

Letter to the School and Village Boards  
Re: Public Funding of the Scarsdale Teen Center  
March 13, 2017 and March 14, 2017

Because there was no opportunity for public comment following the joint meeting of the School and Village Boards on Monday, March 6, 2017, and another commitment prevented me from attending School Board's Budget Session #3, I would like to address some of the comments made by both Village and School Board members that did not fully inform the community of the history of the not-for-profit organization, The Scarsdale Teen Center (the Center), whose doors have been open since May 1999. The Center welcomes Scarsdale teens, whether they attend Scarsdale schools or not as well as nonresident students attending Scarsdale schools. And despite the re-imagining of the Center by the current School Board as being established for teens at risk or that there is a "stigma" associated with using the Center, the Center was established by a community that recognized the risk to all our children as they grow more independent and that sometimes, they stumble. That community supported a supervised, drug and alcohol free place for teens to socialize, run an event and enjoy programming tailored to their ever changing interests.

Public funding from the Scarsdale School District has been \$65,000 annually for the last five years, \$22,500 less than the original funding committed by the district in 1999 despite rising costs in the operation of the Center, creating more pressure on this small not-for-profit to seek other sources of income including rentals of the space and charging for programming other than drop-in hours to meet the shortfall. Still the Center persevered and reached out to state and county grants, private foundations and private donors, mindful of its budget and never going into debt. Characterizing the Center as operating in the red is misleading and while the need for adequate public funding continues, the Center has shown that its creative Board and staff has met the shortfall between the public funding and the costs of operation and deserves to be supported by its community tax base to fulfill its mission.

The Village Board has continued to support the Center at \$87,500 annually and realized that using the facility for its recreational needs for families with children of all ages made sound financial sense. Scarsdale's School District never understood that and made the "nonuse" and "disconnect with the School District" arguments a self-fulfilling prophecy by simply not using it or entertaining efforts to collaborate with the Center. The yearly dismissive response by the Administration seemed to infect the attitudes of the PTAs and PT Council despite the fact that it was some of its former leaders who helped establish the Center in the first place. It took years to gain some traction within the PTA organizations and recent collaborations have been encouraging as the goal of supporting the "whole" child no longer means only within the confines of a five day a week school classroom or ignoring parental concerns.

While there are many reasons for the lack of use during drop in hours which the Center curtailed in the wake of less public funding, less teen use on Monday through Thursday of the school year and in response to a different model for serving the community's teen population and families,

the School Board only focused on drop-in usage and ignored the 2,220 visits to the Center and Center events held in larger community spaces from January through December 2016.

It is likely that both the School and Village Boards will not commit public funding to the Center for next year. They have asked for the Center to propose another model for operating at less cost, to them. The Center has had this discussion over the years with both Boards. The Center looked at other commercial spaces as well as School and Village spaces. None was as financially sound as staying put in the rental space the community remodeled and improved over the years, including an outside deck built by its volunteers. If either the School District or the Village has space to offer the Center, neither Board is raising their hand. In a community that has always had community space issues and may for some time be facing more with a library renovation and Greenacres School project on the horizon, does it make sense to walk away from a completed community space that the Village, the School and yes, even the library could use over the next few years should the Center have adequate public funding? One use that comes to mind is a Mandarin Project which can begin as early as this spring as an afterschool or weekend program at the Center and continue into the summer months before, during or after the Village recreational camps.

The Center will continue to operate through its fiscal year. There are several community programs in the works, the development of the OneLove Project empowering young people to understand and recognize abusive dating relationships and equipping them with the skills to help themselves and their friends. As the Center did for the showing of the documentary, “Screenagers” this past November, the Center is collaborating with the Scarsdale Edgemont Family Counseling Service and the SHS PTA and will conduct training workshops at the Center. The Center is sponsoring several soap box derby building projects at Fox Meadow School and with the Scarsdale Boy Scouts and can provide a number of already built cars that can be refurbished and raced in the annual Soapbox Derby held in New Rochelle in June. The Center is currently looking for new Board members to discuss the future of the Center, with or without public funding. Interested members of the community should visit [www.thecenter862.com](http://www.thecenter862.com) for more information or contact the Bonnie Yaseen, Chair of the Nominating Committee, [bonnie@yaseen.com](mailto:bonnie@yaseen.com).

Respectfully submitted,

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