



..... **VILLAGE OF RYE BROOK**
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OFFICE OF THE MAYOR
Paul S. Rosenberg

January 6, 2014

To My Rye Brook Friends and Neighbors:

Happy New Year! Since taking office last April, 2013 it has been a very busy and productive year for your Board of Trustees. I would like to bring you up to date on some issues that we have been working on. In no particular order, let me provide some highlights:

After dealing with extremely destructive weather in the 2011 and 2012 hurricane seasons, I was relieved that our region came through 2013 unscathed. Although 2013 was a “quieter” weather year, it seems that stronger, more ferocious storms are becoming the new normal. The Village of Rye Brook has spent a lot of time and manpower planning for such storms, working in conjunction with other municipalities as well as Con Edison. Hopefully, it will be several more years before we need to put our storm plans to use.

We have made several updates to our code with the goal of “making life easier” for our residents. This involved code loosening in certain areas, and overhauling it in other areas. Specifically, we’ve made the following changes:

- **Loosening the code in the Scenic Road Overlay District** – This will make it easier for residents who live along one of our “scenic roads” (Ridge St., Lincoln Ave., King St., Anderson Hill Rd.) to make modest improvements to their homes without triggering a full-blown site plan review and the need for variances, which are costly and time consuming.
- **Updating the Generator Law** – The past two hurricane seasons have seen an increase in the number of power outages in the region. This has prompted many residents to install permanent backup generators. Unfortunately, our code was forcing many residents to seek variances in order to install these devices outside their homes. We’ve modified our code so that if you place your permanent generator alongside equipment such as an existing air conditioner compressor, and create adequate vegetative screening, the generator permit application can be handled by the building department. This will quicken the permitting process, save residents the cost of possibly needing a variance, and eradicate the need for obtaining approval from the Architectural Review Board.
- **Shopping Center Zoning** – The Board of Trustees (BOT) has worked with the owners of our shopping centers to update our shopping center district zoning so that when a store turns over, it will be less likely to trigger site plan review, allowing our shopping centers to quickly obtain permits from the building department and re-occupy their stores in a timelier manner.

- **Additional code changes that are in progress –**
 - We intend to modestly loosen the code for determining what size trees need permits to be removed from a resident’s property.
 - The BOT is looking at ways to shorten the site plan approval process for both residential and commercial property owners. This will save several months and many thousands of dollars for these applications.
 - We are also investigating how we might alter the code to address modifications to single family homes that currently require site plan review.

Green Initiatives – In order to reduce our electricity costs and reduce the Village’s carbon footprint, we are investigating the costs and benefits of installing LED lighting in our street lights throughout the Village and installing solar panels on our public buildings, which will generate electricity. We have already installed some LED street lighting in certain areas of the Village (Pine Ridge Road from Lincoln to Mohegan, Magnolia Drive, and the Village Hall Parking Lot), and I would appreciate feedback on this new LED lighting.

Renewal of Village Hotel Tax – This past July, Governor Cuomo signed a law that renewed the Village of Rye Brook’s authority to impose an occupancy tax of up to 3% on hotel rooms located in the Village. Rye Brook always looks for alternate sources of non-property tax revenue and we recognized that the hotel occupancy was a logical revenue source given the fact that this Village has two hotels with over 800 rooms. We estimate that the annual revenue from the hotel tax will be in excess of \$600,000. Rye Brook residents directly benefit because this tax is paid by customers coming to Rye Brook from outside the area.

Highway Garage – It’s been a goal of the Village for many years to purchase from the Town of Rye the land and building on West William Street which is used as our Village highway garage. Although probably unknown to most Village residents, this highway garage is vital when it comes to ensuring that our streets will be maintained, the snow will be plowed & streets salted, and that the leaves will be collected every fall. It’s my pleasure to announce that we closed on the purchase of the highway garage from the Town of Rye a few weeks ago. I want to thank Rye Town Supervisor Joseph Carvin for working with us to make this happen.

Technology Initiatives – We realize that being able to immediately communicate with our residents is critical. Over the years, we have implemented automated phone calls for emergency messages, “email blasts” to inform residents of items of interest throughout the Village, and Nixle for immediate critical notification via text message and cell phone calls. We currently have approximately 625 people subscribed to our community email blasts and approximately 737 people that we can send emergency text messages and cell phone calls via Nixle. If you would like to sign up for important Village-wide emails, please go to www.ryebrook.org/alerts. We’ve also recently embraced social media. There is now a Village Twitter account (@ryebrookvillage), as well as my own. Please be sure to follow me @paulrosenberg.

Financial – Overall, the Village is in sound financial shape. Our most recent audit report for the Village’s fiscal year was a clean audit. Rye Brook maintains a healthy fund balance and low debt.

Although 2013 seemed to be a year of moderate financial recovery, there was also continued economic uncertainty that has plagued our country for the past several years. It seemed that on an almost daily basis, we read in the newspapers about the high costs municipalities have had to endure for such items as health insurance and retirement benefits. In Rye Brook, the two biggest challenges to

maintaining fiscal stability are the rising costs for health insurance (\$1.7 million) and the NYS Retirement System (\$1.6 million). While the Village has been able to negotiate additional employee contributions to offset health insurance premium costs, the retirement system costs are fixed by NY State.

Two years ago, New York State instituted a 2% property tax cap. The current economic conditions combined with the restrictions of this cap on the tax levy will make the 2014-2015 budget difficult to prepare. We will once again scrutinize the budget and we invite the public to attend the budget workshops and public hearings. The Board will be presented with the budget in mid-March. We need input from the public. All sources of revenue as well as expenses will be examined in detail. As you likely are aware, unfunded mandates from Albany are killing municipal budgets.

Comprehensive Plan – I'm very pleased to announce that in the fall of 2013, we started work on Rye Brook's first Comprehensive Plan. This plan is building on significant prior planning efforts and will establish a policy guide for future land-use decisions within the Village. The Village has assembled a 12-member advisory committee representing a broad range of interests and stakeholders in the Village to prepare a final plan for consideration by the Village Board. This committee, together with a consultant team, has already held two public workshops. Future public meeting information, as well as draft chapters of the plan are available at www.planryebrook.org.

Rye Town Dissolution Study – Rye Brook is working closely with the Town of Rye and the Villages of Port Chester and Mamaroneck to study governance and service options for the community. Among the options being explored is the dissolution of the Town of Rye resulting in the creation of coterminous town/villages in Port Chester and Rye Brook. The goal is to determine the most efficient way to govern and the most cost effective way to deliver municipal services. This process would not be moving forward without the support and tireless work of State Senator George Latimer and State Assemblyman Steve Otis.

Signature Flight Litigation – Last month, Village Administrator Chris Bradbury and I (along with elected officials from the Town of Rye and the Blind Brook School District), attended a special meeting of the Westchester County Board of Legislators (BOL). We expressed the Village's opposition to a proposed local law which would have done nothing to prevent Signature Flight Support Corporation (an operator at the Westchester County airport) from seeking to become tax exempt. If successful, this action could have resulted in costing Rye Brook taxpayers hundreds of thousands of dollars in the repayment of tax payments to Signature as well as the loss of future tax payments. I am proud to report to you that the Village, working collaboratively with County Legislator David Gelfarb, Rye Town Supervisor Joe Carvin, and President of the Blind Brook School Board Nancy Barr, successfully demonstrated that we will not submit to such a disastrous outcome without making our feelings known. The local law that we opposed was "re-committed" by the BOL, effectively killing it for the present time.

While the issue of the action taken by Signature to become tax exempt is not over, we will again be working with the other elected officials and the leadership at the BOL in 2014 to ensure that the taxpayers are protected until this matter is resolved. Thank you to the entire Rye Brook community for your outpouring of support. Your Board of Trustees certainly appreciates your involvement and we will keep you updated on our progress with this very import issue.

Reminders

- **Winter Parking Rules** – Unless otherwise posted, parking is prohibited on all public streets or highways within the Village of Rye Brook between 2:00 a.m. and 6:00 a.m. from November 15 to March 15. This allows our highway department to plow and salt our roadways when necessary overnight.

- **Sanitation** – Did you know that you don't have to bring your garbage cans to the street the night before your scheduled pick-up? The Village provides garbage pick-up outside your garage door. Either let your sanitation driver know that you will be leaving your trash cans by your garage door, or contact our Public Works department at 914-939-0753. Also, 2014 sanitation calendars are now available at www.ryebrook.org/sanitation.
- **Snow Removal** – When shoveling and/or plowing your driveway after a snow event (or clearing off snow-covered cars), please do not deposit snow in the street. It creates a traffic hazard, and is a violation of the Village code.
- **Airport De-icing & Odor:** If you live near the airport or the Blind Brook, you may have noticed a distinct, foul odor in extreme cold weather. This is likely the result of a deicing fluid that has been used at the airport for the past two seasons. After its use on the airplanes, the fluid discharges into storm water ponds at the airport and then travels into the Blind Brook. The village has been assured that the deicing fluid does not cause any environmental concerns to residents or the brook and prior testing has shown levels to be well below acceptable limits for this type of activity. While the village will continue to strongly urge the county to try to use an alternative deicing fluid that does not have the same foul odor, deicing is a necessary activity to ensure the planes arrive and depart safely in cold temperatures.

Conclusion

As we move forward in 2014, we will continue looking for ways to deliver quality services to our residents, while keeping our costs as low as possible. We will always look for sources of non-property tax revenue to help deliver these services, much like our hotel tax does today. We will keep listening and making ourselves available to our residents with the goal of continuing to simplify our code to help reduce the amount of time and costs associated with bringing certain projects before Village boards and committees.

I would like to thank former Mayor Joan Feinstein for leaving the Village in great shape as she left office. Joan has been a tremendous resource for me and the entire BOT since our taking office last April.

All of our progress would not be possible without my fellow board members, Trustees Jeffrey Rednick, David Heiser, Jason Klein and Susan Epstein, and especially Village Administrator Chris Bradbury and his fantastic staff. They make what we do look easy.

I wish you and your families a happy and healthy new year!

Sincerely,

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 Mayor
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