamilton Road to the Jordan line, and a new tower being placed.

A letter from Joe & Sarah VanLiew was accepted by the Town Clerk, distributed to the Board and placed into the record file for the 2024 revaluation.

**ADJOURNMENT:**

On a motion by Councilor Platten, seconded by Councilor Blumer the March 28, 2024 Town Board meeting was adjourned at 9:36 PM.

Respectfully,



Danielle Karlik