

**Oakdale Civic Association
General Monthly Meeting
January 11, 2010**

2010 Officers

President:	Ray Carta	560-4650 - present
Vice President:	Stan Feldman	523-8835 - not present
Treasurer:	Pat Kassten	589-8222 - present
Recording Secretary	Carol Schwasnick	589-7455 - present
Corresponding Secretary	Marilyn Triolo	589-5981 - present

Directors

Cathy Cohen - not present

Minutes Recorded by Carol Schwasnick

www.OakdaleCivicAssociation.org

President Ray Carta called the meeting to order at 7:35pm, and initiated the pledge of allegiance. Mr. Carta requested a motion to waive the meeting rules to give time priority to our guest speaker this evening. Member Chuck Triolo made a motion, this motion was seconded.

Guest Speaker: Dr. Alan Groveman, Connetquot School District Superintendent

Dr. Groveman spoke about the district's budget development process and the related survey that was recently distributed to community organizations such as this one. Dr. Groveman gave some background, and offered to answer questions.

He stated that the district has two basic sources of revenue: property taxes and state aid. Every year we know the state aid will be the same amount as the year before, plus a little more - and we plan around that. This year the state is in such a fiscal mess they do not know if they can maintain the current funding level. They are talking about the possibility of using last year's federal aid to fund this year's state aid. This means we might not have the aid we need next year. We are faced with greater difficulties this year. Nobody wants taxes to go up any more than they have to, but we must balance this with trying to run a quality district with programs and services.

In the last 7 or 8 years the district ran the "BAC" - the Budget Advisory Committee. This year the board decided they'd like the input on the budget now, before they put the budget together. Once class sizes are set for example, the staffing is set - and these types of parameters limit modifications to that budget. The board this year asked the administration to get a handle with the community on what it wants. Dr. Groveman's intent was to go out to a variety of groups to see what the groups want to support from a budget perspective. Dr. Groveman then offered to answer any questions in regards to the budget survey that had already been distributed to the membership.

Member Linda Hart asked about the impact of reducing fields and maintenance staff. Dr. Groveman responded that up until a couple of years ago we got lots of complaints about how the grounds looked. Today the grounds and fields are better, and we are maintaining them at a B+ level. Do we go down to B level or a C level? That is the question being asked. Another member asked a question about the impact of reduced technology support for the computers. Dr. Groveman stated that the district currently has fewer people than it needs to keep computers up and running the classrooms. We are not asking these questions because we are overstaffed or understaffed anywhere. Want to know what things the community prioritizes over others, in the event that we need to look at areas to reduce due to budget limitations.

Member Bob Mirro asked if it is true that if we answer "strongly agree" to keeping what we have now, and cut nothing there would be no improvement or increase in services, and there would be a tax increase. Dr. Groveman stated that this is exactly right. The US ranks 19th out of 21 industrialized nations in education. We have extreme pressures for next year. We are going to have a 9% increase in the employee retirement system contribution for next year. The Transit Tax: We pay for MTA in the city, and this goes up every year. If we do everything exactly the same, and don't improve anything, the budget will go up 5% with a tax increase of 7 or 8%, and this is if State aid comes in as expected which it probably won't. The quality of education has improved in this district in the last 5 years. Bond projects have allowed us to do new roofs, three more are scheduled. A rollover budget does not allow us to start any new programs like robotics, etc. We don't think we can come to you with an 8% tax increase so we are asking you to help us figure out how we should tighten and where we should not tighten.

A member asked the question, "Is school enrollment going up or down?" Dr. Groveman responded that it has been up at the HS level and dropping at elementary school level in recent years, but that it should creep back up over the next few years. The biggest class ever graduating was 700+. More recently, this number has been in the 500's. The membership asked then why did we expand the HS several years back? Dr. Groveman stated that this was done to accommodate regarding the district and adding 9th grade to the high school.

Member John Luffman asked about the cost of the teaming concept in middle school. Dr. Groveman explained that this involves dividing teachers into teams who are responsible for about 100 children each. This allows them to give more personal attention to the kids and lets the teachers know better what is going on with them. Teaming is preferable, but expensive because it restricts the number of kids we can put in each class. Costs 2 or 2.5 teachers per grade level per building.

Member Bob Mirro asked, "What are the check points for a Middle School, to support a middle school philosophy?" Could you still call it middle school, if we don't do teaming? Dr. Groveman replied that he is not recommending getting rid of teaming. If middle school teaming is important to you - please tell us, he stated it is important to him and to the administration.

Member Beverly Ruggiero asked about the impact of class size. Dr. Groveman responded that in the High School the more electives we have, the more kids are spread out, the fewer we have the more concentrated they are. HS class size ranges from 17 to 29. It does not range like that in elementary schools. Contractually responsibility for 120 students can be assigned to a teacher for the day at the high school level, though class sizes can vary.

A member asked a question about transportation, "What is the benefit of us having our own buses and drivers vs. outside?" Dr. Groveman replied that we probably could save \$1M the first year to contract it out. In NY State once you have an internal operation, you have to negotiate with that staff to outsource it. By having our own staff we have tremendous control. We have a great transportation program here, parents are very pleased with it, and we do not get complaints about it. Every bus is GPS and radio contact. Not sure if the savings would be as good years 2 and 3, etc.

A further question was, "What is the ratio of districts that own their transportation?" Dr. Groveman stated that in Suffolk County out of 72 or 74 districts about 12 have in-house buses. He stated that inside operation of busing gives more control over drivers and routes. Member Bob Mirro stated that the PTA's feel strongly about maintaining this. Another member used to drive for a contractor, and stated that in that case the same drivers do the same routes every day for consistency, just like in-house.

President Carta gave an example of what may happen if the budget doesn't pass. It has less effect on tax rate but more on programs. In addition to the initial reductions we are talking

about, we would have a real disaster - laying off 100 people and cutting a lot of programs. Dr. Dr. Groveman stated that it's our community, and we need to let our opinions be known. Salaries with many of the bargaining units, including teachers, are subject to contract negotiations, but the unions are expected to be very reasonable this year.

A member asked that question 61 be explained, about whether or not to spend reserves. Dr. Groveman explained that reserve money is put into a variety of bank accounts for various reasons: workers comp and retirement, for example. We try to apply as little as possible during budgeting in case there is a state aid hole. You should want us to apply available reserve dollars as best as we can. Dr. Groveman answered another question regarding how much of the reserves could be contributed. He stated that last year we spent \$5M out of the reserves. How much more we can take out will depend on how this year's expenditures go.

President Carta stated that it is his understanding that school lunch is losing money as it is. Dr. Groveman stated that in a scenario where the lunch program is cut, cold lunches would still be provided for kids on the subsidized lunch program. Dr. Groveman stated that it is difficult to get kids on free and reduced lunch program as it is. A breakfast program is also being discussed, as a way to make sure kids are getting nutrition in their day.

Dr. Groveman stated that on the high school level, we see that some kids will do anything possible to eliminate lunch because they don't go anyway. They want their schedules tight. Food choices are determined by the federal government and there are guidelines which mean that a kid comes in and gets a lunch and they have to take the milk that comes with it - even though they will throw it out. The guidelines are very constraining and this adds cost.

Another member asked the question, "Do all the elementary schools have Assistant Principals?" Dr. Groveman answered that only Cherokee does, since it has 680 kids. There are 7 elementary schools. Another asked if all schools have social workers? Dr. Groveman stated that right now the district provides a B+ level of social work. We could provide none and meet guidelines, but it's important to the administration to have this service in place.

Member question: "You talk about an 8% or 12% tax increase. Can you put a dollar amount on that?" Dr. Groveman stated that this translates to \$26/month on a 4% increase at a \$40K assessment.

Member question: "Is the health insurance fully covered for the teachers and other employees?" Answer: "No they are paying up to 17.5% depending on bargaining unit. When they retire we only pay a portion of the individual coverage."

Member question: "What is a teacher mentor?" Answer: "Two staff members who provide mentoring to new teachers, or help with new curriculum, they are master teachers that work with other teachers."

Member question: "Can you discuss buildings used by outside groups: cleaning costs and security costs." Answer: "If you eliminate this use, those kids can have no place to go. We can eliminate or charge for it. The usage rules state that 60% of the user group must be Connetquot residents. In the Harborfields district, the residents fought planned charges and they were rescinded."

President Carta stated that the only option had been to fill out the survey in hardcopy here at the meeting. Now we can fill it out online, so we will continue our meeting, and then have a special review session for the paper version of the survey for those who wish to remain after. Member Beverly Ruggiero stated that there are 22 organizations listed on the District website as eligible to participate in the survey, including all of the PTA's, Civic organizations, the Chambers of Commerce and Fire Departments.

Regular Agenda:

President Carta presented the minutes, and allowed a few minutes for their review. He asked, "Do we have a motion to accept the motion as presented?" A motion was made and seconded.

Treasurer's Report: Pat Kassten

A very happy Pat Kassten reported that the total income from dues last month was \$2565.00. Paid member families to date: 144. This is a really excellent response to our recent membership mailing. President Carta thanked Chuck and Marilyn Triolo on putting that mailing together.

President's Report: Ray Carta

Byron Lake Cell Tower

At the last meeting we had learned a crane was scheduled to be on site next day to test the location and the height of the proposed tower. Although various members checked in at the appointed time, the tower test did not happen – it happened the next day. One of our members took a ton of pictures and sent them in, and you can see this crane from everywhere. President Carta reached out to Planning Commissioner Gene Murphy - who responded right away and stated that there was no current application in as of 2-3 weeks ago. Mr. Murphy gave his assurance that if an application goes in that we will be alerted. The vendor is South Shore Tower, who is looking at 7-8 sites in Islip at the moment. Ginny Fields' office was also in contact regarding the tower, citing that those decisions are made at the state level. If we get to the point where there is a proposal in for the site there will be other agencies looking at this to measure radiation, etc.

President Carta also spoke to Mr. Murphy about the Town Report. John Eder had to step down from his duties; Mr. Murphy offered to have Jessica Joyce to give us our report via email every month, beginning after the New Year's break.

We had some discussion last month on the scholarship. It's been at \$500 for several years. The Executive Board would like to raise it \$100 to an amount of \$600 for this year. The question to the membership is whether we should keep the scholarship as is or raise it by \$100. A few members championed raising the scholarship to \$1000, as \$500 is not a lot of money these days. Discussion ensued on how \$1000 would affect the budget, and given that the OCA's only source of income is dues, raising the amount further was thought to not be comfortable. Member Chuck Triolo stated that there are a lot of scholarships out there. Connetquot has 30 different scholarships available to graduating students. In the future we can argue for it to go up. A vote was held of the membership on whether to raise the scholarship amount to \$600, this was approved with 2 members opposing. The OCA scholarship qualifications are that the award is given to a student who demonstrates environmental interests and civic mindedness via an essay that is required. It was suggested that we post the description for the scholarship award to on the website for public information. To further raise the scholarship amount, it may require a fund raising effort be established, as other organizations do for awards they sponsor. This is something that can be discussed in the future.

Open Floor

Member Leo Marinick asked if there was any update to on the Rose Spa. President Carta responded that the Police are aware of it, and they would like any input the community has. President Carta suggested going down to the next police precinct meeting, which are held the First Tuesday of every month. The Police Department really responds to the needs of the people that attend these meetings. The inspector, the lieutenant – they all attend. The meeting takes place at the precinct building on Waverly Ave., on the east side just before the traffic circle going into Patchogue. At the next Civic meeting we are going to have the commander send a representative to speak about a number of issues important to our community, including patrols and patrol cars that was discussed last meeting.

Member Brian Lowery addressed the stop sign that was recently installed on Idle Hour Blvd. and Beverly Rd. Mr. Lowery has more than 100 signatures on a petition supporting removal of this sign that was presented to the Town in December. Councilwoman Trish Bergin made inquiries to the DPW and they say it will stay. However, only one person appeared to have wanted it in. Mr. Lowery asked that we call Supervisor Nolan's office at 224-5500 and let him know you support removal of this sign. Idle Hour Blvd is 150 years old, with one reported accident. Now there are 5 stop signs and 3 cross walks and it is too much.

Member Denise Conte spoke about the destruction of a building on the St. John's Campus, where it appears the copper roofing and facing was removed and stolen. This is a violation of a historical structure, which is right around the corner from the Mansion in which we meet. Ms. Conte has been working on landmark status for the Bourne Mansion, and stated that with the destruction of the out-building we have lost something really valuable. It was a beautiful round stable house from the original estate, with a copper face and roof. It was a preschool last, but possibly recently condemned. St. John's has a mortgage against this property. The materials were removed from the building in a matter of days, even though this is patrolled property. The guards knew the perpetrator was on property. President Carta will contact St. John's Security to inquire.

Member Bob Mirro raised the issue of dedication of roads – as is the trouble with Victoria Court, in Oakdale. The road is not dedicated, and the Town does not provide services to this street, including snow removal. Mr. Andrew Hammond has been emailing the Town. and also very disturbing is that the Fire Dept never knew about the road either, which could be disastrous in an emergency. President Carta stated he would contact Bob Doucet of the West Sayville Fire Dept to discuss awareness of this residential street. President Carta also offered to send letters to Gene Murphy from Planning and the DPW to ask about the procedure for having the road dedicated.

Motion to adjourn the meeting was requested at 9:25pm. Motion was made and seconded. The next meeting of the Oakdale Civic Association will take place on Monday Feb 8, 2010 at 7:30pm.