

WEST HARRISON NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION

Minutes of Meeting: April 18, 2007 at the West Harrison Fire House

Attendance: Total - 98 - Board members present: **Fred Sciliano, Charlie Russo, Angela Amodeo, Mario Gallo, , Lori Wilson, Gerri Barbagallo, Gregg Rosenberg, Jeff LaGrotte.** Board members absent: Lisa Faillace-Sciliano.

Fred Sciliano presided and welcomed all.

The minutes of the last meeting of March 28th were approved.

Treasurer's Report: Jeff - Balance is \$15,350.00 Money coming in for ads, journal, tickets, donations with the Dinner Dance affair. A preliminary projection show we should be able to donate \$5,000 to \$10,000 – hopefully. Will report back after board discusses.

Fundraising: Mario – Our Dinner Dance and Silent Auction is the 28th, with a sit down dinner and DJ, open bar. Tickets are going fast. Barbecue on June 9th free to all members.

Seniors Committee: Lori Wilson for Rosemarie Verano - Lunch program is going well, will be talking about adding a Friday lunch. Looking to find an air-conditioned location for the summer lunches, maybe St. Anthony's.

Planning & Zoning: Mary Malara – thanked WHNA board for commitment to town and interest of members. We had a great Master Planning meeting here last month. Some of those ideas are being put into the plan. Discussed the difficulties of the illegal housing task force. People want action, want to foster change – situations have become dangerous, costly. The list that was given to the mayor was compiled by the efforts of many. We are starting a new era – members here are working diligently for changes. She submitted a 60 page critique on the Master Plan, and has passed on issues from others to the town board. She met with the building department who shared monthly report figures – average of 150 to 170 complaints per month – not all resolved. Will present another list with issues to Bob Wasp. Still areas of open space that need protection, trees need to be preserved. Next Wednesday meeting on steep slope permits. Need members on the committee – those interested in positive change. We are being heard. Has attended planning board meetings for a year now. Invited to join a town wide neighbors cooperative group made up of various Harrison town neighborhood groups. The vast resources of PEPA will be made available to us. Join us by being eyes and ears.

Parks & Recreation: Charlie Russo – the committee met with Ron Belmont about the Heritage Trail project. Eagle Scout Mike Agazzi is working with a group on the cleanup, identifying points of interest. Town historian and historical society working to prepare informational plaques. Ron Belmont will work with assessor's office for aerial photos. Need volunteers for the cleanup. Next meeting May 16, 7:30, Dawson Historical Center on Park Lane.

Public Works/Traffic & Safety: Mary Ann DiSimone – tree plantings will begin on various streets. Bob Viscome is forming plan to stagger plantings and tree removals.

Next meeting - May 23rd, 7:30pm, West Harrison Fire House.

Joan Walsh, member and Town Clerk, discussing the recent severe rain storm that caused significant flooding in different town areas said to put damaged property on curb. She handed out a town notice – the town is trying to collect data on damage to apply for and obtain Federal disaster relief funds. Call

the number or access the website. She keeps in touch with the DOT about the ongoing 287 reconstruction project. They are taking down the bridge on Westchester Ave. to White Plains at night and have a walking bridge in place. They can work until 1:00 am – noise only for a few more days. A plan for the replacement fence at the back of Locust was requested.

Guest presentation: Liz Gannon, project manager for the Villa's of Silver Lake off Underhill Avenue – displayed charts of housing units showing plans and finished houses and explained what is being built. 5 houses along Daniel St., 4 houses along Harrison Avenue. Each building is a side-by-side 2 family house. They have been to the planning board and have gone through the necessary steps. Steep slope reviews need for 3 upper lots. Currently have offering plan pending with the NYS attorney generals office. If approved, will sell each part of house to single owner. B-zone allows 2 family house. Will be a condominium association if approved by attorney general. No zoning change needed and does not need any approval from the town on the issue of selling to 2 owners. Aesthetically, a face lift for Underhill Avenue. *(Many questions from the floor about condo/2 family home issue. Some were concerned that the town seemed to be losing jurisdiction to the attorney general's office. Some are concerned about the many cars that need to be accommodated. Lengthy discussion. Fred mentioned that the planning board would address the issue on next Tuesday night.)*

West Harrison Fire Chief Pat Galluzzo: *(Addressed the meeting to give the firemen's side of information on a recent event publicized in the newspaper.)* During the nor'easter storm, the West Harrison Fire Dept. sent 2 crews out on mutual aid, one going to Mamaroneck. A fire occurred there where there was a fatality. The WHFD crew responded to that fire. Most roads in Mamaroneck were flooded out and the driver had to circumvent the flood, but it did not take a half hour as the newspaper reported, it took 8 minutes. The men fought a brutal fire with heavy smoke and 2 firemen retrieved the man to whom they gave CPR. The firemen attacked the fire without help for 20 minutes. Some statements in the newspaper were inaccurate and untrue. These men risked their lives out of their district and he is very proud of them. He will set the record straight publicly. They also sent crews to work in downtown Harrison while still protecting West Harrison. *(Those attending applauded and Fred voiced the appreciation of all. The mayor said these men put their lives on the line and thanked the department and said he was upset with the press.)*

Guest Presentation: Mayor Stephen Malfitano with members of the Task Force for Code Compliance – he brought a number of town officials to let us know what is going on. The task force is comprised of departments that sever the community daily – police, highway, sanitation, fire, anyone that interacts daily with the public. All employees have been asked to be eyes and ears as to illegal occupancy. The task force is managed by the law department because any of the violations are prosecuted by them – so the Town Attorney is here. The building department is responsible for codes – the Building Inspector and Code Enforcement Officer are here. They are in the process of collecting info and following up on it, and most residents are not aware of what is going on behind the scenes. Because of this organization (*the West Harrison Neighborhood Assoc.*), we have received a significantly higher number of complaints. The law department has been asked to draft legislation that can bring not only criminal but civil action with substantial fines.

Building Inspector Bob Fitzsimmons – illegal occupancy ongoing longtime issue; approx. 200 on going investigations at this time – with visits and summonses. Issues are of town code, all illegal occupancies, other zoning code violations, truck and property issues, whole host of issues, not just limited to illegal housing, using the entire town code. B-zone is a 2 family residential zone with some legally existing 3 and 4 family non-forming pre 1923 structures. Code also says the CO's must be obtained and property properly maintained. We enforce 2 codes – town and state. Once in court we then hit them with state code issues. Give order to remedy first two times and then go to court. Judge orders compliance and if not done it goes to trial. They have acted on about half of the list that

WHNA supplied to them; some of them were only allegations that proved to not be true. Everyone here can help us. Notice things like ConEd meters, cable wires, satellite dishes.

Town Attorney Frank Allegretti - we prosecuted over 400 cases with plea of guilty where they have a one year window. If it happens again they can reinstitute the old charges. It is \$250 fine per week right now. The law department is looking over different models to increase fines in different ways.

Code Enforcement Officer Ed DiBuono – We acted on 40 complaints last week. Half of our list of complaints were already acted on, many not valid. We can't go into a house uninvited, can't violate people's rights. But when there is probable cause and I go into your house, you are busted, because I had proof. Election board, ConEd, Police Department, garbage men are some sources of info. We have not lost one case. We go in at night when people are home – last week we went in to 40 houses. Our time is precious and costly. Need to be sure of violation. Out of the 40, we got 13 bonafide illegal basements. The Harrison school district gives us absolutely no cooperation. Complaints, by town code, have to remain anonymous. Haven't had to go to court because they have been guilty. New administrative help is working on the paperwork and creating a data base. He can give us list of those that are in compliance. It is not an easy job. Many people are found with real difficulties. *(Floor – put something on the town website on how to go about the process. Discussion of legalities and town's right for info from school district which is none. Residents want ways to get school district to give info.)*

Mayor Malfitano – will look at some ways to get info on landlords. Frustration is high on all parties and is not treated lightly on our part. We have discussed resident parking stickers for overnight parking in town lots. As Ed said, we need as much accurate information as possible to be as effective and efficient as possible.

Special Guest, State Assemblyman Adam Bradley – Amazing seeing this many people here and what is happening in West Harrison. The state budget is lengthy. Star rebates will be increased substantially for the next 3 years. Enhanced Star increased also. This is meaningful tax relief. Property taxes are killing us. Westchester cost of living causes issues of equity with rest of state. Governor was trying to cut town/village funding but we got a 3% increase instead. Westchester County did get shortchanged in school funding, unfairly, in budget. Westchester was lumped with Ulster and Sullivan Counties in an improper regional plan. We, instead, should have been in a region with Long Island counties. Westchester County is the highest taxed county in the state. We should be getting a reasonable portion of high tax aid. Putnam and Orange got more than Westchester. This was the reason he had to vote against the education budget. The high tax aid went to Nassau and Suffolk counties, not Westchester. He is co-sponsoring legislation to correct this situation by correcting the regional cost factor. He is trying to get meeting with governor. They must correct this injustice some way, even by a lump sum. This important education issue was high jacked for political purposes. A realistic view of Westchester county is distorted because of many high salaries, but in truth it is a very diverse population with a high cost of living.

Mayor Malfitano – talked about the terrible rain storm. Harrison fared better than surrounding communities but had its serious problems too. The town workers did a superb job. The County of Westchester declared a “state of emergency”. As did Harrison and we are looking to have area declared a federal disaster zone. Those individuals that suffered may be reimbursed. Damage must be quantified and the town contacted. Concerning the use of our athletic fields – we are not renting them out. During the off season, the Superintendent of Recreation did allow Manhattanville and Suny Purchase Colleges to use the field at our park as an exchange to return a favor of aid in the past. Mamaroneck allowed use of the Hommocks facility when our pool was down.

Streetscape Utility Pole Issue – Bid package went out and is due Friday. New poles are going in on the business side of street. *(They were across the street on the parking lot side from Hancock to*

Grant.) Options for poles were discussed thoroughly here at past meetings – everyone preferred facilities underground. But the reality of the exorbitant expense made it undoable for us. It involved ConEd, Verizon, Cablevision. A main feed of high voltage would need extensive underground reconstruction. The numbers were scrutinized and reviewed multiple times. When the issue was raised again recently we went back to the facilities and the cost is even higher. Now the issue must rightly be off the table. No other option at this time. We don't want them back on the other side because it will interfere with the planned improvements and would be intrusive to visibility. The West Harrison Fire Department has a problem with this.

West Harrison Fire Chief Pat Galluzzo – read a statement he sent to the mayor and town board: He said that relocating the existing power lines to the firehouse side of Lake St. could have an adverse effect on fire operations and response. This will place high voltage primary power lines crossing the entrance doors of the firehouse. He cited a 2004 incident where lines came down at Lake and Hancock and impeded direct response to and from the firehouse, and caused a destructive fire inside 79 Lake St. into which these wires backed up. He asked that this risk be avoided by a different plan.

Mayor Malfitano – Engineers had advised that the concerns about the wires were not a great risk, but now that it is being done it has attention. We will go to ConEd to see if there is an issue of public safety. They should be able to provide info on a risk factor. The project is set now and if there is a change, the process would have to stop and be put off.

An extensive discussion followed - with firemen insisting that no one can guarantee that those wires can't come down and transformers have "popped" before, and the Mayor reminding that he had brought the issue to us and shared studies; the results and consensus was that it was much too expensive to go underground. The Mayor explained about the high voltage wires that go through here on the way to the airport. Many present felt this was a serious public safety issue. A suggestion from another fireman/member was to put just those wires crossing in front of the fire house underground. The mayor said that this just might be a solution and he may present this to ConEd. The aesthetics of the poles was also discussed, some thinking that there was some more attractive type of pole to use but the reality may be that there isn't. But the Mayor will look at ways to improve the look.

Mayor Malfitano – discussed the plans for the new senior center building at the Mintzer Center: The building is designed, specked out, but had we had logistical issues with input from our fire marshal, Steve Surace, which have been cleared. But the other side where the rink is located is still the best site. The rink is needed but we have concluded that locating the building there may be best, and replacing the rink activity elsewhere. But this building needs to be done now. It is a butler-type structure, finishes that are stucco, nicely designed, not temporary, looks good, not chintzy. We must construct it in the right location. Need a little more time to decide.

Respectfully Submitted,
Angela Amodeo, Secretary