

TOWN/VILLAGE BOARD MEETING  
HARRISON

Held on Thursday, January 7, 2021

TOWN/VILLAGE OF HARRISON

Zoom conference

7:00 p.m.

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1     A P P E A R A N C E S :  
2     MAYOR RON BELMONT  
3     RICHARD DIONISIO  
4     FRED SCILIANO  
5     LAUREN LEADER  
6     FRANK GORDON  
7     JACKIE GREER  
8     FRANK ALLEGRETTI, ESQ.  
9     BRODY SMITH, ESQ.  
10    MICHAEL PICCINI

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1 (Time noted: 7:01 p.m.)

2 MAYOR BELMONT: Thank you.

3 Okay, let's open the second public  
4 hearing.

5 MR. ALLEGRETTI: Before we do that, Ron,  
6 can you -- Mike Piccini, can you allow Brody  
7 Smith in as a panelist. He's on the list of  
8 attendees.

9 MR. PICCINI: Sure, hold on.

10 MS. GREER: Is there a stenographer on?

11 MR. PICCINI: Okay, Frank, he's a panelist  
12 now.

13 MR. ALLEGRETTI: Okay, Mr. Mayor, you can  
14 proceed.

15 MAYOR BELMONT: Public hearing number 2,  
16 continuation of public hearing for the Eminent  
17 Domain Procedure Law for 123 North Street known  
18 as Willow Ridge Country Club.

19 Do we have a motion to open the public  
20 hearing?

21 MR. SCILIANO: I'll motion.

22 MR. DIONISIO: I'll second.

23 MAYOR BELMONT: Okay, all those in favor?

24 (A round of ayes.)

25 Okay, Counselor.

1           MR. ALLEGRETTI: So, this is a  
2 continuation of our Eminent Domain Public  
3 Hearing that we started back on December 17.  
4 It's continued tonight for continued public  
5 comment which is where we left off on December  
6 17 following the presentation by Mr. Smith with  
7 his PowerPoint presentation about what the  
8 purpose of the Eminent Domain proceeding was.  
9 There's at this point no more from presentation  
10 for Mr. Smith or otherwise but it is on tonight  
11 for continued public comment just in case there  
12 were members of the public that were unable to  
13 comment at the last public, or if there's the  
14 same speakers and they want to add something  
15 new that hasn't been already said that's in the  
16 record, we can certainly welcome those as well.  
17 We don't need people to repeat themselves. We  
18 have the record. We have a stenographer. We  
19 have the transcript. There's a video of this  
20 proceeding. So, we don't need people to  
21 necessarily repeat themselves. If there's  
22 anything new to add, certainly we can do that.  
23 So, with that --

24           MS. LEADER: One thing I think would be  
25 helpful though given the last meeting, one

1        thing is just to make it clear to people that  
2        the written comments that they have been  
3        sending in, how those are going to be treated  
4        in terms of public comments since we have been  
5        getting lots of them, and then I think the  
6        second thing is let people or help people  
7        understand that we're not going to respond  
8        directly to questions during this public  
9        hearing because I think people were very  
10       frustrated. They felt they were posing  
11       questions to the board that we weren't  
12       answering but the structure of this is really  
13       just meant for public comment. There will be  
14       another forum for questions. But do you think  
15       it would be good if we just address those two  
16       things quickly?

17                MR. ALLEGRETTI: Yes, that's fine.

18                Yes, we did at the beginning of the public  
19       hearing we outlined what the procedures were  
20       and even before that with our notices. We all  
21       indicated -- we, the town, indicated that  
22       anybody could comment in writing in addition to  
23       commenting at our hearings, which this is the  
24       second hearing. So, yes, we have received both  
25       written letters, communications, e-mails. They

1 are being compiled. They will be part of the  
2 record of this entire proceeding. So, yes,  
3 every communication that's coming in is going  
4 to Mr. Smith as our Eminent Domain counsel on  
5 this and, yes, they will be part of the record  
6 when we close this.

7 MAYOR BELMONT: Thank you, Frank.

8 MR. ALLEGRETTI: So, with that said,  
9 Brody, do you have anything else to add or?

10 MR. SMITH: No. I'm available if there's  
11 any questions from the board but, of course, if  
12 you'd like to contact me by e-mail individually  
13 if something occurs to you later, that's fine  
14 too.

15 MR. ALLEGRETTI: Okay, great. At this  
16 point, Mr. Mayor, if there's anybody in the  
17 audience that would like to speak, certainly  
18 this is now the time. And Mike Piccini, if you  
19 see anybody you could allow them in.

20 MS. LEADER: Should we tell people that  
21 they should raise their hands?

22 MR. ALLEGRETTI: Yes, yes.

23 If you're an attendee and would like to  
24 speak, there's a raise your hand button on your  
25 Zoom platform. Mr. Piccini, our IT specialist,

1 will acknowledge you and allow you in one at a  
2 time.

3 MS. GREER: We have Andrew so far. We  
4 have to Andrew Lynch -- I'm sorry -- Andrew  
5 Schriever.

6 MR. SCHRIEVER: So, as you know, I'm the  
7 attorney for Willow Ridge, Andrew Schriever,  
8 from Cuddy and Feder and I won't take long.

9 I agree that many of the important points  
10 were vetted at the last hearing and rather than  
11 go through it, I would certainly just refer to  
12 and incorporate into the record my letter of  
13 January 5 to the town board. There a few  
14 points of concern and questions that we don't  
15 believe have yet been addressed or answered and  
16 I understand perfectly what was said a few  
17 minutes ago that the board will not necessarily  
18 be answering questions at this meeting, but I  
19 do want to express our concern that at some  
20 point, whatever time the board feels  
21 appropriate, sooner than later we would hope,  
22 some of these questions do get answered. And  
23 part of our thinking on the club's behalf is  
24 that the questions I'm about to ask are just  
25 sort of make sure we've kind of checked off and

1       considered are, in our view, just as important  
2       to those town residents that are in favor of  
3       the taking as they are to Willow Ridge.

4               So, with that in mind, for us, one of the  
5       most important questions which has not yet been  
6       answered is concretely how the town is going to  
7       pay both for the price of acquiring the golf  
8       course and for its continued operation. We do  
9       request and believe it would be appropriate for  
10      the board to share with the residents of  
11      Harrison, the town appraisals regarding highest  
12      and best use value and well as a trans estimate  
13      of operating costs going forward so that town  
14      residents are able to make an informed judgment  
15      about what the cost will be.

16             As for the acquisition itself, I think we  
17      all agree on standard which is that it's based  
18      on the highest and best use. The concern that  
19      we have expressed is that the highest and best  
20      use for this particular parcel is that it's 120  
21      acres, which are great for single-family  
22      housing and we have submitted in our papers  
23      that the cost of each plot that would be  
24      developable could be six figures or even seven  
25      figures in the case of some parcels for each



1 parcel. We want to know whether or not the  
2 town has calculated the price of the taking yet  
3 based on that standard.

4 Another question that came up is it was  
5 suggested that the town might be looking to  
6 borrow in whole or in part to pay for the  
7 acquisition. The question we have is how the  
8 town is going to repay the loan without passing  
9 through the cost to its taxpayers.

10 And we also want to know whether or not  
11 it's the town's position that if it had paid  
12 for the golf course based solely on its present  
13 use as a golf course as opposed to the highest  
14 and best use standard, would the fair market  
15 value of that price be lower? And if the  
16 answer is that it would be lower than highest  
17 and best use to pay for it in its capacity as a  
18 golf course, why would the town want to pay  
19 more through a taking than through a negotiated  
20 acquisition.

21 Just a few more questions which is whether  
22 the town has calculated the annual operating  
23 costs for the golf course, the tennis courts,  
24 the pool, and the dining facilities? If so,  
25 will it disclose that to the residents before

1       it commits to spending taxpayer funds on the  
2       taking?

3               We want to know how the town will pay for  
4       the fees and costs in connection with the  
5       taking proceedings themselves, the court  
6       proceedings.

7               And if the town does plan to use its  
8       reserves to buy a golf course, which was also  
9       suggested, or we believe suggested at the last  
10      meeting, whether that's a proper use of  
11      reserves because our view is that reserves are  
12      typically reserved for emergencies. And  
13      somebody had asked what does COVID has to do  
14      with this? Our answer to clarify that from our  
15      perspective, is that while it was represented  
16      that people have been keeping up with their  
17      taxes, the economic recovery is not yet at hand  
18      and, in fact, things are getting more dire.  
19      And we are in an economic downturn so I'm not  
20      certain that Harrison can depend on the same  
21      tax revenue because I would imagine that like  
22      many other communities, there are going to be  
23      some that are going to need some reliefs or  
24      perhaps have to delay payments based on their  
25      own financial circumstances.

1           Just a few other questions which is  
2           whether or not the town intends to pursue a  
3           bond financing as part of this; if so, what  
4           would be timing around that? And whether a  
5           referendum would be required to approve a bond  
6           issuance. And if that's the case, what would  
7           be the town's plan B if as such a referendum  
8           did not pass.

9           And lastly, one resident that had spoken  
10          in support of the taking at the last meeting  
11          had asked whether or not the town can assure  
12          its residents that the taking and the running  
13          of the golf course will not result in tax  
14          increases. And our question is whether the  
15          town is prepared to give that assurance to  
16          those who are in favor of the taking before it  
17          votes to spend the money on the taking.

18          Those are the questions that, for us,  
19          remain outstanding and needless to say, I'm  
20          grateful to the board for its time and  
21          attention to these issues.

22          Thank you.

23          MAYOR BELMONT: Thank you.

24          MS. LEADER: I just wanted to say one  
25          thing. Mike, can I speak for one second.

1 I'm not going respond to the multitude of  
2 questions because it's not appropriate at this  
3 time as we explained already, but I did just  
4 want to say because I received multiple  
5 questions from the public about this, I'm very  
6 committed just as an individual on this board,  
7 I can't speak for my colleagues. I'm  
8 personally very committed to ensuring that  
9 everything that is possible to be transparent  
10 with our taxpayers about in terms of the  
11 financials for this and our decision making  
12 around the financials will be shared with the  
13 public as soon as it's appropriate and  
14 possible. I'm not going to address the rest  
15 and I can't speak for my colleagues, but that  
16 is certainly something that I'm deeply  
17 committed to and would expect of our town.

18 MR. PICCINI: Okay, next person is  
19 MaryAnne Lynch.

20 MS. LYNCH: I'm MaryAnn Lynch and I'm with  
21 my husband, Kevin. We live at 19 Bardion Lane  
22 in Harrison and we've been living here for 40  
23 years. And I am a -- we're both avid golfers  
24 and we're both Apawamis members. We think it's  
25 a wonderful endeavor that Harrison would like

1 to have a recreation facility for its  
2 residents. And I remember last meeting in  
3 December when we talked about, you know, the  
4 percentage of people that you had sort of done  
5 initial thinking and survey on that would use  
6 the golf course. It seems to be a low  
7 percentage. I was also at one point the  
8 treasurer of Apawamis. I understand how much  
9 it costs to run a golf course. And I just  
10 wonder and I just would like to add that  
11 perhaps there's a thought process here that  
12 Harrison could take the facility and nine holes  
13 and have a wonderful recreation facility for  
14 the town.

15 I know of a club in Connecticut, which you  
16 all probably do too, Mill Brook, has nine holes  
17 of golf and they have a substantial membership  
18 and they play 18 holes. They have a couple of  
19 different tees and a couple of different  
20 greens, and it's really nice, really nice. And  
21 then, if that's the case, you wouldn't -- we,  
22 the town, wouldn't have such a big burden from  
23 a financial standpoint and we could look  
24 forward to making money in the years to come.

25 MS. LEADER: Thank you.

1 MR. PICCINI: There doesn't seem to be any  
2 other hands raised.

3 Lucy Udell.

4 MS. UDELL: Good evening, everybody. Can  
5 you hear me okay?

6 I just wanted to state that I lived in  
7 Harrison for 19 years. My name is Lucy Mazzuco  
8 Udell by the way. And I was a member of Willow  
9 Ridge for approximately eight years and I and  
10 my family are big proponents of the town taking  
11 over Willow Ridge, and the management of it,  
12 and purchasing of it. We would love for Willow  
13 Ridge to continue and for Harrison to make the  
14 purchase. So, I just wanted to state that  
15 because we do think it would be wonderful for  
16 our town.

17 MS. LEADER: Thanks, Lucy.

18 MAYOR BELMONT: Thank you.

19 MR. PICCINI: Angela Sposato has her hand  
20 up.

21 MS. SPOSATO: Good evening.

22 Angela Sposato, 13 Gleason Place.

23 I was on the last meeting in December and  
24 I know of a lot of information that's been  
25 passed around to the residents of Harrison and

1 I just wanted to reiterate that I have been a  
2 member at Rye Golf Club for over 40 years. I'm  
3 an avid golfer as well. I sit on their board.  
4 And I just for the record, want to say that the  
5 taxpayers of Rye have never ever paid for that  
6 club. That club is self-sustaining and the  
7 membership runs that club and pays for that  
8 club. I want people to understand that the  
9 taxpayers of Rye have never, ever spent a dime  
10 on that club but reap the benefits of that  
11 wonderful club.

12 So, I'm in big favor of Harrison moving  
13 forward with Willow Ridge because it would make  
14 me very happy to be in the town I live in to  
15 play in instead of outside the town.

16 Thank you.

17 MAYOR BELMONT: Thank you, Angela.

18 MS. LEADER: I thought there was going to  
19 be so many comments?

20 MR. ALLEGRETTI: If there's no one else  
21 that wants to comment at this point --

22 MS. GREER: There's one now.

23 MS. LEADER: I think we have to make a  
24 last call after Richard.

25 MS. GREER: Richard, you're muted.

1           MR. OSTERER: I'm Richie Osterer. I live  
2 in Sunny Ridge. I've had the privilege of  
3 living in Harrison all my life. I guess my  
4 kids who also grew up here are third generation  
5 and so I really wear two hats as a Harrison  
6 resident who's been here all my -- by the way,  
7 at Willow Ridge, I was referred to as the  
8 oldest member. I'm not the oldest member, I've  
9 just been there longer. Some other people are  
10 a lot older than I do.

11           As a Harrison resident, I think it's a  
12 wonderful thing for them to take this course.  
13 It would be a great asset to this town. I was  
14 alive and remember when this went on  
15 40-whatever-it-was years ago. I was a bit  
16 younger. So, I think it would be a great asset  
17 to do it. It all comes down to now as a member  
18 Willow Ridge for so long the only thing I  
19 think, and this is what it always comes down,  
20 it's going to be what's a fair price and  
21 there's no argument it's based on the 1-acre  
22 zoning -- that it's presently zoned as 1 acre  
23 zoning. Those of you -- I know in Sunny Ridge,  
24 where I live, a third of an acre sells for  
25 about -- and I'm not negotiating, I'm just



1 making a point -- sells for about \$550-  
2 600,000, even over that. So, here you have 1  
3 acre. If you have 125 acres, I know I heard  
4 120, 126, if you take away 25 acres for  
5 wetlands, you net out at 100 acres, you take  
6 another 50 acres off for roads, and utilities,  
7 and everything else, 50; then, just for the  
8 heck of it, take another 10 off and go to 40  
9 acres. 40 acres, if you just stay at \$100,000  
10 for what a third of an acre sells for, it's  
11 \$700,000, that's \$28 million.

12 I'm not negotiating. I know the lawyers  
13 are going to do all kinds of dances with this  
14 but that is relatively accurate facts. Again,  
15 I'm all for it. I'd fight like heck to never  
16 have a development, that would be a horror show  
17 for Harrison and for people everywhere because  
18 it's so crowded by North Street. So, really,  
19 it just comes down to working something out. I  
20 hope the town moves quickly. I hope the club  
21 moves quickly. And, frankly, I would be in  
22 favor of the town getting a friendly price, but  
23 it has to be in the ballpark. You can't be in  
24 a different city. That's all I have to say and  
25 thanks for listening.

1           MAYOR BELMONT: Thank you, Richie.

2           MR. ALLEGRETTI: It doesn't seem like

3           there are any other hands raised. I would ask

4           that the board motion to continue for the next

5           meeting, which, I believe, is in two weeks and

6           at that time we will have the environmental

7           review aspect done for the board's

8           consideration and at that time we could take

9           additional final comments and close the hearing

10          again.

11          MAYOR BELMONT: Is there a motion to give

12          it until January 21?

13          MS. LEADER: Second?

14          MR. DIONISIO: I second.

15          MAYOR BELMONT: All those in favor?

16                   (A round of ayes.)

17                   (Time noted: 9:12 p.m.)

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C E R T I F I C A T I O N

I, ESTAMARIE CASTELLI-VELEZ, a Shorthand Reporter and Notary Public within and for the State of New York, do hereby certify the foregoing to be a true and accurate transcript to the best of my knowledge and ability.

I further certify that I am not related to any of the parties to this action by blood or by marriage and that I am in no way interested in the outcome of this matter.

Estamarie Castelli-Velez

ESTAMARIE CASTELLI-VELEZ