

Message from the Mayor



January 25 – I write to report to you on events, activities, progress and plans in our Village. Things are well!

At this writing, we are recovering from the “gathering surge” from the pandemic over the holidays.

Infection rates have come down from near 10% in early January to about 7% now and are declining. We need to be much lower than that and we may be on our way.

We owe thanks to many for toughing out this past year. Our medical professionals, first responders and essential workers showed enormous courage under difficult and uncertain times. These folks served the sick and kept critical household and medical goods and services flowing while we sheltered-in-place. Our scientists and pharma companies, regulators, and now logistics operators, under the aegis of Operation Warp-Speed, deserve enormous credit for delivering a vaccine to end the pandemic in such a short time. And finally, you deserve credit for following the guidelines so that we could initially “flatten-the-curve” and mitigate the spread of the virus and, most recently, bring the infection rate back down. Special thanks to our parents doing triple duty educating, and engaging, their children at home.

At this writing, there is plenty of criticism. I will avoid any of that and simply say two things. One, what we are experiencing is nothing short of a plague. Second, Teddy Roosevelt told us that in any great undertaking “...there is no effort without error or shortcomings...” and a worthy effort will end “...in the triumph of high achievement.” I look at the horizon and see a uniquely American triumph over the plague from American ingenuity and sheer grit on a large scale. While I expected 100 million people to be vaccinated by the end of March, I think April is more realistic now as we achieve 1 million vaccinations/day. The end is in sight.

Many are still anxious....afraid, some are angry. Practice patience....be tolerant....help others.

Enough about the pandemic. The Village exists to serve the residents and we have not lost sight of that mission. We have much going on including some exciting things.

In addition to the pandemic, we survived substantial damage from Tropical Storm Isaias which left much of the Village without power for 8 days and Plandome Road closed for 5 days. PSEG-LI communications and systems failed us spectacularly. Our peninsula Mayors have weighed-in as a group to express your voice in dissatisfaction to LIPA, who is investigating.

Our March 2020 election was postponed by the Governor until September and we had a successful election with “absentee ballots.”

The pandemic and Isaias bring us some financial challenges; nothing we can’t handle.

Following on our new LED lights on Plandome Road, we have ordered a test run of two LED street lights to install on our path to LED lighting the neighborhoods.

While our two road grants have been acknowledged by the Grant Agencies (a very late-stage process) new delays have come up.

On February 1, we are having a Zoom Public Hearing to receive your input on the idea of merging the functions of our Planning Board into the Board of Trustees.

What would a permanent home mean for the Village? Some thoughts on that are inside.

The Newsletter contains more information on these and other things of interest. The Village continues to be in great shape, even as others struggle. And we are moving forward with confidence to continuously improve.

It is my great privilege to serve. Questions, comments and complaints are cheerfully accepted at Mayor@PlandomeHeights-NY.Gov.

Kenneth C. Riscica

Mayor

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Silva Ferman
Gus Panopoulos
Dianne Sheehan
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Planning Board, Chair

Trey Harragan
Technology Advisory
Board, Chair

Pandemic Brings New Delays to our Road Grants

Our 10-Year Capital Plan calls for \$1.15 million in spending on infrastructure over 10 years (now 12 years) with \$625,000 spent and \$525,000 to go. The largest remaining item (nearly \$400,000) is road resurfacing in the Bournedales.

We have two grants pending to support this work. One grant was initiated by Sen. Phillips in August 2018 (\$125,000) and the second grant was initiated by Sen. Kaplan in 2019 (\$50,000). In August I reported that these two grants have now been acknowledged by the grant agencies and the process toward closure had begun.

However, in December, we were advised of new delays. These result from spending controls at the State due to the pandemic financial stress. NYS Budget Bulletin B-1223 states, with respect to capital projects, the controls include “...authorities are barred from entering into new contracts for capital projects except [for health emergencies]...”

We are monitoring and evaluating this development as we see how our 2019 road repairs in Bournedales hold up over this winter.

Storm Isaias

In the middle of the pandemic, Storm Isaias showed up with a vengeance. At 12:15 we had a little wind, by 12:45 we had high wind gusts and by 1:15 trees began to fall. 13 of them fell on our roads closing an unprecedented number of streets. A large fallen tree snapped three utility poles on Plandome Road and closed the road for 5 days; it took 8 days to restore power and cable to our Village and to adjacent Plandome.

We called in our emergency resources, already on alert, and by 2:00 pm they were in the Village clearing streets. As each hour passed and we thought they were done, we found new downed trees. They cleared 13 streets of trees in “real time” as they fell and all our streets were open by 6:00 p.m., except of course Plandome Road. Some skill; lots of luck.

When we were done opening streets, we noticed that 16 trees in the Village Preserve were down or “hanging.” With more

time, we got three bids quickly and had the low bidder clear the trees and the debris.

We added a special pickup for yard waste for residents with debris and we had a special sweeping to clean our streets of the residue. It all took a week or two.

When we were done, we did some clean up and enhancements at the shoreline to make it friendlier for our kayakers.



Facing Challenges From a Position of Financial Strength

We use “Best Practices” for governments in our budgeting, financial controls, performance vs. budget, “Planning Beyond One Year” and our 10-Year Capital Plan. Results include: (1) moderate, stable taxes that are *1/3 lower than outside the Village* (about \$535 less per household each year) and (2) building capital reserves to support our 10-Year Capital Plan.

2020 Events Strain Resources – As you read this newsletter you will see references to additional, non-recurring costs throughout. We spent money hardening Village Hall against COVID-19, we spent money clearing streets and the Village Preserve as a result of Storm Isaias, we spent money on absentee ballots, we spent money on sudden governance changes due to COVID-19 and we spent money on electronic meetings and other things.

In addition to these hard costs, we lost about \$15,000 in a stream of interest income that no longer exists (we budgeted for that loss) and our building department is behind budgeted revenues due to project delays from COVID-19.

All of this leaves us about \$25,000 behind budget “year-to-date.” That is a big number to us.

My reaction; “no worries, mate.” Here is my plan. Some of our Isaias and COVID-19 costs are eligible for partial reimbursement from FEMA. We have worked with FEMA before, and we are working with them now. We know how to do that. We have already submitted volumes of data including invoices and “GPS tagged” pictures of the Isaias damage. I expect us to be eligible for \$10 -15,000 of reimbursement from FEMA; I don’t know when. Beyond FEMA, we are “tightening our belt,” scaling back or deferring some expenses. Further, I currently expect Building fees to rebound.

Our polices are solid and we have a steady hand so we can confidently face the matters we faced this year without hesitation. Our “planning beyond one year” policy assures us we can meet any challenge and our “budget vs actual” discipline assures we can know and address the problem swiftly. So, we are strong and will remain strong, *no worries.*

Moving LED Lights Forward Cautiously

LED street lighting has been around for years. Advantages are: lower cost to operate and maintain, a cleaner more focused light and lower energy use. Disadvantages have been very high costs to install and brightness that is too intense for neighborhood lighting. Recently improvements have been made in (a) cost and (b) the quality of the lighting.

In May, we replaced our existing black extension arms and light fixtures on Plandome Road with new stainless steel extension arms and LED lights. Now we are exploring options

for LED in our neighborhood street lights. The time is right. Costs have come down, options have opened up and more residents are using LED so the change will be less noticeable.

There are two approaches, replacement and retrofit. In order to “test drive” each option for performance characteristics we have ordered one of each light installed. After observation, we would select one option and then decide how to move forward throughout the Village. More on that to come.

Village Seeks Input on the Planning Board

A municipal Planning Board functions as a land-use body covering primarily subdivisions. Periodically, other matters come up such as “concurrent jurisdiction” on neighboring property (like a development in adjacent Plandome).

As a mature, fully developed community, few land use issues come up for the attention of the Planning Board. In 20 years, there were only four matters to come before that board and only one of those was a subdivision matter (in 2018). That situation is unlikely to change as there are very few “as of right” opportunities to subdivide in the village.

The Planning Board addresses legal issues and consumes a full

complement of volunteers (7; 5 members and 2 alternates) and those members are required to be regularly trained in law.

After discussion over many years, the Board of Trustees has decided to seek resident input, through a Public Hearing, on transferring the functions of Planning Board to the Board of Trustees.

There is robust further information on this matter on the homepage of our website at www.plandomeheights-ny.gov where you can read the reasons for the change in the law and get information on how to participate or make your feelings known.

Election

The 2020 Village election was a challenge. The Governor delayed the election several times ultimately settling on a date in September. Many governance items flow from the election, like appointments, budget, policies, etc. Some can wait (appointments) some can't wait (budget). So, with help from the Village Attorney we navigated a sea of governance items.

When it came to the voting, we noted that some of our most reliable voters were also our most vulnerable residents. So we

executed an absentee ballot program that went like this: Every registered voter was invited by mail to vote by absentee ballot by signing and returning a request for absentee ballot. Then a ballot and a secure envelope was sent to the voter. The voter returns the ballot in the secure envelope with a signature that was then compared by our election inspectors to the voter roll. It was well executed and we had a very high turnout for the vote, 140 voters. We will do this again in March.

A Permanent Home?

Most/many municipalities own their own Village or Town Hall. For many years, we were housed in officials' homes. With increased and growing requirements and needs, for more than 25 years now, we rent.

There are many advantages to owning since governments pay no property tax and municipal interest rates are remarkably

low. A permanent home would permit the Village to make long term commitments it wouldn't make in a rental. So, we are exploring possible options for a permanent home. It is an exciting thought.

Will we be successful? Maybe not. But we surely won't be if we don't explore; so we are. If you want to help, let me know.

County Reassessment Phase-in Begins

Once again, the property tax assessment system in Nassau County has been “Reassessed.” The last time was, I believe, 2008, and that one led to this one. 2020 – 21 begins the 5-year Phase-in of Reassessment. As a result, beginning with the School tax bills in October 2020, many of us saw significant increases in our taxes, 10% or more. And that's the good news. Legislator Nicoletto advises, “Under the County Executive's plan, if your taxes are increasing as a result of Reassessment, your

taxes will incrementally increase each year for the next four years until your new assessed value is achieved.” Got that?

The Village uses the County assessment rolls to levy our property tax so we are evaluating the effect on the village. I do not expect a significant effect since disparities within our village, as opposed to North Shore vs South Shore for the total County, should be smaller. More on this as we go along.

Policing in the Current Environment

Police Commissioner Patrick Ryder has a Commissioner’s Community Council (“CCC”) of leaders from each of the 19 legislative districts. The CCC provides briefings and receives community input on county law enforcement. It is a great privilege to be invited to serve on the CCC. It gives me a direct line of dialog with Commissioner Ryder.

In the current environment, all law enforcement is required to take steps to address the racial justice issues of this past year. In 2020, the CCC was enlisted to assist in that process. From

Protection of Manhasset Bay – In December, we swept our streets and cleaned our storm drains. Our streets drain to the Bay, so this work helps protect and clean Manhasset Bay.

that effort, I can tell you that the Commissioner has strong community engagement on the issues including with minority youth, pastors and other leaders. And the dialog on the CCC is candid and respectful. Progress is being made through trust and respect. And residents desire for strong law enforcement remains a priority in the County.

One result from the effort is that the police have agreed to the use of body cameras.

Please Curb Your Dog – We are receiving complaints about the failure of pet owners to pick up their dog waste. Please follow the law and pick up and dispose of your dog waste.

Clerk’s Corner

As a reminder, we pay for side-yard pick-up so it is not necessary to put your trash at the curb. We remind residents that overnight parking requires a permit from the Village.

Village code restricts contractor work to 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday – Friday and 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Saturday. No work is permitted on Sundays or Federal holidays.



**Incorporated Village of
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