

# **COUNCIL OF GREENBURGH CIVIC ASSOCIATIONS**

## **Minutes of Meeting – Monday, February 24, 2025**

This Zoom-enabled meeting began at 7:30 PM. The meeting was chaired by CGCA Chair Madelon O'Shea (Old Edgemont). In attendance were: CGCA Treasurer Dorrine Livson (Worthington-Woodlands), Mike Burdi (Suburban Manor), Lorraine Cantori (Greenburgh Action Alliance - Hartsdale), Paul Colten (Hilltop Farms), Lloyd Cort (Parkway Gardens), Major Fareed (Juniper Hill), Ellen Foley (East Irvington), Alicia Ford (Parkway Homes), Richard Grant (Hartsdale Park), John Malone (Juniper Hill), Maria Pecora & Bill Sullivan (Sprain Brook Parkway), Ella Preiser (Beaver Hill), and Carol Sarcinella (Hartsdale Park). Also attending was Greenburgh Councilman Francis Sheehan.

Treasurer Livson noted there was \$795.65 in the checking account. She said a bill for \$119 for Zoom has been paid and another bill for \$76 will be due for website maintenance. Minutes of the January 27, 2025 meeting were approved with two corrections. Mrs. O'Shea noted that at the mentioned Town Board meeting, Netanyahu was referred to as Israel's President. He is not, but rather Prime Minister. Mr. Sheehan mentioned a sex change in the Minutes. Ella Preiser apologized for changing Mr. Sheehan's gender by spelling his first name wrong (Frances) in the January minutes.

### **PROPERTY TAX RELIEF FOR THOSE IMPACTED BY NATURAL DISASTERS**

Madelon O'Shea mentioned Supervisor Paul Feiner's email blast today about the 2025 Climate Change Property Tax Assessment legislation that Governor Kathy Hochul signed into law. Councilman Francis Sheehan said Greenburgh initiated this law to provide some relief to property owners impacted by flooding who are forced to pay full property taxes on properties they cannot occupy or use. He noted the Town is currently working on the necessary legislation to provide some relief to the tax burden on these property owners - retroactive to 2020.

Dorrine Livson recommended that post cards be sent to all residents, notifying them before a Public Hearing is scheduled on this proposed legislation. Mr. Sheehan said he is recommending that postcards be sent regarding the ADU legislation. Mike Burdi suggested a "two-fer" - mentioning both the proposed ADU and tax abatement Public Hearings on the same post card.

### **CONTINUED PUBLIC HEARING ON PROPOSED ADU LEGISLATION**

Madelon O'Shea reported there is a continued Public Hearing scheduled for this Wednesday, February 26, before the Town Board regarding the proposed Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) legislation. She said she appreciates the information CD&C Commissioner Garrett Duquesne has provided to civic leaders but there are still many unanswered questions. She noted she was unable to obtain information from a real estate person. Dorrine Livson said she sent out the letter from Richard Grant and noted he is not happy with the Town's answers to questions he raised. Mrs. Livson said she is not for or against ADUs but believes the Town must do a better job of informing the public. She said merely posting information on the Town's gblist, advertising a meeting in *The Journal News* and sending information to civic leaders registered with the Town is not sufficient. She recommended sending a post card to all single family homeowners.

Councilman Francis Sheehan suggested that it is more effective if someone is present at the Public Hearing to read any CGCA statement into the record rather than just sending a letter to the Town Board and asking that it be placed in the record. Mrs. O'Shea said she doesn't know if Town Board members really are listening to what is said. She noted there is archived documentation that ZBA members play with their cell phones and talk to each other while residents speak at the microphone. She said sadly, several of us who used to regularly attend Board meetings have had recent very bad experiences and no longer prefer to attend meetings in person.

Ella Preiser reiterated that the average homeowner knows nothing about this proposed law and reminded that Richard Grant pointed out in his correspondence that not even members of his civic group's executive board were

aware of the issue. It appears the people who will ultimately get approval to create an ADU are those who already responded to Supervisor Paul Feiner that they want one. It was noted if they don't meet the requirements, they can always apply to the ZBA for a variance and will likely receive it.

Ellen Foley mentioned there are so many facets and the public doesn't know what the Town Board is considering. Councilman Sheehan noted right now there are people who are very much in favor of ADUs, and there seems to be a push to approve them with a sunset clause - let's try it to see how the law works!! He noted if you have something and then take it away, there could be a lawsuit. He noted there has only been a minor change to the proposed law. He said that he personally has no problem if the ADU is inside an existing house, but he has serious concerns about putting another building behind a house and saying that it's in compliance with the Comprehensive Plan and doesn't represent an increase in density. He noted most people don't understand that even creating an ADU within an existing house may be costly. In addition to creating a kitchen, it will be necessary to provide an opening for ingress/egress and it may be necessary to increase the size of the windows. Mrs. O'Shea asked if fire departments have weighed in about the need for firewalls, etc. He noted the Building Department, not the Fire Department, would be responsible. John Malone later confirmed that things like fire walls are based on the New York State building code and the Building Department is responsible for overseeing them, not the Fire Departments. Lloyd Cort mentioned parking and concerns about how ADUs would be monitored. Mr. Sheehan said he too was concerned about parking since there is nothing in the code to prevent turning the front yard into pavement, and more cars would increase the requests for hardship parking on the streets during the winter months. Mike Burdi questioned whether there is a setback requirement from parking to the house for fire safety. Mrs. O'Shea noted there was a house fire in Edgemont caused by a car that caught on fire in the garage. Alicia Ford said it would not be a pleasant view with cars parked along the front yard.

Mrs. Livson mentioned increased usage of Town services such as water and sanitation. Mrs. O'Shea mentioned the potential impact on schools. Mr. Sheehan said two stated goals were to help create affordable housing and to help seniors age in place. However, there is nothing in the proposed law addressing affordability and there is no special provision for family members to help one age in place. He noted we keep hearing that there will be very few ADUs. He questioned how the stated goals would be achieved if there are only a few units created. Mrs. O'Shea asked again if the units are created for family members, why it would be necessary to sign leases.

Mrs. O'Shea said to create more affordable units it would make better sense to build rental multifamily housing on major roads. Mr. Burdi agreed and noted that would provide necessary housing that was convenient to shopping and transportation. Lloyd Cort reiterated his concerns about parking. He noted all the houses in his neighborhood have garages but there are also eight to ten homes that have cars parked in the front yards. His main concern continued to be how ADUs would be monitored.

Mr. Malone commented that the Fairview Fire Commissioners sent a letter to the Town Board urging that if this ADU legislation is adopted, there should be no tax discount, and the homeowners should be assessed full taxes for any additions to the house. He recalled that Tax Assessor Edye McCarthy mentioned the state was considering a \$200,000 tax exemption phased in over a ten-year period. He said he personally does not support this proposed law but he noted Supervisor Paul Feiner wants it and has suggested a tax break. Mr. Malone noted he also is concerned about the parking and the impacts more residents would have on services. Major Fareed agreed with the comments made by Mr. Malone.

#### **AD HOC TRAFFIC SAFETY COMMITTEE FORMED**

Lucas Cioffi joined the meeting at 8:00 PM and was welcomed by those present. Dorrine Livson said she had sent Mr. Cioffi a list of some concerns dealing with traffic safety that had been mentioned at previous CGCA meetings. He was invited to tell those present about his plans.

Mr. Cioffi said Supervisor Paul Feiner invited him to create an informal ad hoc committee to address Town traffic safety concerns. Mr. Cioffi noted the committee had not been approved by the Town Board. He was inviting all Greenburgh residents to participate and hoped a good result would encourage the Town Board to make it a permanent committee addressing traffic safety problems. He noted in 2020 Mr. Feiner asked him to co-chair a committee in Edgemont and after nine months they published their work. Mr. Cioffi noted hundreds of Edgemont residents were engaged and large amounts of data were gathered through surveys. As a result, the Town Board took some action to plug some safety gaps, like a multi-million dollar grant for a critical sidewalk. He said following these meetings a woman was killed on Central Avenue by a neighbor while walking her dog in a crosswalk near the Edgemont/Hartsdale border. She had the right-of-way. He noted it was tragic for the woman who died and equally tragic for her neighbor. Mr. Cioffi noted after this tragedy, Mr. Feiner asked him to start a committee again focusing on traffic safety. [**\* This paragraph is incorrect. See re-write on page 6.**]

Mr. Cioffi said there is a broad mandate to provide advice to the Town Board, but there is no power to craft policy. Mrs. Livson asked how residents will get involved. Mr. Cioffi replied the plan was to form teams for every neighborhood and work with existing civic groups. He provided his email address ([lucas.cioffi@gmail.com](mailto:lucas.cioffi@gmail.com)) and his phone number (917 528-1831). Mrs. Livson said she will email the information to those on the CGCA list and encouraged everyone to forward this information to their constituents. Mr. Cioffi noted Edgemont already has a strong committee, but the needs of other communities are unknown. He said his committee has some technical skills to bring to the table, e.g., the ability to gather large amounts of data. But the committee needs to learn the history and what local needs exist so the committee can help get those needs addressed. The plan is to meet entirely on Zoom. He noted one of the first issues the committee would like addressed is for the Town to start sharing data about traffic accidents by posting it on the Town's website. He noted another person was hit walking a dog at the same intersection. He said if the person knew someone was killed at that intersection nine months earlier, they might have walked their dog in a different location.

Those present at the meeting started mentioning some problems.

Paul Colten noted that pedestrians are often difficult to see if they are out of the driver's peripheral vision. He said NYC has put pedestrian bulbs at intersections, making vehicles drive a little further out into the intersection before they make a turn and that gives the driver the ability to see people in the crosswalk. He suggested the Town could look at whether any intersections in the Town might benefit from this technique.

Mrs. Livson mentioned that shrubs are frequently not trimmed sufficiently on many corner lots. She said when she makes a left turn off of her street, she has to creep, creep, creep all the way to make sure no one is crossing, or not paying attention and busy on their cell phones.

Mike Burdi said as part of an aging population, our eyesight is not as sharp as it used to be. He raised concerns about it being hard to see when commercial property owners pile snow up near the entrance/exit to a business parking lot. He said another problem is the blinding halogen lights and LED lights on the streets. He noted the AARP is trying to address that issue. He suggested it is important to find out the cause of incidents. Is it lighting, weather-related, distracted drivers, distracted pedestrians, cell phones usage, etc.? Knowing the cause will provide a better idea of how to address or minimize the problem.

Lorraine Cantori said since the legalization of marijuana, that is all you smell around vehicles at intersections. She questioned whether there are statistics on the number of people driving under the influence. She noted she is a 32-year resident of West Hartsdale Avenue and has observed speeding and erratic driving and a number of accidents on the street. She said when the cops are around, drivers behave. However, there appears to be an increase in the number of people who just don't respect the Vehicle and Traffic laws.

Mrs. Livson mentioned another problem is the lack of code enforcement. She noted NYS law mandates no parking within 15 feet of a fire hydrant, but there are no markings on the streets and drivers ignore this law. She also noted there appears to be little enforcement of the overnight parking restrictions from December 1<sup>st</sup> to March 15<sup>th</sup> from 1:00 to 6:00 AM. She said Supervisor Feiner has put out emails that cars will be towed. However, cars are not being towed, they are not being ticketed, and are not even being issued warnings. Another problem is speeding. She noted a few areas around Town have had speed limits reduced to 25 mph, but more areas need to be addressed. She also questioned whether there is a need for more red light cameras or other cameras.

Mr. Cioffi indicated he was writing down all these issues. He noted public engagement was needed if actions must be taken, but you don't want to take any action that may need to be withdrawn later. He said his committee can help devise a survey that can be distributed throughout neighborhoods to obtain data. Community groups can then present the data to the Town Board or ask the traffic safety group to back up what is said. Mr. Cioffi said if these have been long time problems, something needs to change. He indicated a means of having stripes painted on streets within 15 feet of a fire hydrant could be developed. He noted we don't know why the Town is not addressing problems. It may be a lack of resources or possibly the Town doesn't know about the problems. He said the committee may be able to create some technology where one can report problems instantly.

Mr. Colten said he called the police one morning about a vehicle parked overnight on the street during a recent snow storm. He noted you could see the snow plowed around the car. The police responded that they could only ticket the vehicle during the prohibited overnight parking hours.

Carol Sarcinella said Richard Grant had contacted the police about overnight parking and there seemed to be some movement in her area. Major Fareed and John Malone noted the overnight parking restriction was not enforced in the Juniper Hill area. Alicia Ford agreed that overnight parking was not enforced in Parkway Homes, especially during snowstorms, when you could see the snow plowed around the cars in the morning. She noted there should be enforcement of the law, whether or not there is snow. Mr. Cioffi questioned whether more tickets would be issued if one took a picture and sent it to the police. Mr. Colten noted most people who would report these things are home sleeping at 1:00 AM. Ms. Ford said she has called the police after 1:00 AM to report cars parked on the neighborhood streets including one practically in front of her house.

Mr. Colten noted there needs to be more patrolling of the neighborhoods. Mr. Malone commented there are only six or seven police cars on patrol during the overnight hours and that is not sufficient personnel to handle other calls and to cover all the miles of town roads between 1:00 AM and 6:00 AM. Mr. Burdi noted residents should become the eyes and ears of the police department and not be hesitant about reporting a vehicle parked illegally. If enough tickets are issued, the public will get the message. He also noted the vehicle could be an abandoned or stolen car. But, he also pointed out that there is the possibility the person could say: "I didn't know, I wasn't aware of Town law." He said the same thing is true with parking within fifteen feet of a fire hydrant. Mr. Burdi stressed we need to make sure everyone knows about the laws.

Mr. Cioffi inquired whether the CGCA would like to establish a system to be able to report these kind of problems. He asked whether "Fix It! Greenburgh" was still available to report problems. Councilman Sheehan responded that it is currently available but there is a question whether it will continue to exist. He noted that Albany had a sequence of events and abandoned using the system because courts have ruled that if someone reports a problem, it constitutes notice, and a municipality could be found liable if the problem wasn't corrected, even though it didn't have a chance to fix the problem because so many problems were being reported.

Madelon O'Shea asked what the CGCA and individuals can do to help. Mr. Cioffi said teams can be formed in different neighborhoods, wherever there is energy. The committee will then coordinate between areas and go "deep and wide" learning from each other. It's a total volunteer effort. Even youth who want to get involved in

community service projects can participate. He noted there will be a lot of technology involved and it would be a good project for youth to put on a college resume.

Mr. Cioffi thanked the CGCA for inviting him to the meeting. Those present thanked him for attending and his efforts to help everyone in the Town enhance traffic safety. His phone number and email address will be circulated. He was welcomed back anytime he had something to report.

Ellen Foley said she was very glad to hear from Mr. Cioffi. She noted her neighbors would like to see more patrol cars to address the speeding on Taxter Road, Sunnyside Road and Mountain Lane. She said even though there is a 25 MPH speed limit in the Village of Irvington and Greenburgh has reduced speed limits to 30 and 25 mph in some areas, and even though there are warning signs, people still speed. She noted once when she called the police after 1:00 A.M. about cars illegally parked, she had the feeling they wanted to say "Go to bed lady."

Councilman Francis Sheehan pointed out that the agenda for tonight's CGCA meeting listed Mr. Cioffi as Co-Chair of the Town Safety Committee. Mr. Sheehan noted the four members of the Town Council have not approved this committee because they have concerns about encroaching upon the good working relationship with the traffic safety committee that the Town Board has developed with the Edgemont Community Council. Mrs. Livson took responsibility and said she was to blame for the error posted on the CGCA agenda. She noted that Mr. Cioffi had pointed out at the beginning of the meeting that it was an ad hoc committee. Mr. Sheehan said he would have no problem with a Citizen's Safety Committee. He noted it was apparent from the conversation and issues raised tonight that the CGCA supports the plan for such a committee. Mrs. Livson said Edgemont should be proud of what it has accomplished and other areas would like to emulate the success.

### **POSSIBLE JAIL TIME AWAITS THOSE WITH ILLEGAL DRIVEWAYS**

A rather lengthy and heated discussion took place about driveways. Some Greenburgh residents have been cited for having illegal driveways, constructed or expanded without a building permit or C of O. Needless to say it must be very upsetting to receive notice in the mail from the Building Department that one is guilty of doing something illegal and being warned that if the problem is not corrected within 30 days, there could be fines or imprisonment. Additional notices were sent by the Town's DPW stating that it is illegal to have not only a driveway, but also walls, fences, posts, trees and bushes in the Town's right-of-way and a fine or imprisonment could result if the issue is not corrected. [Note: Many residents may not know that ten to fifteen feet of their front yards actually belongs to the Town but the property owner must maintain it.]

Records indicate many of these driveways cited were constructed decades ago, long before the current owners purchased the property. If a variance is needed, the costs can be several thousand dollars. Costs include hiring a surveyor to verify dimensions and setbacks, 11 copies of various documents, application fees, a newspaper ad announcing the meeting, notices mailed to neighboring property owners within 250 feet, a per page cost of the transcript of the meeting, and triple the cost for permits to legalize the driveway. This all started because 62 years ago the Town granted permission to construct a two-car garage at the rear of a house, but apparently there is no record of approvals for a driveway for vehicles to reach that garage from the street. ZBA members then required the property owner to provide photos of any similar driveways in the neighborhood. The Building Department then cited other property owners for having no permits for their driveway expansions.

Questions were raised about title insurance. It was noted that it is unlikely that title insurance companies examine every square inch of a property and its buildings to determine whether variances and permits have been granted for everything, including a driveway. Title insurance more likely simply assures that taxes have been paid and there are no liens against the property. While a financial challenge has been presented to a limited number of residents in one neighborhood, if this issue continues, it is possible that many residents throughout the Town could be found guilty of having illegal driveways. Those present at the CGCA meeting agreed this vendetta is

outrageous, unfair and just wrong. Home owners should not be punished for something that was done decades ago, long before they purchased the property.

Councilman Francis Sheehan recalled that years ago when he served on the ZBA, a similar issue arose.

Alicia Ford said that in 2017 when a neighbor went to sell her house, she learned whoever owned the house prior to her had made changes to a whole full basement. Before she could close on the sale, it cost her more than \$50,000 to restore the house to its original condition. The house was then worth more money but she couldn't ask for more because she had already locked in the asking price.

### **ACCOUNTABILITY QUESTIONED**

Lorraine Cantori mentioned a lack of accountability. She said that she filed a FOIL (Freedom of Information Law) request with the Town for information and has received no response. She questioned things like how much money is raised in late fees from property owners who do not pay their taxes on the due date. Where does that money go? Where does the money go for penalties people pay for disobeying provisions in Town codes? How many people have lost their STAR Exemption? How many went into foreclosure?

Ms. Cantori also noted that the majority of Hartsdale residents don't send their kids to the Greenburgh Central School District. As a former educator she said she finds it frustrating that residents appear to be overtaxed. She noted the school pays \$72,500 a year for kids in special education. She said she has heard some students are graduating 12<sup>th</sup> grade without even passing basic reading.

### **MISCELLANEOUS**

**Trouble in River City?** Madelon O'Shea mentioned the nastiness and vitriol at recent Public Meetings and the disturbing emails being circulated. She noted she remembers the unrest in Greenburgh in the late 1950s and early 1960s and has concerns that history may be doomed to repeat itself.

**Thank You Dora. Thank You Shelly.**

Once again, the CGCA extends a thank you to Dora Ashley for continuing to maintain the CGCA website and a thank you to Shelly Livson for taking over the duty of arranging the CGCA Zoom meetings.

### **\* Re-write of first paragraph on page 3**

Mr. Cioffi said Supervisor Paul Feiner invited him to create an informal ad hoc committee to address Town traffic safety concerns. Mr. Cioffi noted the committee had not been approved by the Town Board. He was inviting all Greenburgh residents to participate and hoped a good result would encourage the Town Board to make it a permanent committee addressing traffic safety problems.

Mr. Cioffi noted in November 2022, Edgemont Community Council (ECC) President Dylan Pyne asked him to chair the ECC Traffic, Sidewalks and Safety Committee. Hundreds of Edgemont residents were engaged and large amounts of data were collected through surveys. A report was submitted to the Town in October 2023. As a result of the ECC committee's work, the Town Board took some action to plug safety gaps, and were successful in securing a multi-million dollar grant for a critical sidewalk project on Old Army Road. Mr. Cioffi said following this effort, a woman was killed on Central Avenue by a neighbor while walking her dog in a crosswalk near the Edgemont/Hartsdale border. She had the right-of-way. He noted it was tragic for the woman who died and equally tragic for her neighbor. Mr. Cioffi noted after this tragedy, Mr. Feiner asked him to start a Town-wide committee, focusing on traffic safety.