

COUNCIL OF GREENBURGH CIVIC ASSOCIATIONS

Minutes of Meeting – Monday, August 14, 2023

A special thank you was extended to Carmela Greco-Acevedo who arranged this Zoom-enabled meeting which began at 7:30 PM. The meeting was chaired by CGCA Chair Madelon O’Shea (Old Edgemont). Also in attendance were CGCA Treasurer Dorrine Livson (Worthington-Woodlands), Mike Burdi (Suburban Manor), Paul Colten (Hilltop Farms), Alan Fishman (Northern Greenville), Maria Pecora and Bill Sullivan (Sprain Brook Parkway Drive), and Ella Preiser (Beaver Hill).

Treasurer Livson stated the CGCA bank account balance as of July 31, 2023 remained the same at \$1,122.36. She noted a donation will be made tomorrow to St. Jude’s Children’s Hospital in memory of Ella Preiser’s sister (Irene Wood) who passed away in May.

CGCA SENDS THOUGHTS & PRAYERS TO THE NOVO FAMILY

Dorrine Livson reported that Celia Novo has informed us that her husband Guy is in Montefiore Hospital with a neurological disorder complicated by Covid. She indicated it is tiring and exhausting and dark days seem to be ahead. It was noted that CGCA representatives from all different religious faiths are sending best wishes, thoughts and prayers to the family. Mrs. Novo was a former President of the Hartsdale Park Civic Association and a regular attendee at CGCA meetings.

“NOISE” CAMERAS COMING TO GREENBURGH?

Paul Colten mentioned that he was happy to learn that the Town will look into the possibility of installing “noise” cameras to give summonses to vehicle operators with noisy or no mufflers who violate the law. He noted he wasn’t at the presentation in July and has no details of how the system will work. He presumes it will work similar to red-light speed cameras with some built in calibration to measure noise levels within a certain distance and with infrastructure running lines to do it. A testing area along Central Avenue was proposed and Supervisor Paul Feiner asked residents to propose other areas to expand the system.

Dorrine Livson mentioned that the really big part will be how violations will be enforced. She said a problem with noise coming from Elmwood Day Camp was reported to Supervisor Paul Feiner. His simplistic response was to “call the police,” which accomplished nothing.

HARTSDALE GREENHOUSES CASE BEFORE ZBA ADJOURNED

Ella Preiser noted at the ZBA meeting on July 20, 2023, Carol Wielk, President of the Secor Homes Civic Association, did an excellent job explaining the problems with Hartsdale Greenhouses’ application seeking either an Interpretation reversing the Building Inspector’s denial letter or a Use Variance to continue the illegal firewood and mulch operation. While the presentation was lengthy, it presented accurate information and properly explained the process necessary to meet the NYS legal requirements to obtain a Use Variance. Madelon O’Shea noted that during the “deliberation” portion of the ZBA meeting, various ZBA members referred to Ms. Wielk in derogatory terms, as the “woman with white hair who spoke forever,” “if you believe the novel she wrote,” “she divided the community,” “she divided the room.” A member of the ZBA who was not physically present at Town Hall but on Zoom said “she was very uncomfortable and felt threatened” by what Ms. Wielk said. She also said “she was uncomfortable and felt threatened” by the CGCA letter that Dorrine Livson read into the record during the hearing.

Mrs. O’Shea questioned whether the CGCA should say something since our reputation as civic leaders was impugned. Ella Preiser said she personally intends to address these insults. She questioned why the CGCA letter read into the record by Mrs. Livson felt threatening. It addressed three issues:

(1) Whether the application was correctly noticed? It was not. Only the parcel of land purchased in 1955 was mentioned. No mention was made of the second parcel where the illegal operation of turning logs into firewood and mulch was occurring.

(2) When the wood processing operation actually began? No photos or documentation has ever been presented. Only the same statement that the operation has been in place for 68 years since the one parcel was purchased in 1955 is repeated. [Everyone should believe the owner who purchased the property on December 12, 1955 immediately began importing logs to cut up.] In fact, aerial photography shows vacant land in 1960 and several long-time residents have stated this operation did not exist. Even ZBA member Diane Uberle has stated publicly on the record that she grew up in the area and played on the vacant land in the 1960s.

(3) The process necessary to obtain a Use Variance. The applicant has produced nothing required by state law. Mrs. Preiser noted if the ZBA grants a Use Variance it could jeopardize every single family residence district in the Town by permitting a use that is not allowed in most commercial districts.

Mrs. O'Shea said she was at Westchester Greenhouses on East Hartsdale Avenue over the weekend to obtain some fresh produce and noticed a large sign on the wall indicating "firewood was for sale, we deliver with a phone number." This suggests not just the little bundles of firewood are for sale, but whole cords of it.

It was noted that Building Inspector Frank Morabito has done a considerable amount of research and posted everything he found on the Town's website under Active Applications - Zoning Board of Appeals. All are encouraged to view the website. It indicates a number of illegal things have happened over the years. The records show there are 38 greenhouses on the site but the owners only sought permits for three of them. In 2009, numerous trucking firms were paying to park on the site. The owner applied for a Use Variance but decided to pull the application when told dollars and cents proof would be necessary to prove he could not obtain a reasonable return on the property for every permitted use allowed in the zoning district.

The applicant has requested an adjournment so the case will not be heard until the September 21, 2023 ZBA meeting. Mrs. O'Shea questioned if the CGCA should present another letter in opposition. Everyone present was polled and agreed that the CGCA should submit another response. However, it was agreed that we should wait in order to respond to any additional information that the applicant provides.

NAT'S PUB TO BECOME TRUCK DEPOT

Madelon O'Shea noted that because of its age, NAT'S PUB, advertised as the "Best Burger in Town," on Saw Mill River Road, just south of Warehouse Lane, has come before the Historic and Landmarks Preservation Board (H&LPB). Plans are to demolish the building. She said it is not worth keeping. Ella Preiser agreed and noted the building has been flooded repeatedly over the years. The property is located in the Light Industrial (LI) zoning district and plans call for the site to become a truck depot, with parking for about 20 trucks.

ELMWOOD DAY CAMP DISMISSAL CAUSES TRAFFIC NIGHTMARE

Dorrine Livson reported that after the June CGCA meeting she was contacted by a number of residents on various local streets (Westchester View Lane, Palisades, Green Acres, Lark) who were enduring lengthy time periods each afternoon to get to/from their homes because of traffic backups caused by parents waiting in line to pick up their children being dismissed from the Elmwood Day Camp. Some vehicles waiting were not only blocking access to driveways but actually parked in some homeowners' driveways. Drivers didn't even apologize when asked to move. Mrs. Livson noted her handyman told her it took him 20 minutes to come to her house from the Sprain Brook Parkway, and he turned down Worthington Road.

Still photographs and videos were presented of long lines of vehicles on local roads. The issue was discussed at the Town Board work session on July 11 and again at the Town Board meeting on July 12 when the Police Chief said he drove to the site and it only took him two minutes to travel eastbound and three minutes to travel westbound on Dobbs Ferry Road. Ella Preiser said the CGCA sent a letter to the Town Board on July 12 stating

the Town Board must take action because lives may be at stake. Mrs. Livson said the following Thursday, Town Council members Francis Sheehan and Gina Jackson met with her on Dobbs Ferry Road and with their own eyes saw the traffic backed up along the road and cars pulling around a bus. They agreed this situation can't go on, is not fair to residents and creates a potential danger. When the director of the Day Camp approached them, he accused Mrs. Livson of being a trouble maker and rabble rouser with nothing better to do with her time. Earlier, Supervisor Paul Feiner said he would arrange a meeting to discuss the issue, but the camp director said he was too busy with camp and had no time to attend a meeting. Mrs. Livson said she will contact Mr. Sheehan again to see what can be done to resolve this issue before next year's camp season. Madelon O'Shea said this reminds her of an incident many years ago when a developer told former Town Supervisor Anthony Veteran that he would be willing to pay to move Mrs. O'Shea (a troublemaker) to Scarsdale or anywhere out of Greenburgh.

UNITED REFRIGERATION VARIANCE REQUESTS LIKELY TO BE DENIED

Ella Preiser noted that Alex Anzer, who lives on Hunter Lane, will likely be successful in getting the ZBA to deny the area variances requested to build a three story, 73-foot high building that would have towered over everything in the area. The proposed building would be a mere 24 feet from Mr. Anzer's backyard fence. At the July 20, 2023 ZBA meeting, the applicant's representatives said they would not consider building only a two-story building or a three-story building with smaller heights in each story. At that meeting Dorrine Livson read a letter from the CGCA asking the ZBA to deny the variances requested. During the deliberation portion of the meeting, the consensus of ZBA members was to deny the application, but they voted to close the application "For Decision Only" so that member William Bland, who was absent at one meeting, could watch the video and/or read the transcript before voting. ZBA Member Kristi Knecht plans to abstain. Everyone at the CGCA meeting agreed this was a wrong use in a wrong place. Mrs. Preiser noted the proposed building would also tower over the Sportstime building in front of it, which used to be a bowling alley and will now be a Jeep dealership.

Mike Burdi said that he went to schedule an appointment with Volkswagen today and decided to check out the current United Refrigeration site. He said when you stand in the parking lot in front of the building, there are rather large trees in bloom so it is difficult to see anything to the left or the right, including the adjacent houses. He noted the current building is higher than the curved roof of the former bowling alley, now Jeep dealership. Mrs. Preiser noted that the trees in bloom will shed their leaves in another month or so, and if you increase the height of the building by 200%, there is no way future trees could block the view. She noted the real issue is the precedent that granting these variances would set.

Mr. Burdi also expressed concern about the impact of additional truck traffic on Route 9A that a triple sized warehouse at this site would create. He noted a couple of miles north, Amazon is constructing a huge warehouse which will greatly increase truck traffic on the road. When you add the number of trucks from Warehouse Lane, ShopRite, Sam's Club, and the two industrial parks, it may be necessary to adjust our time schedule. Mrs. Preiser mentioned although you cannot see it, a short distance away Regeneron is currently working on building about one million square feet of space and Westchester County is moving ahead with plans to create a huge Biomed facility on the vacant County Reservation. Progress will be progress and life will not be like it was 50, 60 or 70 years ago. It was noted people might not decide to stay in the area.

MASSARO PARK - A POSITIVE CHANGE FOR AREA RESIDENTS

Ella Preiser reported that it took a stabbing, but positive changes are finally being made at Massaro Park. This 2.5 acre site, which is named after a former Greenburgh Town Councilman, is right off of Payne Street, north of the Village of Elmsford. Formerly a number of parking spaces abutting the park sat directly off of Payne Street and were used by people attending the park, as well as patrons of a small deli across the street. Those parking spaces are now enclosed within a fence that comes right to the sidewalk. The fence can be locked at night when the park is closed.

The parking places have been a concern for area residents for many years because they became a hang-out place at night for men smoking, drinking, talking loud, playing loud music, and lately harassing drivers on Payne Street. Even though signs were posted prohibiting parking at night, those hanging out ignored them. Area residents have even attended Town Board work sessions to ask that their concerns be addressed. Dorrine Livson noted that recently someone threw something at a resident who was driving by one night. The man got out of his car to say something and was attacked and stabbed multiple times.

Mrs. Livson also noted that the Building Inspector found numerous violations including a serious electric problem at the deli and it was closed. It is unknown whether the violations can be cured so the deli can re-open.

Mike Burdi said he finds it aggravating and frustrating to learn that it took a stabbing to address what he identifies as a “quality of life” issue. He said when these incidents occur they should be documented and reported to the police. If you see something, say something and do something. If needed, the higher ups need to step on the toes of the police chief, who should be told to make the problem go away. Concern was expressed that the current Police Chief has been told to be gentle with Greenburgh residents. Mr. Burdi said he is not knocking Greenburgh’s police but is concerned that incidents not escalate to quality of life incidents.

AN AGENDA - “TO HAVE OR NOT TO HAVE. THAT IS THE QUESTION”

Madelon O’Shea noted that the President of the Edgemont Community Council has suggested that the CGCA go back to distributing a formal agenda before each meeting. She noted that method was used when the CGCA met at the TDYCC, but practically no one brought the agenda to the meeting or contributed to it and that is why we stopped issuing one. She said everyone has her email address and should feel free to contact her. Dorrine Livson mentioned that when she sends out Zoom contact information before a meeting, she asks for any topics people would like discussed and no one responds.

NO INTERIM “LEAF BLOWER” LAW ADOPTED

Ella Preiser mentioned that at the June CGCA meeting it was noted that an interim law banning leaf blowers for two months - from June 15 to August 15 - was proposed. She noted tomorrow is August 15 and nothing happened. Madelon O’Shea said her magnolia tree sheds huge leaves at this time of the year and they are slippery, meaning she cannot walk safely on her patio or pool deck. The tulip tree is also shedding leaves now. This weekend her gardener blew these leaves, as well as debris from her gutters. Mike Burdi added that the people we elected to do the work have spent umpteen hours over many meetings revising and amending this law and it was all a charade. He said life will go on and the issue will come up next year in April or so. Mrs. O’Shea said the gardeners are in and out so quickly, you could not get any official here in time to hear or see them. It was noted other yard and lawn equipment is noisy and kicks up pollutants. It is difficult to understand why the Town wants to regulate against people enjoying their property safely.

MISCELLANEOUS

Con Ed to Bury Electric Wires. Madelon O’Shea mentioned that Con Edison is planning to bury electrical wires underground on Birchwood Lane, which is land area adjacent to the Harts Brook Park and Preserve property and across Ridge Road from the Westchester County Ridge Road Park. This is seen as a protective measure in the right direction to address Climate Change.

Money Available for Necessary Flood Repairs. Madelon O’Shea mentioned a gblast put out on August 10 by Supervisor Paul Feiner that reported on a \$3 million New York State grant that would provide up to \$50,000 to eligible homeowners in Westchester County to make emergency home repairs necessary due to flooding incidents. She had no details but encouraged anyone who had sustained flood damage to look into the matter.

Thank you again Carmela and Dora for making this meeting possible and getting the word out to all.