

Village of Plandome Heights

The role of sewers in the incorporation of the Village in 1929

The following is an excerpt from our “History” page on our website:

The general reason Plandome Heights drew up incorporation papers in June 1929 can also be said to be the desire for home rule and the desire to keep taxes low. But specifically there seem to be two main issues which instigated the incorporation.

The first issue involved the zoning of a piece of land just north of Colonial Parkway and Webster Avenue. In the September 27, 1928 issue of Manhasset Mail it was reported that the owners of that property protested the Town Planning Board and Zoning Commission’s suggestion to change it to Class A residential for single family homes. They wanted to build garden apartments on their property instead.

Some Plandome Heights residents organized to protest. The first Plandome Heights Association was formed, with John S. Olney, who lived on Plandome Road, as president and John M. Isaacs of 95 Bay Driveway as secretary. The Association was effective. The Town Board held its final hearing on the matter on February 27, 1929 and ruled that the piece of land in question would be zoned Class A residential. The issue caused some controversy in Plandome Heights, however. Two residents who lived on Plandome Road testified for the apartment houses and were “vigorously opposed” by the Association at the hearing.

The Plandome Heights Association was already geared for action when a second controversial issue appeared: the ever-popular issue of sewers. The Town Board, with the Manhasset Civic Association’s approval, was proceeding early in 1929 to form a sewer district in Manhasset. The only area which protested was Plandome Heights. The Plandome Heights Association circulated a petition against the proposed sewers and this was submitted to the Town Board in March by John Isaacs. “We have no objections to a sewer for Manhasset proper,” said Mr. Isaacs, “so long as it does not include the property of the signers of the Plandome Heights Association petition against it.” Mr. Isaacs also said that if the Town Board agreed to the proposed sewer district, the Plandome Heights Association would move for annexation to the Village of Plandome.

The March 28, 1929 issue of the Manhasset Mail included a letter from Summit Drive resident George Oestreich explaining Plandome Heights’ position:

Plandome Heights is restricted to one-family dwellings and it is our good fortune that our terrain is especially well adapted to the proper functioning of cesspools and septic tanks, due to the subsoil of sand which extends to a depth of 14 ft. and beyond this coarse gravel exists, with the result that we experience no trouble whatever with our present system of disposal. In view of these conditions, surely it would be violating the simplest laws of economy were we to invite additional unnecessary taxation which a sewage system would obviously bring about. On the other hand, should the business section of Manhasset, which has shown such a remarkable development in recent

years, require and desire a comprehensive sewer system, we wish them good luck in their undertaking, as most certainly such a decision must be reached before long.

The Manhasset Civic Association met on the evening of April 1. John Isaacs said again that if Plandome Heights was included in the sewer district, it was going to incorporate at once.

On April 8 the Town Board met and voted to form Manhasset's million dollar sewer district over a minority protest from the Plandome Heights Association. John Isaacs and Plandome Court resident George F. Weimann voiced the Association's feelings. Weimann said, "Sewers would throw the community wide open for apartment houses," and "We should put the sewer money into a hospital for this locality."

After the Town Board's action, Plandome Heights proceeded with its plans to incorporate. It was discovered that Plandome Heights could not annex itself to the Incorporated Village of Plandome, because the consent of both Plandome and the Town Board were necessary. It seemed unlikely that the Town Board would consent, regardless of how Plandome felt. So Plandome Heights decided to incorporate by itself. Ernest Strong, counsel for Plandome and Plandome Heights, detailed the procedure:

- Peights Association submits to the Town Supervisor a proposition signed by 25 adult freeholders in the village, describing the territory to be incorporated, and enumerating the population. (To incorporate, a village must have 250 people residing within a 3-mile radius.)
- The Association submits to the Town Supervisor a consent form signed by property owners constituting at least one-third of the value of real property in the village, as assessed at the last town assessment.
- The Supervisor holds a hearing on the subject of whether or not the above-filed papers comply with the law.
- The village holds an election on the question of incorporating. Voters must have owned property in the village for at least 60 days before the election.
- The village then is incorporated when the election certificate is signed by the election inspectors and delivered to the Secretary of State, the Tax Commissioner, the County Clerk, and County Treasurer; and when the village map is certified as correct by the Town Supervisor and filed with the Secretary of State.
- Then the Town Clerk appoints a temporary Village Clerk and 3 electors to serve as inspectors. The Village Clerk within 5 days gives notice of an election of officers. An election is held to choose a Mayor and four trustees. Within five business days after the election, the Mayor and trustees meet, and appoint a clerk and treasurer.

It was quite an involved procedure. Someone, perhaps the Town, circulated a sheet addressed to "Mr. Taxpayer of Plandome Heights" asking "Have you carefully and

seriously studied the question of incorporation upon which you are to vote on Tuesday, the 11th. Do you not know that this is a matter of such grave importance that it should not be acted upon hastily or without thorough knowledge of the responsibilities?" Then it discussed three main issues: 1. Taxation and home rule: "Are you ready to pay increased taxes without increased benefits?" 2. Sewers: "Sewers are bound to come. Do you prefer to have them installed by a local commission . . . or . . . by a general commission, over which you will have no control?" 3. Zoning: Do you not know that if you form a village and propose to adopt zoning ordinances, that you must provide a business district in the most reasonable and logical place?" The broadside ended by exhorting the villagers to "VOTE 'NO' upon the proposition to incorporate your territory into a village."

On June 11, 1929 the election on the question of incorporation was held at the residence of John Isaacs, 95 Bay Driveway. The outcome was 35 ballots for incorporation and 17 against. Plandome Heights was now an incorporated village.

The next month on July 17, Plandome Heights villagers held an election to choose their first Mayor and Board of Trustees. Those elected were: Mayor, John Olney; and Trustees, John Isaacs, Frank Haley, W. W. Lancaster, and Gottfried Steigmann.

In concluding the story of how Plandome Heights became incorporated, it must be said that Plandome Heights can take some of the responsibility (either praise or blame, depending on how you look at it) for the fact that Manhasset was never sewered. It was the first area which voiced strong opposition and "seceded" from the Town to escape inclusion in the sewer district.

In October of 1929, however, the Manhasset Board of Sewer Commissioners issued a report showing that the sewer system would cost considerably more than \$1 million or \$.50 a front foot per year. A month later Munsey Park also decided to incorporate, to avoid higher taxes with the coming of the sewers.

With the loss of both Plandome Heights and Munsey Park which together totaled over one-fourth of the district's assessed property valuation, the Town Board recommended in January of 1930 that the Manhasset Sewer District be dissolved.

Besides, the Depression had also come.