

September 13, 2016

Addressing our Village Management

These remarks were given at the Board of Trustee meeting on September 13, 2016

Like most in the community I have been following the Reval proceedings over the past several months. I am not going to talk about the Reval itself tonight, but rather what we learned about our Village operations, the issues that exist and what I believe we can do to fix these issues.

What troubles me most is that all of the issues about our operations¹ only came to light because the Reval was a project with high visibility and there were a number of residents who pushed through all the barriers to get at the truth. But what about all the other aspects of our operations and all the capital projects that also impact us but aren't so visible. How do we as a community have any confidence that all these aspects of our annual \$50M budget are being properly managed? Whether you were for the Reval or against, happy with the outcome or dissatisfied, I think we can all agree there has been an erosion of confidence in our Village Management. The question of what to do about the Reval will continue, but it's also time to address how we make the necessary changes to our Village operations to ensure future decisions and projects are managed properly. Here is what I think we need to do.

The Board of Trustees

Management: Most of the decisions you make are predicated, at least in part, by information, analysis and recommendations provided by our Village Staff. I think until now it was assumed this information could be taken at face value. No more. There can be no assumptions on Village-prepared materials. Everything must be critiqued now. Until our confidence is restored, you will need to micromanage.

¹ To read firsthand about how the Village (mis)managed the Reval project, I suggest requesting a copy of all the Village emails obtained through Freedom of Information Law (FOIL) requests by residents. The Village can provide copies.

Meetings: Often there is information presented or topics discussed outside of this room; whether it is during the 7:30pm agenda meeting or in other forums. More discussion between the seven of you needs to be happening on this dais during public board meetings. Too often you explain why you made a decision at board meetings; instead you need to allow the public to hear your thought process before a decision is made to help us be more involved in the process. There is a time and a place for meetings and discussion outside of the bi-weekly board meeting, but too much has been shifted away from the public eye.

Public Information: The packet of information you receive on Friday before board meetings needs to be made public. We need more than seven sets of eyes on this information. For those who aren't aware, the Friday before each Board meeting the agenda of the upcoming meeting is posted on the Scarsdale website. The Board, however, receives an additional packet with information related to Village decisions and projects.

What I'm asking for is more transparency and until confidence in the Village is restored, more oversight of operations.

Residents

Be Present: We need to be present. That doesn't mean we have to be at every meeting. But at key junctures such as during the budget process, we need to be there. I will use the budget process, which drives so much of what happens each year in the Village, as an example. While there have always been presentations of the preliminary budget for residents, by the time we're presented with this information, it's effectively too late for change. We need to be at the meetings where the department heads present to the Board. This is where decisions are made. By law these meetings are public. They're long, almost all day, but we can divide up the time and ensure we're involved in the decision process. And if need be, provide the Board with key questions they may not have asked.

Be Heard: We need to continue voicing our thoughts. If you have an issue, a question, a suggestion or a constructive criticism – you need to voice it. And you need to voice it to the Mayor and the Board. You may have sent something to the Village Manager or a department in the past, but if you really want to be heard it needs to go directly to the Mayor and the Board.

We've seen what being present can do. If residents hadn't come to all these meetings, pushed for more information and stuck with their convictions, none of the issues with the Reval and our Village operations would have come to light. Now we need to continue doing it with projects at the outset to position us for success.

Village Manager

Responsibility: Our structure of village management is similar to that of a typical corporation. Instead of a Board of Directors we have a Board of Trustees. The Board sets high level policy and provides high level oversight. However there is no expectation that the Board will scrutinize every detail of daily operations. This is why we have a paid Village Manager, our CEO of the Village. This is Steve Pappalardo's role. It is the Village Manager that is responsible for the day to day operations of our Village and the implementation of the Board's policy decisions. And just like with the CEO of a company, the buck stops with the Village Manager. The execution of this Reval wasn't just a failure of our Assessors Department; it was Steve's failure too. Every department is HIS responsibility. When they succeed, he succeeds. And when they fail, he fails. We've had a major failure. And now we have a crisis of confidence. We need to know that he understands this on him. We need our Village Manager to publicly take responsibility. Up to this point, he's been quiet, has barely said anything meeting after meeting. This community will not have confidence restored in Village government until he takes responsibility. I want to hear Steve say "I take full responsibility" and I want him to mean it.

Moving Forward: Then we then need to hear his plan on what he is going to do going forward to ensure something like this doesn't happen again. Not just for the Assessor office but for all

departments. Maintaining the status quo is not acceptable. I remind everyone, we've only scrutinized one department. What if we had looked in this level of detail at another part of our operation; a department, a capital project, a recommendation to the Board? We need to have confidence that if we start FOILING all the other departments that we won't find similar issues. We spend \$50M every year on operations and capital projects; we need to know our Village Manager has his finger on the pulse of all departments and major projects.

This all needs to happen not with just the Board, not at a 7:30pm agenda meeting that isn't televised, but in this room at a public board meeting.

The last few months have brought to light a number of significant issues in how this Village is run. I hope we can look at these issues and work together to solve them. Thank you.

Ron Schulhof