

**Oakdale Civic Association
General Monthly Meeting
January 12, 2009**

2009 Officers

President:	Ray Carta	560-4650
Vice President:	Stan Feldman	523-8835
Treasurer:	Pat Kassten	589-8222
Recording Secretary	Carol Schwasnick	589-7455
Corresponding Secretary	Marilyn Triolo	589-5981

Board Members

Cathy Cohen
John Eder

Minutes Recorded by Carol Schwasnick

www.OakdaleCivicAssociation.org

President Ray Carta opened the meeting at 7:35pm with the pledge of allegiance. President Carta requested a motion to waive the rules for meeting agenda to bring in our guest speaker up-front. A motion was made by Chuck Triolo, seconded by the membership.

Guest Speaker: Stephen Badala, First Vice President, Connetquot School Board.

Mr Badala announced he would be touching on some issues with the school budget. Governor Patterson has proposed a new budget for this year, which includes a DRA (Deficit Reduction) of \$3.4M, which is equivalent to 52 teaching positions. On Long Island it costs \$15.5K to educate a child, \$21.5K per special education child. Long Island educates 17% of NY State's children and receives only 12.8% of the aid.

Unfunded mandates

Mandates cost the district millions of dollars every year. Mandates are basically programs that the State requires the school district to run but does not necessarily fund adequately. These weigh heavily on the districts and include data reporting, Wicks Law, transportation, and Project Save. In the 1990's transportation was reimbursed at 90%. Now, it is reimbursed at a flat rate of 40%. It costs over \$6m PER year to transport children back and forth to school in Connetquot. Wicks law has to do with construction projects. For example, in the West Islip School district recent projects cost them \$10M more than if this law was done away with. The State rescinded Wick's Law for this year for projects that are "shovel ready." In Connetquot we have projects up in Albany that are waiting for approval. Approval has been delayed, some of them have been in this status for 18 months, and these projects are not considered "shovel ready." Data reporting means that the district is required to report everything to Albany and the district gets no dollars for that. Teachers get removed from the classroom to do this reporting, requiring the district to pay for a substitute. At the school board convention one district talked about having a copyologist - an employee who gets paid to make copies and send reports to Albany. The State mandates AED (defibrillator) training, but we don't get money for this either. The State has also passed a law that requires districts to allow teachers 4 hours of paid leave time to have cancer screening, mammography, or to give blood. Teacher leaves classroom to do this and a substitute is required. Why can't teachers do this on their time off, like anybody else?

Where are our tax dollars going?

Long Islanders pay 68% of their tax bill to education but only receive 12% back to educate Long Island children. NYC is not listed for any cuts from Governor Patterson's budget. NYC

also receives \$200M in building aid. On average a NYC homeowner pays only \$2K in property taxes. We here on Long Island are funding these bigger school districts such as New York City, Buffalo, and Albany.

Individuals With Disabilities Education Act.

This is supposed to be funded by NY State at 40%, but gets funded at 17.2%. The incoming President says he will fully fund this program. We hope he does. In NY State the autism numbers are in the rise, with 1 in 150 children diagnosed. Between 1996 and 2005 education costs for special education increased 4% per year, and 60% over the last 10 years.

Our property taxes.

Nassau County ranked #3 in taxes, Suffolk ranked #11, Niagara County in upstate NY is ranked #1. Last year Medicaid fraud totaled \$44M, this year its \$50M. Hospitals and doctors are double billing - billing for things you didn't receive and appointments you didn't have. We are all paying for this in our taxes. It must be addressed.

So far what the governor has put out there for his proposed budget has been just a proposal, but it looks like Long Island is going to be his whipping post. If these cuts stay in place, the situation will be dismal. The Governor just gave us a new unfunded mandate: Special Ed Preschool. Every district has to have it. This represents \$600K or more to pass along to the taxpayers. We need mandate relief. We need community groups, and everyone to be letting this governor know that we expect him to support us by cutting in other areas that will not affect the education of our children. We need Mandate relief to pass on to the taxpayer. The #1 issue in the economy is taxes. We were preparing for a midyear cut in funding in this district which we did not get – surprisingly. Superintendent Groveman had a workshop to design cutbacks without decimating the education. When you speak to Dr. Groveman he's very positive that solutions will be found. We have to be mindful of the taxpayer and keep services for our children. The first meeting of the Budget Advisory Committee (BAC) is in February. It is very eye opening to see all the numbers and what you have to do to bring in a budget. Every year it takes a 7% to roll in a budget. 7% is too much money. We understand that and are working very hard to keep our programs intact.

Incoming President Obama says he is going to give a \$5B dollar stimulus package to education. But we are really not sure what is going to happen, so it is hard to plan around and there are a lot of unknowns. We hope he can keep to this promise.

Tax facts: The tax cuts really don't work. In California, there were some cuts in the 1970's and now the performance of school districts in that state is abysmal. In Massachusetts, there is an influx of state aid, and a cap on tax increases. Now their buildings are falling apart because they have not been able to work critical maintenance into the allowed increases. So they are now electing to go over the cap. If a tax cap went into effect last year this district would have lost \$6M, over 4 years: \$20M. That is a lot of money.

Look at the difference in cost to educate a child vs. incarcerate an inmate. The State puts more money into incarceration than into education. Why did the governor's budget not cut any money from the NY State corrections institutions? The inmates at Rikers eat better than many people, and watch better TV, have better medical. Mr. Badala stated that he came from law enforcement, and feels that the money is better spent on education to keep more people off the streets. If you are not educating young people, some will see crime as their only option.

\$15M. This is a cost to the W Islip School district because they negotiated a contract with teachers about paying into medical insurance. There are 30 administrators in the Mt. Sinai district \$150K+ per year, with 2,650 students. At Connetquot there are 6 at that level with 7,400 students. These are examples of waste in other districts. The waste must be cut to preserve the programs.

Our Superintendent, Alan Groveman, is ranked in the middle in terms of salary. Mr. Groveman has turned this district around. We as a school board have negotiated a good contract with him and he is pleased with his position, the district and community. The total package for the Syosset Superintendent is \$532K. The salary alone is over \$400K. That package is excessive.

Bill 3177. This was introduced in the NY State Assembly and Senate 2 years ago. Only one Assemblyperson voted no – and must have been the only one to read the bill. It states that the last proposal by the union would automatically become the contract if the district was found to not be negotiating in good faith. Our Assemblywoman voted yes. This would have cost us millions if it went into effect. Also, \$18M is the total amount of money that unions pumped into campaigns in 2007. This is significant.

The CSEA negotiated a contract in Nassau County. An arbitrator awarded the CSEA members a \$600 signing bonus and longevity pay. Food service workers and bus drivers are included in the CSEA – not just teachers. This contract, settled by an arbitrator, could possibly hurt us. Last year it cost \$3M to mail out star rebate checks. Why didn't the state do it electronically and reduce our taxes instead of paying for a mailing? They should reduce our taxes by that money. They wasted millions of dollars to do it.

The membership asked a question about Connetquot's extensive reserves: The EBAL: "Employee Benefits Accrued Liability Reserve." This reserve is set up for employee accrued liabilities. This money cannot be used for anything but employee payments of unused sick and vacation time at retirement. That has been set up for a very long time. We cannot touch that money. This year, 58 teachers are eligible for retirement, possibly not all of them will retire, but we need to make these payments. In Connetquot we borrow money at 1.6% interest. This is very low and due to our excellent standing in terms of reserves. This status will save the district \$500K in interest this year. Other districts pay twice that. The NY State pension system is currently \$38M in the red, and do we pass that cost along to taxpayer to make up the difference? Who is going to make up that money? We don't want to. At the last PTA Council Meeting Ginny Fields could not give an answer when asked directly. We are looking at having a double digit increase again, to make that up.

Mr. Badala noted that there is a good mix of people on the school board right now. He is first VP right now, serving as legislative liaison. He tries to attend every meeting there is on education and get up to date on everything there is to do. There are meetings with the State Senate and Assemblypeople on Feb 2 and Feb 27. The cuts proposed by Governor Patterson are not good for anybody. School districts generate property values. The best place for special education used to be Sachem, now it has shifted to Connetquot. We do it better than the government says we have to. Mr. Badala handed out post cards for residents to send to Albany asking Governor Patterson to restore all state aid to education. It asks him to reduce aid to charter schools - charter schools are not supposed to get state aid. It also asks the state to lobby the federal government to fully fund IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act). It asks the Governor not to make LI taxpayers the scapegoats to make budget. Long Island schools should not bear the brunt of the cuts. The way to build the economy is not by punishing education. It's a fight and we should all fight this together. Our elected officials are not listening; we need to tell them what we need them to do in terms of these issues.

There is a project that has been sitting in Albany for 18 months now to put new controls on building systems to save energy. It is still sitting and the cost benefits cannot be realized until it is implemented. For Connetquot, owning buses is a very good thing. Commack is about the same size we are. It costs them \$10M per year to use Suffolk Buses. It costs us \$6M with our own buses and drivers. We are going to see some additional savings because of fuel costs coming down. The school buildings have dual burners for their heating systems: natural gas and oil to be able to switch as appropriate. John Eder asked, "What is

the worst case scenario in terms of what we pay (in taxes)?” Mr. Badala answered that the NY State Budget is due to be approved on April 1, and he can’t tell us an answer right now because there is so much that can happen with the incoming President and changes that the new administration may make.

At Sachem there is a Taxpac group headed by Frank Gorman. At Sachem, they decimated all their reserves. 160 teachers retired and they did not hire anybody to backfill. They are now looking to cut \$7M from their budget. You cannot make up the reserves. Mandates are pretty much the same for all school district. We have twice as many as Sayville. The demographics determine it and we have more because of our focus on special ed and our bigger special ed population. The membership asked what is the plan and what is in motion now? Mr. Badala responded that we enjoy nice class sizes now, but we still have not gotten a bottom-line figure. Last place we will likely go is class sizes. The BAC will have to work under contingency budget guidelines.

Bob Mirro stated that the Governor is not going to be able to cut himself out of this problem. He needs to show leadership for generating revenue, and have not seen this in what we have read. Bob asks to put the buzz in his ear during the legislative meetings that Mr. Badala attends. Mr. Badala responds that Tom Suozzi had stated, “Why waste a good crisis” in terms of what is going on with the economy. Mr. Badala also stated that unfunded mandates include the “No child left behind” act. It’s not working. In the 70’s there was better closing of those gaps. It’s the wrong direction.

December Minutes

President Carta made a motion to waive the reading of the minutes from December. This motion was seconded.

Treasurer’s report:

President Carta delivered the treasurer’s report as Pat Kassten left early not feeling well. December’s income from dues was \$420. We replenished the postal account for \$250 and paid the postal box fee of \$86. There are 94 paid member families to date for 2009.

Motion was made to accept treasurer’s report as read, motion seconded.

President’s report

President Ray Carta reported that in this last month we added a lot of links to the website. We added National Grid, The National Weather Service, Bohemia Civic, and Friends of Connetquot. The Chamber of Commerce has its own tab now; the tab includes a link to the Chamber website. The Chamber will reciprocate on their website. A guestbook feature was also added. Comments will be approved before they go up to ensure they are printable. A tab was also added for the monthly guest speaker. Our goal is to make it so useful that you don’t have to go anywhere else. There is a new OCA hotline to replace Stan’s cell number. This is 560-4650, call anytime. Mr. Carta stated that he strongly believes that membership is very important. The Lions club of Sayville is now gone, defunct – and they had a good and active membership. President Carta stated that he would like to form a membership/events committee and is asking Bob Mirro to chair. The goal of the committee is to look for opportunities for community events. If anyone would like to help Bob with this, please give a call to the hotline or send an email. We need to constantly work on membership so we never dwindle.

President Carta stated that he received an email on the Oakdale sign pollution patrol. They have removed 525 signs since they started, and have a list of the top offenders. The Community has declared Oakdale a sign-free hamlet, and it takes the community to ensure enforcement. President Carta encouraged the membership to stop their cars and rip down every sign that can be reached. Write down and/or email the information or keep every sign and turn them in at a meeting. These get faxed over to a woman in code enforcement. It has resulted in far fewer signs, so it’s working even though the town does not have staff to

call the offenders directly. The best deterrent is to take the signs down until people realize it's a waste of time and money to put them up. With Garage sales in the neighborhood, we trust that people will put the sign up for their event and take it down once it's over. We also try and work with politicians on signs, which is difficult. We are looking to give them a limited time frame or limited locations to post signs, but outcome remains to be seen on how that will work.

President Carta distributed surveys that are stamped and self addressed for members to fill out with feedback and suggestions for meetings and the organization in general. Mr. Carta stated that it is your Civic Association, and your opinion matters.

Connetquot Fish Hatchery

Recording Secretary Carol Schwasnick gave an update on the Connetquot Fish Hatchery. As previously reported, the NY State DEC had determined not to renew the hatchery's permit for operation due to the presence of the IPN virus in the Connetquot fish. Secretary Schwasnick reported that she had spoken recently to Richard Remmer, past President and current Director of Friends of Connetquot. He stated that since this announcement the Friends have encouraged the State to consider alternatives. Recently, the DEC has agreed to renew the permit for limited operation, including obtaining clean eggs from another source. This permit is contingent on approval of the NY State Parks Department, led by Carol Ash. Although the State overall is on the right track, timing is more critical than we believe they realize. Hatching season is from late January to early February, so if the permit is not issued very soon the hatchery stands a chance of not being able to raise fish this year. Secretary Schwasnick has drafted a letter template and is currently having this reviewed by Richard Remmer. Once approved, this template will be emailed to the OCA membership and posted to the website for folks to personalize and send to Albany as soon as possible to voice support for this valuable local resource. *(Update 1/20: Documents are now available on the OCA website. Please see the News and Events tab. Everyone is encouraged to send letters to Governor Patterson and Parks Commissioner Ash).*

Dowling College Update

Jamie Flynn gave an update on the hearing of the Town Planning Board a couple of weeks ago on Dowling's request to change use for 5 residences in Idle Hour from "residential" to "office." Dowling owns 35 homes in Idle hour, and for years we have been encouraging them not to expand into the neighborhood in any way. At the Planning Board hearing, Cathy Cohen read a letter she had written. The Planning Board did not make a decision, they shelved it, but they did ask for a master plan from Dowling.

Mr. Flynn went on to read Cathy Cohen's letter on her behalf. The letter stated that the request flies in the face of reason and means increased vehicular and pedestrian traffic. There are better places for an office environment - Bronco Charlie's would be the perfect place for offices and parking. Originally the houses in Idle Hour were for professors as perks or as part of compensation packages and they were removed from the tax rolls for not generating rent. Now Dowling proposes to change the character of these properties. Why do they need to move administrative offices into the community? Probably to create more classroom space in their main buildings. Two years ago Dowling President Bob Gaffney had proposed to turn the Oakdale campus into a graduate and performing arts center to reduce the student population there. At same meeting he also agreed to sell Bronco Charlie's. We cannot create a thriving downtown in Oakdale with this eyesore in place. This was all lip service and Dowling has not stood by their promises. Office space is not the best use of residential properties zoned AA and AAA. The original use as housing and as a buffer is still valid. The community feels there is better property in Dowling's portfolio for office use, and they should use the money slated for renovating the houses to raze Bronco Charlie's and landscape the lot until they can decide what special use that property will have. The community of Oakdale has done a better job at fighting this issue than Dowling has. The only plan that makes sense to allow Dowling to grow and to preserve Idle Hour is to move the entire undergraduate population to their Brookhaven campus. They are not being truthful at

all, stating recently they have not gotten permits for demolition of Bronco Charlie's, then having Gene Murphy remind them they have had that permit since last December. Jamie Flynn asked the OCA membership for any objections to the fight against Dowling. No objections were raised. Bob Mirro stated that Dowling owns a landlocked situation and are trying to creep the boundary into the surrounding neighborhood. They are a small school with bad speculation on their standpoint. Jamie Flynn reminded the membership that the Planning Board is very strict. They try not to make any exceptions and the Town of Islip actually sued Dowling on behalf of Oakdale many years ago. Islip lost the case, unfairly. No one vetted the judge. His name was Cromerty and he had ties to Dowling that did not allow him to be impartial. Dowling was supposed to have a more recent meeting with the community or the Oakdale Round Table and they never did it. The bottom line is that Dowling cannot be taken for its word; they are not honest and have intentions that go against the wishes of the community.

Harlem Wizards vs. Connetquot: February 2nd

Deirdre Neunzig from the Bosti PTA reported the Harlem Wizards are coming to Connetquot on February 2, and will play Connetquot faculty and staff. The Oakdale Civic Association is invited to have a membership table with banners and information. The Bohemia Civic Association and Chambers of Commerce are also welcome. Information regarding ticket purchase has been posted on the website; please see the News and Events tab.

St. John's Church

Pam Burner from St. John's Episcopal Church reported on renovation efforts at the historic landmark. She has been trying to get government grants to fix the church. The State recently contacted Pam after three years of trying to get a \$50K grant and Pam had to send copies of everything to Albany. That effort was through Ginny Fields. Because of the length of time this is taking, a new program has been developed called "Buy a Shingle." For \$25 you can buy a shingle for the roof. There are other options to buy a wall or partial wall. A time capsule will be buried in July 2010. You can put a message in, with your purchase to help St. John's. The capsule will be unearthed in 2065. Pam noted that if everybody in Oakdale bought a shingle, we could do the roof tomorrow. Everyone is encouraged to participate. Information on this program will be posted on the OCA website.

Town Report: John Eder.

Again this month, John Eder emailed Town of Islip and they responded to questions.

- New applications: no new change of zone or special permits.
- Oakdale-Bohemia Rd. condos: the question was posed regarding the pond and fountain that had originally been planned. The response: there is a plan for a three foot deep swale for drainage purposes, most of the time it will just be grass.
- St. John's University property: no new developments
- Sidewalks on west side of Oakdale-Bohemia Rd.: Gene Murphy will follow up with engineering regarding status; he agrees the curbs look low.
- Chase Bank: The building plans were approved last week, construction will be done this spring, assuming they move forward.
- Rollstone: The County has not yet purchased the property, this is still in progress.
- Green Cactus: Little activity recently, considering the building permit was issued on 1/2/09. The sign in the window is down. John will follow up further with Planning.
- Dowling College: thank you to those who went to the meeting with the Planning Board. John Eder asked the Town when they think a decision could be made. Jessica Joyce responded that a meeting was held with the Town and Dowling on Friday Jan 9. Dowling was told that this issue would not be brought back to the planning board until Bronco Charlie's is demolished. The next step is to get us a timeframe for this work. Hooray! A question was asked about getting a copy of the transcript for the public hearing. The membership noted that anyone can get a transcript of the meeting by filling out a FOIL request with the Town and referencing the date of the meeting.

- Bronco Charlie's: John Eder heard a new party was interested in the property, but the Town said no discussions with any interested parties have been held recently.
- Traffic light: a member of the community had requested that a light be considered for the corner of Waterford and Oakdale Bohemia Road. Mr. Eder stated he will bring up the traffic light request now with the Town.

The next general meeting of the Oakdale Civic Association is scheduled for Feb 9. Our guest speaker will be Suffolk County Planning Commissioner Thomas Isles who will discuss development of the Sunrise Corridor. Mr. Isles' past experience includes some time working for the Town of Islip Planning Dept. where he was Gene Murphy's supervisor. He should be a very informative speaker.

A motion to adjourn the meeting was made at 9:28pm. This motion was seconded.