

Josh Frankel
45 Black Birch Lane
Scarsdale, NY 10583

April 12, 2016

Honorable Mayor Mark and Board of Trustees:

In the event I am unable to speak during the Public Comments segment of the April 12, 2016 meeting, I would like to nonetheless convey my sentiments for the record on a number of issues.

In no particular order:

With Regard to the Assessment Controversy

There is apparently still controversy surrounding the (no longer) recent assessment/revaluation and the impact it had on larger lots. Absent hard evidence that the methodology used by Tyler Technologies was in some way flawed, defective, or deficient, this issue should now be moot.

The revaluation had a beneficial impact on some, myself included (though small), an adverse impact on some, and no impact on others. That there would be an adverse impact on some – those who had been underassessed for decades – was known in advance and came as a surprise to exactly no one. The simple fact of the matter is that the lots that have been most underassessed over the decades, thereby reaping the largest benefits, have been the larger lots. This is not rocket science, but simple math.

Claims that having these large lots now equitably assessed are going to somehow lead to the demise of the Village are, well, nonsense.

I undertook a study of residential real estate transactions for the nine-year period covering 2007-2015. Over that period, according to the NYS Office of Real Property Services, there were some 1,977 transactions. Of those 1,977 transactions, some 21 – or 1.06% - involved lots larger than two acres. If we expand the analysis to include lots over 1.5 acres, the sale total goes up to 52, or 2.6% of the total. In the two-acre-plus category, there have been two sales for each of the last three years. And while sales fell off a bit in the 1 ½ - 2-acre category in the past few years, a) those numbers are miniscule to begin with, and b) there's no evidence tying that insignificant drop-off to the revaluation (correlation does not imply causation). Claims regarding the deleterious impact of the revaluation are nothing but mere speculation. Lastly, the flip side of all that math is that fully 97% - 1,925 of 1,977 – of sales in the last nine years involved properties under 1 ½ acres in size. It's fair to say this is the bread and butter of Scarsdale real estate. And while the Toppings make very sympathetic "victims" of the revaluation – and I am sympathetic to their plight – they benefitted from decades of under-assessment. Would it be fair for residents to be forced out due to being unfairly overassessed? Last word on this: Everyone continues to have the right to grieve. The Board must move on.

SCARSDALE SALES AT VARIOUS ACREAGES*											
YEAR	<=.5	PCT	>.5, <=1	PCT	>1, <=1.5	PCT	>1.5, <=2	PCT	>2	PCT	Total
2007	196	79%	35	14%	9	4%	4	2%	4	2%	248
2008	113	80%	22	15%	6	4%	0	0%	1	1%	142
2009	126	73%	34	20%	7	4%	4	2%	1	1%	172
2010	151	77%	29	15%	11	6%	4	2%	1	1%	196
2011	166	78%	28	13%	10	5%	3	1%	5	2%	212
2012	191	81%	26	11%	10	4%	6	3%	3	1%	236
2013	209	85%	24	10%	6	2%	6	2%	2	1%	247
2014	214	79%	40	15%	11	4%	3	1%	2	1%	270
2015	214	84%	31	12%	6	2%	1	0%	2	1%	254
Total	1580	80%	269	14%	76	4%	31	2%	21	1%	1977

*Data from NY State Office of Real Property Services, as of on or about April 1, 2016. 2015 may be incomplete. Calculations by author.

With Regard to the Library Renovation

While I am admittedly not as up to speed as I might be on this issue, it very much smells to me like a solution in search of a problem. With a sophomore and a graduating senior in my house, I have spent more than my share of time at the library over the last 15 years. I've also spent considerable time there on my own researching past editions of the Scarsdale Inquirer on microfilm. With those countless hours under my belt, I believe I'm as qualified as any other resident when I say that I don't see the need. The library has never been overcrowded when I've been there. I've always gotten a parking space. I've always gone straight to – and accessed – both the microfilm and the attendant readers or, frankly, anything else I've needed. So, my question would be: What problem is it that we are trying to address here? Are we anticipating an upswing in our resident population that will necessitate additional library resources? If so, I'd be interested in seeing the demographic projections. If not, I'd respectfully suggest that the library is perfectly fine as is.

The opening lines of the "campaign" site states: *"Visit Scarsdale Public Library during school finals week and every seat is taken. Bring a toddler to a morning program and the crowd is overflowing. Come to the Library any weekday and circle the parking lot in search of an open space."*

So we're to spend north of \$15MM because every seat is taken "during school finals week?" And while I haven't had a toddler in a long time, and can't speak to that point, I have not, as mentioned, ever had a problem finding a parking space.

With Regard to the Upcoming Budget

If it is true, as Bob Harrison maintains, that the Village is sitting on a fund balance of \$8.7 million, and if it is true that this represents 16.08% of the budget, and if it is true that the Board's stated policy is to maintain between 10-15% of the budget on hand, simple math tells us that the board could move approximately \$600,000 from the fund balance to mitigate the proposed 3.7% tax increase. The fund balance does not belong to the Village. It belongs to the residents – all of us – and to the extent it has

been overfunded, those excess funds should be, to the extent possible, returned to residents (or perhaps even used to repair our third world roadways). Easing the tax increase is a very acceptable way to do just that. If there is a purpose to hoarding – and growing – the balance beyond the Village’s stated policy, we should all be made aware of what that reason is, and that is not offered rhetorically.

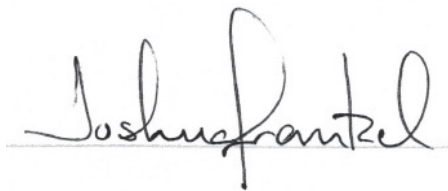
With Regard to the Roadways

On to my favorite topic: Our roadways. If I were to give a State of the Roadways speech, I would be very brief and to the point: They’re deplorable. Whatever money is being allocated to road repair and resurfacing is simply insufficient. And no doubt will be for the foreseeable future, as the deterioration of the roadways will continue to outpace the Village’s ability to do the necessary repair work; we will fall ever more behind. Aside from one major snowfall this year, we had a relatively mild (snow-wise) winter, yet I’d venture we’ll make no more progress on the roadways this year than we’ve made in years gone by. Which is next-to-nothing. As I’ve previously suggested, I urge the Board to bond out some funds to undertake a more meaningful infrastructure project. Interest rates remain near record lows, and while I understand the unorthodox nature of borrowing longer-term to fund what is an immediate need, the simple fact of the matter – you can timestamp this one – is that we’ll wind up paying more at some time down the road to do the same work we could be doing now for less.

With Regard to Monte Nido

The Board apparently continues to be the recipient of laudatory comments regarding its vote opposing the entry of a (for-profit) residential treatment facility for adolescent girls with eating disorders into our village. Far from being brave and bold, the Board’s actions remind me, frankly, of the recent legislative action in North Carolina, which may be followed by similar action in Mississippi. This is not who we are. Or, more to the point, not who we should be. The Board’s vote, along with the petitions that were circulated, were nothing more than NIMBY-fueled discrimination against those who are, in some way, different. I was – and continue to be – deeply ashamed of how the Board (to say nothing of many of my neighbors) comported itself on that matter. I hope that with just a bit of introspection, you can do better in the future.

With thanks for both your service and consideration,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joshua Frankel". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath the name.