

# *The Edgemont Community Council, Inc.*

Founded in 1947 to determine community opinion on civic matters and coordinate community action thereon and to plan and promote the general welfare of the community embraced within Union Free School District #6.

Post Office Box 1161

Scarsdale, New York 10583

## **MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF THE EDGEMONT COMMUNITY COUNCIL**

**October 3, 2011**

A meeting of the Board of Directors of the Edgemont Community Council, Inc. was held at the Edgemont Junior-Senior High School, October 3, 2011, in the faculty lounge. The following officers and directors were present: Geoff Loftus, Robert Bernstein, Marc Ackerman, Alec Clarke, Matt Jaffe, Greg Adams, Aubrey Graf-Daniels, Monica Sganga, Robert Klerer, Robin Schaffer, Jonathan Kelly, and Peter Mellis.

Officers and Directors not in attendance Schuyler Kraus, Larry Rusoff, Karen Kelly, Jonathan Faust, and Andrea Weiss.

Civic Associations represented: Longview (x), Fort Hill (x), Cotswold (x), Greenridge ( ), Old Edgemont (x), Northern Greenville ( ), Southern Greenville ( ), Central Park Avenue ( ).

Guests: Arnold Laubich, Michelle McNally, and Lisa Wexler (new ECC liaison from the Board of Education).

Geoff Loftus called the meeting to order and Bob Bernstein took minutes. The meeting was called to order at 8:10 PM.

**Minutes** – The minutes from the meetings held in June and September were approved.

**Treasurer's Report** – Mr. Adams reported that we have a total of 137 paid members, and \$4435.80 in assets as of 10/3/2011.

**President's Report** – Mr. Loftus reported that he had attended several “back to school” nights at the Greenville and Seely Place Elementary Schools and that there had been a sharp increase in the number of “likes” on the ECC’s Facebook page. Mr. Bernstein reported that, according to Facebook, there are now at least 140 people who monitor the ECC Facebook page on a regular basis.

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**SBNC Update --** Mr. Ackerman reported that there are a number of uncertainties facing the school district at present with respect to state-mandated tax cap, what specific budget line items will be exempt, and whether, despite promises that it would do so when the tax cap was passed in June, the state legislature will address relief from any of the unfunded state mandates burdening school districts throughout the state. Mr. Ackerman also said there was uncertainty with respect to school administration, with the announced retirements of Barry Friedman as high school principal (effective August 31, 2012) and Christine Monseliu as assistant principal (effective December 31, 2011). With respect to school board candidates, Mr. Ackerman said that as far as he knew, Ms. Wexler would be running for re-election to a second three-year term and Mr. Stoughton, the current board president, would be stepping down.

**Fire District Report –** Mr. Loftus read a report from ECC director and fire district commissioner Mr. Faust, who was unable to be present. Mr. Faust's report is as follows:  
I can report on the Fire Department front that:

1. We have not heard any new rumblings on the consolidation issue. That is not to say conclusively that the issue is fully dead and buried, but I am not aware of any effort to advance the idea.
2. Budget - We are looking at a fire tax increase of about 2.8%. This is permissible despite the 2% cap because the vast majority of the increase results from health/medical, workers comp and retirement charges that are largely out of our hands and the cap law allows some overage for certain types of such costs. To that end, the state approved new workers comp legislation that increased the benefits paid out -- resulting in higher premiums that we must pay. Likewise, retirement contribution rates are based on actuarial data that is "reset" every 5 years.

I note that we continue to do more with less; the assessed value of the district continues to decrease (so, keeping taxes flat would yield less revenue). Nevertheless, all of our line items remain appropriately funded.

**Town Affairs –** Mr. Loftus reported on a series of meetings that he, Mr. Ackerman and Mr. Adams had had with Town Supervisor Feiner. Feiner told them that the tax hike for 2012 would be “definitely under the tax cap” for allowable items, but that the overall hike would be higher

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because of increases in pension, retirement and workers compensation benefits. Mr. Adams recalled Mr. Feiner saying that while the town would continue to maintain two separate recreation departments, there would be a cut of \$200,000 for Parks & Rec and \$250,000 for the Community Center. However, Mr. Adams said Mr. Feiner did not wish to be held to these numbers. Mr. Loftus said Mr. Feiner also said there were “probably” going to be layoffs and some reductions in town services. However, Mr. Feiner was clear that the Town Board would vote to continue the Town’s after school program at a total cost to the Town of \$115,000 which he said would be “covered by grants.” Mr. Bernstein said the \$115,000 is net of all grants and doesn’t cover additional expenses such as free busing every day from the Greenburgh Central schools.

Mr. Ackerman said what struck him about the discussions with Mr. Feiner was an apparent inability by Mr. Feiner to understand the concept of risk management. By way of example, Mr. Ackerman brought up Feiner’s proposal to purchase a \$140,000 pool liner for the main pool at Veteran Park and Mr. Feiner’s comment that the purchase would extend the life of the pool by several years and thereby avoid the need to replace the pool as the town’s professional consultants had recommended. Mr. Ackerman reminded Mr. Feiner that the consultants had said the reason the pool needed replacement was that, among other things, the filtration system had outlived its useful life and may soon no longer meet county health requirements. Mr. Ackerman asked if Mr. Feiner had checked with the Town’s professional consultants to find out whether the purchase of a new pool liner at this point made any sense. Mr. Feiner said he had not done so and thanked Mr. Ackerman for the suggestion. Mr. Ackerman said he found this lack of attention to detail by Mr. Feiner on matters involving substantial expenditures of taxpayer money troubling.

Mr. Loftus then raised the issue of reassessment and the adverse impact the lack of reassessment was having on the Edgemont School District. He said that Mr. Feiner did not disagree with the need for reassessment – it has not been done for more than 56 years -- but said it would be helpful to him if the ECC were to take the lead on the issue. Discussion followed on whether and what to recommend to the Town Board.

**RESOLVED**, on motion by Ms. Graf-Daniels, seconded by Mr. Ackerman, and approved by 10-2 vote, that Mr. Loftus would deliver a letter to the Town Board expressing the view that the ECC supports town-wide reassessment and opposes efforts by Mr. Feiner to condition reassessment on enactment of hardship provisions for Greenburgh that would require action by

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the New York State Legislature, noting that other communities in Westchester, such as Bronxville, Rye and Pelham Manor, have proceeded to implement reassessment without the need for any such provisions. (A copy of Mr. Loftus's letter is attached.)

Mr. Loftus then said he wanted to start a conversation in Edgemont about whether Edgemont should become its own village. Mr. Loftus cited a number of concerns, including escalating town property taxes over which Edgemont has no control, the Town's 56-year failure to conduct a town-wide reassessment, which is costing the Edgemont school district millions of dollars annually, and the absence of any Edgemont control over zoning and planning as the Town considers a proposed new comprehensive plan that is expected to call for substantially increased housing density along Central Avenue that could swamp the school district with a substantial increase in enrollment.

Mr. Loftus also expressed frustration with meetings he and other directors had had with Mr. Feiner. He said Mr. Feiner defended such controversial practices as the Town's having two separate recreation departments and the Town's own after-school program even though every school district already has one.

Mr. Loftus said he believed a committee of the ECC should study the 2005 report prepared by the Edgemont Village Exploratory Committee (EVEC) and report back to the ECC next month with a recommendation as to whether, in light of the concerns he raised, it now makes economic and practical sense for Edgemont to incorporate.

Mr. Loftus said that Edgemont's record of controlling school and fire taxes over the past five years was substantially better than that of the Town, noting that Town taxes for the unincorporated area went up 42.5% since 2005, while school taxes went up only 23% and fire taxes went up by 11%. He said increases in neighboring Scarsdale, which controls its own taxes, were comparable to the increases that took place over those areas which Edgemont itself controls, suggesting that Edgemont, with elected volunteers supervising professional management (just like the Board of Education), might be able to do a better job than the Town does, without professional management, in providing services and controlling municipal taxes.

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He stressed that what he wants considered is not "secession" from Greenburgh, which is not legally or economically practical. He said "secession" was a term used by opponents of incorporation in 2005 to scare residents.

**RESOLVED**, upon motion by Mr. Mellis, seconded by Mr. Clarke, the ECC unanimously voted to create a committee to study the issue of whether Edgemont should become its own village. Appointed to the committee were ECC directors Marc Ackerman, Peter Mellis, Aubrey Graf, and Greg Adams, and the committee will be chaired by Mr. Ackerman.

Mr. Loftus asked that the committee report back to the ECC at its next meeting or whenever thereafter the committee feels it has something to report.

In new business, several directors brought up concerns and questions about town police policy with respect to arresting teenagers for underage drinking. Mr. Bernstein said he would raise the concerns with Chief DeCarlo and report back.

The meeting was adjourned at 10 p.m.

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To the Town Board of Greenburgh,

The Edgemont Community Council met on October 3, 2011 and voted to ask the town to do a revaluation of taxable properties within the Town immediately.

The Town of Greenburgh and the many taxing entities within it (school and fire districts, among others) need stability in their budgeting and taxing processes, and the continuing number of tax certioraris and grievances make that impossible. We are collectively paying more than \$10 million a year in tax refunds, the Town this year is borrowing money to cover these costs for the first time in its entire history, and the State Legislature says tax cert payments are not excluded from the state-mandated property tax cap, which means the money spent on tax certs may result in less money available to educate our children.

Not to mention that it has been 56 years since there has been any revaluation of taxable properties in Greenburgh.

It is way past time for a revaluation.

We also believe that waiting for the county to act, or for special legislation from the State Legislature to enact "hardship provisions" for Greenburgh residents is political gamesmanship. No county action or state-enacted hardship provisions were needed for those towns and villages in Westchester that have already approved revaluation, including the City of Rye, and the Villages of Bronxville and Pelham Manor.

Common sense says that it is time for revaluation.

We know that voting for revaluation will require an act of political courage from the members of the Town Board – as voters and taxpayers, we have the right to expect such courage from our elected officials.

Sincerely,



Geoff Loftus  
President  
The Edgemont Community Council