

COUNCIL OF GREENBURGH CIVIC ASSOCIATIONS

Minutes of Meeting – Monday, January 22, 2024

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. In attendance were: Tom Bock (Fulton Park), Mike Burdi (Suburban Manor), Paul Colten (Hilltop Farms), Lloyd Cort (Parkway Gardens), Ellen Foley (East Irvington), Alicia Ford (Parkway Homes), Richard Grant (Hartsdale Park), Carmela Greco-Acevedo (East Irvington), Ella Preiser (Beaver Hill), Ken Stahn (Sprain Road), Carol Wielk (Secor Homes) and Eric Zinger (Hartsdale Neighbors).

Ella Preiser apologized that the minutes of the December 11, 2023 CGCA meeting were not ready. Treasurer Dorrine Livson was not present but sent notice that the CGCA bank account balance as of December 31, 2023 was \$1,022.36. A year-end financial statement is being prepared. All bills have been paid. Mrs. Livson found no need to raise dues. They will remain the same at \$25.00 for two years (2024 and 2025). Ken Stahn asked where to send the money. It was noted information and a membership registration form will be emailed to all.

“MEET & GREET” INVITATIONS TO BE EXTENDED

A brief discussion took place about extending “Meet & Greet” invitations to newly elected Town Clerk Lisa Marie Nero and newly elected Town Councilmember Joy Haber as well as to various department heads. The purpose would be to get to know each other and hopefully make it possible to work cooperatively for the benefit of the Town. It was decided to extend the first invitation to Ms. Nero for the February 26, 2024 CGCA meeting. The meeting will start as usual at 7:30 PM, with Ms. Nero to join at 8:00 PM if that is convenient. The goal is not to blind-side her with comments/questions, so those wishing to discuss particular topics will be asked to let the CGCA know about them in advance. A decision about who to invite next will be addressed at future meetings.

TOWN-WIDE FLOODING - A MAJOR CONCERN

Madelon O’Shea mentioned that Supervisor Paul Feiner put out an email (12/28/23) stating the NYS DEC will be studying flooding along the Saw Mill River in Greenburgh beginning in March 2024. She noted that she emailed Mr. Feiner today that the CGCA would like full-scaled studies regarding all the named and unnamed rivers/streams contributing to flooding throughout the Town. She informed him the CGCA is willing to help and would like seats at those study meetings. She requested DEC contact information. In order to make a list of potential study sites, she asked those present at the meeting to provide information on flooding in their areas.

Lloyd Cort said there is a creek running behind his house. He noted some people on South Road put rocks in their backyards so the creek now flows across to Granada Crescent and then toward the Bronx River Parkway. He said a lot of water collects in some back yards. He noted the waterway used to be called “Motion Creek.” Mr. Cort also noted that the Lois Bronz Children’s Center outdoor playground area was totally destroyed by Hurricane Ida in 2021. Grant money has been sought to replace it.

Ellen Foley said there is no stream in her area of East Irvington but individual property owners do receive water from higher grounds. She noted that storm drains along the street need more frequent cleaning.

Carol Wielk said homes along Jean Lane get flooded from Ferncliff Cemetery. She said she built a berm on her property but the property still takes lots of water from the Cemetery. She noted Ferncliff received approval to put in storm drains four or five years ago but it remains to be seen if it will ever happen.

Eric Zinger mentioned that the Four Corners and East Hartsdale Avenue properties flood. Ms. Foley mentioned a \$541,000 grant from FEMA has been received to study Hartsdale Brook.

Alicia Ford mentioned that properties along Edgepark Road flood.

Richard Grant said the Hartsdale Park area still is a problem area with water running down from the Harts Brook Nature Preserve (former Gaisman property). There is also a stream on one neighbor's property in the area.

Mike Burdi said he thought that Senator Stewart-Cousins has applied for a \$250,000 grant to study flooding in co-operation with the Army Corps of Engineers. He also noted that Gov. Hochul proposed money in the budget to make repairs or buy out those properties that have sustained frequent flooding. Questions were raised whether people would receive fair market value. Also questioned was whether people failed to do their homework and bought houses with no knowledge of flooding. Eric Zinger noted the law currently allows one to pay \$500.00 in lieu of disclosing previous flooding but in March that option will no longer be available to sellers of property.

Ella Preiser reminded that she, Dorrine Livson, and Dylan Pyne met with Westchester County Legislators Jewel Williams Johnson and MaryJane Shimsky, Supervisor Feiner, and DPW Commissioner Rich Fon in November 2022 to discuss flooding, with few results. She noted you do not need a Hurricane Ida, only a couple of inches of rain, to flood and close down her son's businesses and numerous other businesses in the area north of Elmsford. Ms. Foley asked what caused the flooding. Mrs. Preiser responded that it is the Saw Mill River which needs dredging. She noted the river is no longer as deep or as wide as it once was and she does not believe the massive developments in the area adequately address the resultant increased probability of flooding - including what is happening at Regeneron and further north on Route 9A in Mount Pleasant where Amazon built a 150,000 square foot warehouse and blacktopped acres of land on what used to be the Green Valley Nursery, or further north along the Saw Mill River Parkway which was elevated nine feet for about 1.3 miles. She said she does not believe installing a few drainage pipes or Cultec chambers takes the place of acres of vacant land which absorbed water along with multiple trees that used to drink thousands of gallons of water a day.

Tom Bock stated he had ten (10) feet of water in his basement from the recent storm. He said water, three feet deep, was running down the street and entering driveways, yards and basements. He said five years ago he didn't have all this flooding, and he can't afford to stay here if every time it rains he gets flooded. He noted Supervisor Paul Feiner attended a neighborhood meeting in October and made a lot of promises but the residents realized nothing has happened. Mr. Bock said the Town claims it has no record that the Army Corps of Engineer did work on the Manhattan Brook in his area. He said his next door neighbor, who is an Emergency Management Planner, says the piping in the area is undersized. Some people are putting in French drains but that is a drop in the bucket. Mr. Bock said more effort is needed to get the Town to push the state and federal governments for funding to address this issue. He noted the Town has flooding problems in a lot of places and you can't just fix the problem in one place because it will back up to another place. He said there must be one continuous project to deal with each river or stream.

SIDEWALKS - THE PROS AND CONS

Madelon O'Shea mentioned that unlike flooding, multiple grants recently have been sought and received for sidewalks. She noted CD&C Commissioner Garrett Duquesne asked the CGCA to weigh in on some of these proposed sidewalk grants. He was informed that the Executive Board did not wish to respond until discussing the matter at a meeting, and the next CGCA meeting would not take place until tonight (1/22/24).

Mrs. O'Shea questioned whether property owners are fully aware that they are responsible for clearing a sidewalk of snow and maintaining to Town standards any sidewalk abutting their property, even if it is located within the Town's right-of-way. Property owners are also responsible if someone gets hurt on the sidewalk. She reminded that people on Old Army Road received summonses for not shoveling their sidewalks, even though their sidewalks were shoveled. However, the Town then plowed the road pushing snow onto the sidewalks, requiring shoveling again, but an enforcer came by and issued tickets. Alicia Ford mentioned when the Town wanted to place sidewalks in the Parkway Homes area in the early 1990s, the community came out in force to oppose them.

Mrs. O'Shea said as Chair of the Historic & Landmarks Preservation Board she has requested information on which side of West Hartsdale Avenue the sidewalk is planned since there are a number of existing stone walls that should be preserved. She noted ADA compliant sidewalks must be five (5) feet wide and this may require moving telephone poles. She has received no response to her request. She questioned how many people walk from Pat Capone Road on West Hartsdale Avenue down to Central Avenue or the Hartsdale train station. She also questioned how many walk from the Library or the Health Center. Paul Colten said he couldn't imagine that many people would walk all the way up that winding hill on West Hartsdale Avenue, however, he mentioned seeing a number of pedestrians walking to the train station from about a quarter of a mile from Central Avenue where there is a condominium and several single family homes. Richard Grant said West Hartsdale Avenue is a very dangerous place to walk. He noted there is a trench on one side which fills with water when it rains. Eric Zinger said the people in the Hartsdale area have safety concerns and want a sidewalk built to address those concerns.

Mrs. O'Shea also mentioned a sidewalk along Knollwood Road adjacent to the School for the Deaf and Westchester Community College properties. Alicia Ford noted that many people walk from the County Jail to catch the bus on Route 100B. Mr. Colten said a sidewalk is proposed on Dobbs Ferry Road from Route 119 to Knollwood Road. He noted a lot of pedestrian traffic in the area but said some properties are pretty close to the road, so he is not sure how that will work out.

Lloyd Cort said his community is very happy that a sidewalk will be built on Hillside Avenue. Carol Wielk said some time ago CD&C Commissioner Garrett Duquesne requested and she gave him a letter supporting a sidewalk. She said the CGCA should be careful not to raise a blanket condemnation of sidewalks, noting it is important for people to walk and get connected to other neighborhoods. It is important to make the Town more walkable. Mr. Cort agreed with Ms. Wielk's comments. He indicated we can't project what will happen in 20 years, but if sidewalks are built they will be used. He said it is important to understand the dynamics and how to prioritize where to put sidewalks and how much money should be set aside for sidewalks and flooding.

Carmela Greco-Acevedo said a lot of people are pushing for grants for sidewalks in her area of East Irvington because of the number of kids walking to school. She noted the area has no sidewalks and there is zero walkability or connectivity to the Town. She said she understands concerns about shoveling snow, maintaining a sidewalk and potential danger if someone falls, but she agrees with Ms. Wielk and Mr. Cort about the need for connectivity and walkability. She noted not everyone owns a car, so using a bus is a necessity. She said she has complained to Mr. Duquesne about the dangers people taking a bus face on Route 119 [which is a state road]. One has to cross the busy road to get to the bus stop, where there is no bus shelter or even a bench but rather it is immediately adjacent to a lane of traffic. She said there needs to be a report card that places sidewalks in areas where there are businesses with a lot of workers using public transportation.

Ellen Foley said in East Irvington many people object to sidewalks because they don't want to shovel snow. She mentioned a sidewalk on Ardsley Road where people walked down a steep hill to the train station and recalled that the Town absolved the adjacent homeowners from shoveling the snow. Mrs. O'Shea said that portion of Ardsley Road is a Westchester County road. She said for years, part of Old Edgemont Association dues paid a firm to plow that sidewalk. She said it would be less onerous for everyone if a machine was available to plow sidewalks following snowstorms.

Tom Bock said he has always championed sidewalks on Old Kensico Road, as long as money for sidewalks is not tied into flooding. He noted only two people have been hit by cars and killed on Old Kensico Road. He has responded to numerous calls in Elmsford and other areas so he recognizes the importance of sidewalks and traffic lights like those recently installed on Central Avenue.

ACCESSORY DWELLING UNITS - LEGISLATION PROPOSED

It was noted that last week (1/17/24) the Planning Board discussed the proposed legislation to allow accessory dwelling units (ADUs) in single family neighborhoods. The units are limited to one-family zoned properties containing 20,000 or more square feet. Each unit can be from 400 to 800 square feet in size and located in the existing house, in a detached garage or in a newly constructed cottage. The estimated cost of creating an ADU was between \$100,000 and \$300,000. Paul Colten said that the Planning Board only expects to grant about 25 Special Permits for ADUs a year and that other communities that have adopted such legislation had very few requests. Mike Burdi noted the owner must live on the premises.

It was noted that Gov. Hochul is pushing the idea to create more housing units and Greenburgh and other communities fear if they don't do something proactively, they will lose control over zoning. Eric Zinger suggested communities with laws in place may be exempt from any Albany directives. Questions were raised whether this is an assault on suburban living. Many people moved from the city to get away from illegal apartments and close living quarters. Ellen Foley noted when the concept was first introduced, some of the more spacious and more affluent upper Westchester communities said "no." It was then decided that ADUs should be located near train stations or places with public transportation.

Madelon O'Shea said her home and several homes in her neighborhood could accommodate an ADU. Her lower floor consists of a large playroom with a separate entrance, a bathroom and two bedrooms. She has only 19,500 square feet of property but an area variance could be sought from the ZBA. She could move into the ADU and rent her five bedroom house. The legislation claims it will help one "age in place" but provides no information about assessments, the cost of yearly taxes or yearly inspections. She noted Greenburgh has several very desirable school districts and expressed concern about the impact on schools. Mr. Zinger said if only 25 units are approved for the entire Town, it is not likely to impact the schools. It was noted only a few children added to a particular grade could be very costly to a school district.

Ms. Foley questioned whether this would change one family neighborhoods into two family neighborhoods. She doubted that many owners would seek to build a separate structure but noted it would not be that costly to convert a basement. It was noted there are a number of detached garages in Greenburgh and it wouldn't be that expensive to convert them. Mr. Burdi questioned the impact on infrastructure with additional cars causing congestion on some very narrow streets. Planning Board members had expressed concern about widening driveways and indicated they would try to grant approvals that maintained the character of the neighborhood. Richard Grant noted that the Planning Board said it would limit only one ADU to a street.

The units are supposed to be affordable and help people "age in place." If an owner moves into the ADU and rents the rest of the house at market rate, affordability is questionable. Mr. Burdi noted the law only allows one year leases. If one signs a lease and winds up with a problem tenant, good luck on addressing the issue. On the other hand, by limiting leases to one-year, there is no stability. He noted for years "mother-daughter" units were the norm in many communities and he wondered how many exist in Greenburgh. Mrs. O'Shea pondered how many Special Permits for "roomers and boarders" have been issued in Greenburgh. It was noted that a number of homes already have illegally converted space.

Lloyd Cort noted communities already face problems. He said the home for the handicapped in his neighborhood is a very nice building, but there is lots of traffic with vehicles visiting the site backed up all the time. He noted his area already has problems with some new neighbors parking cars all over the streets. He said it is inevitable ADUs will bring more cars, traffic, sidewalks, flooding to the area. Mr. Colten said he thinks individual car ownership will decrease over the decades, with more people calling for a vehicle to come to their house when needed. It was noted that can be costly. Mr. Cort said he just returned from London hours ago and it cost him \$320.00 to go from Kennedy Airport to Grand Central terminal.

It was noted the committee studying this issue was heavily weighted in favor of the Planning Board with four Planning Board members on the committee. Only one member of the community attended and raised questions during the “public discussion” the Planning Board held last week.

When the issue comes before the Town Board, civic leaders were urged to attend and speak out. It was agreed we don’t have enough data at present. Numerous questions were raised. How will assessment change? What will happen to the resale value of homes with ADUs and adjacent properties? What will be the cost for taxes, to register for a permit, for annual inspections, etc.? Will the Town have enough staff to do inspections? Will the real estate industry use this concept as a benefit? What will be the impact on the schools?

Ken Stahn said we are thinking of all the negatives, and driving ourselves crazy over something that likely won’t be a problem.

RITE AID MOVING

Mike Burdi mentioned that Rite Aid on East Hartsdale Avenue is closing. He noted there is another drug store on the block so the closure will not create a major problem for those needing a pharmacy. He said he sent a note to Supervisor Paul Feiner suggesting that a possible tenant could be Chestnut Markets, the forty year old business connected with gas stations. Paul Colten agreed and said that a food store is needed but noted there is a parking problem. It was noted the parking lot is available. Mr. Burdi noted one can also have home delivery. Madelon O’Shea recalled that a supermarket [Daitech Shopwell] used to be located at the site.

THANK YOU CARMELA AND DORA

Everyone was reminded to sign off. At the December CGCA meeting someone neglected to sign off and the tape continued to run for over four hours causing problems. Carmela Greco-Acevedo said she would make sure everyone signed off tonight. All expressed thanks to Carmela for arranging these monthly CGCA Zoom meetings. The CGCA also thanks Dora Tomulic for maintaining the CGCA website. Carmela and Dora provide very important services.