



## Mayoral Community Update

April 18, 2022

Dear Scarsdale community,

Reflecting on my first year as mayor, I thought about change and the role each of us plays in our personal, professional, and community lives to improve our collective experiences and future circumstances. Mother Teresa once commented, “I alone cannot change the world, but I can cast a stone across the waters to create many ripples.”

The ripples we each create through our actions, initiatives, and collaborations produce immediately visible impacts as well as those with far reaching, hidden influence advancing beneath the surface of time, serving to benefit future generations. This is the essence of Scarsdale civic life and our communal call to public service.

Working in partnership with my esteemed colleagues on the Village Board, our exceptional Village staff, and the myriad dedicated volunteers serving on our official volunteer boards, councils, and commissions, as well as those supporting our community-based organizations, we have achieved many [notable accomplishments](#) over the past year.

I am not only blessed to be a member of the Scarsdale community but also to be entrusted as your mayor. Thank you for the privilege to serve and to do my part in making Scarsdale the best place to live.

Now, I offer the following timely information and insights of import or interest to the Scarsdale community.

### New Village Board Members

On Monday, April 04, we welcomed our newly elected Village Board members, including Deputy Mayor Randall B.



Whitestone (re-elected) and two new trustees to the Village Board, Trustee Jeremy A. Gans and Trustee Kenneth L. Mazer. I know they will be a fantastic edition to our Village government. At the same time, we bid a fond farewell to Deputy Mayor Justin Arest and Trustee Lena Crandall,

both of whom have done an incredible job during their two terms. We will certainly miss their experience, knowledge, and spirit during our meetings, and we wish them the best.

### **Website Refresh and New Logo**

Partnership and collaboration are defining characteristics of the manner in which the Village Board, staff, and our volunteer boards, councils, and commissions engage with one another to cultivate positive outcomes. Scarsdale is fortunate to have highly skilled professionals serving the community on a volunteer basis.

The [Advisory Council on Communications](#) (ACC) is one such group of volunteers, and they have recently completed two major initiatives: redesign of the Village website and creation of a new logo. Both of these projects delivered exceptional results! Please take time to visit [scarsdale.com](https://scarsdale.com) to view the ACC's work in upgrading the site.

The ACC completes an annual work plan and presents it to the Village Board prior to commencing projects they believe to be of benefit to our organization and community. When the concept of a visual identify program and supporting logo was presented, we understood the need and knew the team would deliver something fabulous. However, when the logo was recently revealed, the team exceeded all expectations! The visionary team, led by Chair Dara Gruenberg with design development expertise from Diane Greenwald and Kerry Hayes and historical input from Jordan Copeland, produced a work product that will have a lasting impact on Scarsdale. I am proud to be part of the larger community that got to bear witness to this incredible effort.

Village Manager Cole commented, "Village staff enjoy working with each member of the Advisory Council on Communications (ACC) and the quality of their deliverables is consistently impressive. Both the Village government and Scarsdale community have benefitted immensely from their efforts, dedication, and capable professionalism. As village manager, I take great pride in the fact that our website is the best in Westchester County and that the logo is imbued with our sense of place, capturing and conveying an identity that is uniquely Scarsdale. To think these accomplishments — and more — are the product of locally sourced talent on a volunteer basis simply floors me. I've been in municipal government for a period exceeding 25 years and have been involved in countless volunteer-based activities and initiatives; the ACC continuously hits the high-water mark along every dimension of my experience in working with volunteers. I can't wait to buy some Scarsdale swag with our new logo!"

Under the ACC's capable leadership, the new logo, with variations, will be thoughtfully incorporated into a more comprehensive visual identity program, including our documents and forms, vehicle decals, business cards, and more. With my sincerest appreciation and awe, I express a deep debt of gratitude to the ACC for their continuing efforts to support our mission-critical commitments to communication and transparency.

## Village Budget

I have spoken on many occasions about the shared commitment of staff and the Village Board to enhance the annual budget process such that it becomes more publicly accessible in format, including a new [Community Budget Brief](#), transparent in content and purpose, aligned with our mission, values, and supportive of the outcomes we wish to achieve. The [FY2022-23 Tentative Budget](#) and the supporting process used to develop it constitute a significant step in the right direction, and we are building upon that work to further improve our approach as we begin to look ahead to the FY 2023-24 budget.

One year ago, we advanced a new strategic and financial planning framework, and we asked department heads to consider budgetary requirements to meet our goals and objectives. Not only did staff articulate priorities within departments, but also they performed the difficult but necessary task of ranking priorities for the entirety of the Village. We also made abundantly clear the risks to Scarsdale of underfunding essential operations and deferring necessary capital expenditures.

Key elements of our FY 2022-23 Tentative Budget include:

- 3.7% increase in the tax levy, or roughly \$216 on the average property owner, which is within the tax cap (max of 4.7%). Over a period of more than twenty years, our levy increases have trended sharply downward, while many of our expenses have escalated. As a consequence, deferred maintenance has resulted in a variety of adverse consequences, including such problems as increased operating costs associated with emergency repairs, excessive equipment downtime, and service delivery impacts. We must begin to confront these expenses or be exposed to sharply increasing tax levies in the near future. It should be noted that we have presented a responsible budget that attacks long-term deferred needs.
- New FTEs. Staff and the Village Board are working collaboratively to maintain and enhance service delivery, including exploring opportunities for process streamlining and operational efficiency gains. Throughout this continuing effort, we have remained cognizant of the long-term implications, both positive and negative, of adding new FTEs. To illustrate our commitment in this regard, it should be noted that eight new FTEs were originally proposed, as staff was given direction at the outset of the budget process to present proposals each felt reflective of the resources required to achieve our organizational and community goals, including investments supportive of our mission: Providing Distinguished Service to a Discerning Community. As we publicly worked through the proposals and initiated our prioritization process, we collectively determined that four of the requested positions would not be funded, while the other four are important to add. Understanding the why of the four FTEs we added is critical.

Taking the positions one at a time, I'll first address the Weinberg Nature Center FTE.

### *Weinberg Nature Center Naturalist*

As you may be aware, there was an outpouring of public support for transitioning naturalist, Sam Weinstock, to permanent full-time status. Sam has performed exceptionally in his part-time role and his efforts have led to the establishment of very popular new programs and associated revenue enhancements. We anticipate that Sam's full-time role will continue to build community interest in the Weinberg Nature Center, perhaps also helping to cultivate financial support for needed facility improvements. It should also be noted that Mr. Weinstock's popularity has been elevating his status in Westchester County, making him a prime candidate to be offered an opportunity to be recruited elsewhere. Finally, it should also be noted that the Weinberg Nature Center was once served by a full-time naturalist.

Next, I'll briefly discuss the new Maintenance Mechanic – Pool position that is being added.

### *Maintenance Mechanic -- Pool*

With regard to the new Maintenance Mechanic – Pool FTE, one must note that there is a single individual – a foreman – presently on-staff with adequate skills and background to handle all pool-related maintenance needs. Not only does this present a clear continuity of service and pool operations problem, as a single foreman cannot be present every workday of the year, plus weekends, but it also takes time away from the foreman's other duties. Important foreman tasks have been neglected, including such tasks as field maintenance oversight, tennis court inspections, repairs, and maintenance, and oversight of contractual support. The Scarsdale community has noted deficiencies in each of these areas that the foreman is unable to properly oversee. From a maintenance and operations perspective, the Scarsdale Pool Complex season runs from March or April to approximately November, so the peak time commitment is significant. Additionally, the Village used to enjoy contractual pool maintenance support for the entire season; however, when the contract was rebid in 2017, we were required to incorporate prevailing wage requirements applicable to the contractor's laborers. Prevailing wage makes it very difficult for private pool maintenance firms to operate. They cite difficulty tracking each task a laborer must perform within a single day and adjusting the hourly rate accordingly, as well as the impact of paying prevailing wage on their worker satisfaction and willingness to perform tasks at pools not paying prevailing wage (substantially less pay for workers on those jobs creates internal conflict and pressure to increase all worker wages). In fact, the firm we had contracted with for such services for approximately 40 years, declined to bid on the contract once the prevailing wage mandate was incorporated. After substantial effort, including outreach to approximately 13 vendors, we awarded a contract to a firm to provide the services, but

the firm was unable to perform the work required and we had to terminate the agreement. In view of the foregoing and other supporting rationale, it is both necessary and prudent to add the Maintenance Mechanic – Pool as a new FTE, which will also be of great value to PRC operations during the brief off-season.

Next, I will speak to the Tree Trimmer FTE we are adding.

*Tree Trimmer (a temporary add of one FTE to support succession needs)*

Please note that the Tree Trimmer FTE being added is effectively a temporary add. Because of an anticipated vacancy, including a long-term absence, the Tree Trimmer is being added to serve as a bridge solution to ensure operational continuity of services. Once the incumbent has officially separated, that position will not be re-filled, resulting in no net increase in staffing, as one will cancel the other out. As you may have noted, the request for an arborist was not supported in the budget process and was one of the proposed FTEs that did not make our prioritization cut.

I will now briefly discuss our rationale for adding the Code Enforcement Officer FTE.

*Code Enforcement Officer*

Scarsdale is distinguished from other suburbs, in part, by its exceptional quality of life. In recent months and years, we have gradually increased the burden placed upon enforcement officials both by design and in response to increased activity requiring enforcement attention, such as the volume of construction activity we experience as one of the most desirable communities in Westchester County. Local laws, such as our tree protection law, gas-powered leaf blower ban, and others, also require diligent enforcement support, including during weekend hours.

The volume of work clearly supports the need for a new FTE, as the work cannot be properly handled by a single part-time employee and it is not prudent to take building department personnel away from higher-level responsibilities, such as plan reviews and permit inspections, or police personnel away from their critical public safety missions, to perform the duties of a code enforcement officer. Of course, all authorized personnel, including police and building department personnel, will continue to perform code enforcement response duties, but our new FTE will support the need for proactive enforcement that our community expects and has consistently requested.

- Fund balance and debt. Historically, the Village has budgeted just over \$1M of unassigned fund balance to offset property tax increases. These monies were not used due to conservative budgeting but, coupled with a previous policy of funding capital projects with surpluses, made deferring necessary improvements a common

occurrence. This has only been exacerbated in recent years by depending on higher levels of one-time revenues (particularly fund balance) and was not a sustainable long-term strategy. This Board and staff have tried to recalibrate this strategy and include the responsible level of funds to support our infrastructure needs. We have also reconsidered our debt usage and are willing to use more debt in the next year or two for long-term projects while rates remain attractive.

\$2.17M of unassigned fund balance is used in the tentative budget. Of course, this incorporates the \$1M reduction in transfer to the library and also accounts for the \$430K reserve established for debt reduction. The level of unassigned balance is still higher than what had historically been in our budget, but it is lower than what was included in the most recently adopted budget. It is hoped that we can transition back to a sustainable level of unassigned fund balance going forward.

We are fortunate to have a strong unassigned fund balance due to prudent planning by staff and previous boards. Therefore, while we must always consider the long-term implications of using fund balance, we are not at a juncture to worry about replenishing said reserves. The \$430k assigned fund balance for debt reserves is not creating a property tax increase; it serves to smooth the anticipated increase in debt service over the coming fiscal year. The decision reflects that we understand the implications of our decisions in the near-term – particularly higher anticipated debt levels until certain bond issuances begin to roll off in the near future. This is a responsible approach to funding our needs while minimizing the property tax burden.

Thank you to all those having taken time to participate in our budget meetings and discussions. Your thoughtful commentary, suggestions, and support for our efforts have yielded meaningful influence on the FY 2022-23 Tentative Budget. As a result, we have presented a responsible budget that provides the resources required for us to lean into the future and effectuate positive change. Our budget is scheduled for adoption at our regular meeting on April 26, 2022.

Next, I will share information about two very important studies currently underway, the Pool Complex Study and the Village Center Mobility and Placemaking Study.

### **Pool Complex Study**

As you have likely heard, the pool is a community gem that is in dire need of investment. Built over 50 years ago, the pool complex has outlived its useful life and is regularly subject to emergency repairs and shutdowns. Our board determined that we needed to take action and initiated the Pool Complex Study to reimagine the future of the pool complex. Ultimately, we seek to ensure the following:

1. The Municipal Pool Complex is viewed by residents as a premier community recreation asset helping to further strengthen Scarsdale's preeminence in Westchester County as a superb place to live.
2. The Pool Enterprise Fund is fiscally sound.
3. Declining pool membership trend is reversed, ultimately attaining historic membership levels.

The [Existing Conditions Report](#) has been completed and highlights the need to invest in excess of \$13M simply to bring the facility into a good state of repair and compliant with all applicable code requirements; this estimate effectively provides for reconstruction of the entire facility, as it presently exists. However, that level of cost presents opportunity for investment to make the facility an even greater, more fiscally sustainable project capable of serving Scarsdale's recreational needs and interests for the next 50 years.

The continuing study will help to inform the reconstruction scenario that best meets our community needs and willingness to financially support.

Next steps include completion of a Market Assessment Report and distribution by mail of a statistically valid random community survey. Residents who receive one of the mailed surveys are strongly encouraged to complete and return it. Once the surveys hit the mail, a press release will be issued through [Notify Me](#) to encourage resident participation. Our consultant team will provide a public update on April 26 at a public work session of the Village Board. In the interim, study information is available [online](#).

The Village Center Mobility and Placemaking Study is another project that will yield decades-long benefits for the Scarsdale community.

### **Village Center Mobility and Placemaking Study**

Another major project underway is our [Village Center Strategic Mobility & Placemaking Study](#). Project goals include:

- Increasing pedestrian and cyclist safety.
- Providing access for all users, irrespective of mode choice or ability.
- Activating public spaces and enhancing Village Center vibrancy.
- Supporting sustainability.
- Improving traffic flow and circulation.

Most recently, the consultant team from [FHI Studio](#) led a Village Center walk audit and Sprague Road site visit on March 29. The consultant team was joined by members of the Village Board of Trustees, staff, residents, and community-based organizations, including representation from Scarsdale Neighborhood Associations, the League of Women Voters, the Conservation Advisory Council, and Scarsdale Forum, among others.

Next steps include launch of a project website and additional public engagement opportunities, such as virtual and in person work sessions.

## Public Safety Excellence



The Scarsdale Police Department (SPD)'s commitment to excellence starts at the very top and permeates throughout the entire organization. Earlier this month, I had the privilege of speaking on behalf of our extraordinary department during the rigorous assessment review by the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies (CALEA). I was exceptionally proud when CALEA announced the SPD would receive the CALEA Advanced Law Enforcement Accreditation Award. The Department first earned

accreditation in 1990, and Scarsdale is one of the few communities in New York State, and the only community in Westchester County, to achieve national accreditation. This high honor would not have been possible without the strong leadership of Chief Matturro, Lt. Detective Kelleher, and Sergeant Castro and the entire department's commitment to excellence in policing. The Scarsdale community benefits immensely from the vigilance, kindness, and professionalism of all the men and women wearing a Scarsdale police uniform.

On the topic of public safety and dedication to serving the Scarsdale community, Mr. David Raizen and his team were recognized by County Executive George Latimer in February for their efforts in helping to keep the community safe and healthy during the COVID-19 pandemic. Mr. Latimer commented that SVAC, "...stepped up to the plate, going above and beyond to administer testing and vaccines, oftentimes putting their own health at risk. The men and women who make up... [the] Scarsdale Volunteer Ambulance Corp represent humanity as its best and define community to its core." More recently, SVAC was selected by the State of New York to train members of the National Guard, and the program graduates honored Mr. Raizen and his team at one of our Village Board meetings, as depicted. SVAC receives minimal government financial support, relying upon the generosity of the community to support their mission.



To round out public safety, we also have new leadership in the Fire Department. Chris Mytych, formerly a Captain, was appointed by the Village Board to serve as Fire Chief. Chief Mytych impressed the Board and interview committee with his commitment to community, continuous process improvement, and data driven decision making. We couldn't be more excited to have Chief Mytych's vision, humanity, and energy at the helm!

Next, I have some seasonal reminders.

## Seasonal Reminders and Upcoming Events

### *Gas-Powered Leaf Blowers*

Entering our second season of the Gas-Powered Leaf Blower restrictions, I encourage every property owner to adopt sustainable landscaping practices, including adhering to our gas-powered leaf blower restrictions, as summarized at the end of this section. Strategies such as [leaf mulching](#) are helpful in reducing the volume of leaves needing to be removed from one's property while at the same time yielding environmental and water conservation benefits.

As you may recall, the Conservation Advisory Council undertook significant research in 2020, culminating in their [report and recommendation](#) to the Village Board that use of gas-powered leaf blowers should be restricted. Following a combination of public discussions and a public hearing, the law was adopted. Following adoption, a variety of communication initiatives were implemented to help get the word out about the new local law. Outreach at that time included landscaper notifications, a Scarsdale water billing insert, press releases, a period during which our enforcement personnel only issued warnings, local media coverage, and much more. This season, we supplemented our standard communication efforts by deploying highway messaging signs to reach persons our robust communication efforts had not yet reached.

As a reminder, the gas-powered leaf blower restrictions in effect are:

January 01 through September 30:                    **DO NOT** use a gas-powered leaf blower.

October 01 through December 31:                **CAN** use ***Tuesday through Friday***, but ***not*** on federal holidays.

\*\* Electric or battery-powered leaf blowers are allowed year-round  
*and*  
Leaf mulching is strongly encouraged\*\*

### *Water Conservation*

To avoid the stress of receiving an expensive water bill in August and thereafter, water users are strongly encouraged to amplify their water conservation measures. Take time to review our online [Conservation Tips](#), particularly those related to leaks and outdoor water use – the major drivers of exceptionally high bills. Lawn sprinkling, pools, and leaks are all significant drivers of high water bills. Property owners are strongly encouraged to use the latest commercially available technology to manage water usage and to receive cell phone alerts when consumption is unusually high, indicating a potentially costly leak.

Invariably, there is community angst when water bills spike with increased outdoor use during the watering season. Keep in mind that there is a lag between usage and billing, which

sometimes causes confusion over a high bill. To illustrate, the August billing includes usage from mid-March through mid-June, with mid-June through mid-August not being billed until November.

Adopting conservation measures *now* can help to reduce or eliminate water bill sticker shock later. The extreme cost of water billed in association with leaks can easily be avoided through use of commercially available, relatively inexpensive tools and supporting apps.

### *Upcoming Events*

- The ‘Dine the ‘Dale tent is back, and better than ever! Drop in for a bite and watch for special events under the tent, courtesy of the [Scarsdale Business Alliance](#). Shop local, dine local, Scarsdale!
- Spring and summer recreation program registration is off to a strong start. Visit the [Parks, Recreation, and Conservation](#) page for more info.
- The [Scarsdale Music Festival](#) is also back and tickets are on sale! This is one of our marquee events, and I’m very excited to see it return on June 04 as a Zero Waste Event, thanks to collaboration with the Conservation Advisory Counsel. Don’t be the only Scarsdalian that misses SMF this year – BTW, there’s already merch available! Check the [website](#) and get your tickets and merch before it sells out!



### **Concluding Remarks**

With the onset of warmer weather, I am eager to restart my Coffee with the Mayor sessions, as I enjoy meeting each of you in person in an informal, casual atmosphere conducive to conversation. Look out for announcements in local media. Until then, please feel free to email me using [mayor@scarsdale.com](mailto:mayor@scarsdale.com), and I will personally respond.

Looking forward to connecting with you again soon,

Jane E. Veron  
Mayor