

EYE ON THE CLIFFS

A publication of EC for Responsible Government

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"Let us not seek the Republican answer or the Democratic answer, but the right answer. Let us not seek to fix the blame for the past. Let us accept our own responsibility for the future." John F. Kennedy

EC for Responsible Government is a not-for-profit corporation established and managed by and for residents of Englewood Cliffs. Our organization is non-partisan and does not endorse or support candidates in local elections. Our organization was created to alert the community about important actions and decisions taking place at meetings of the Mayor and Council, the Planning Board, and the Board of Education. It is our intent that our newsletters will provide you with information and commentary about governmental matters that could affect you.

We encourage you to visit the borough website www.EnglewoodCliffsNJ.org, and we urge you to attend Mayor and Council meetings. If you are interested in joining our organization, please contact us for more information at ecfrg2017@gmail.com. We welcome community input. We welcome contributions to fund our outreach and communication activities. If you want to support our efforts, please make your check payable to EC for Responsible Government and mail it to: PO Box 1812 Englewood Cliffs NJ 07632.

CARIN GEIGER, President
DEBBIE FEHRE, Secretary

DEBBIE TSABARI, Vice President
LYNN LIASKOS, Treasurer

Highlights of the October 11th Mayor and Council Meeting

Mayor Kranjac Wants Elaborate Rehab of Witte Field May Cost \$3.3-3.7 Million

At the October 11 meeting, Mayor Kranjac suggested that the Council *"pick up the plan that we originally wanted to do, that I wanted to do; light up the field, turf most of it where people could play...put a band shell in and a pavilion and make Englewood Cliffs a showcase town...."*

The plan Kranjac says he wants is referenced in the \$30,000 Maser Consulting Feasibility Study, found on the borough website. This study presents several plans for the field. The plans that include artificial turf on most of the playing fields, the installation of LED lighting to illuminate these fields, and a new pavilion are estimated to cost between \$3.3 and \$3.7 million. These plans also include a new handicapped accessible children's playground and a new parking area. Kranjac did not mention whether he still wants the new playground and new parking area that are included in the higher \$3.3-3.7 million estimate, however eliminating the new playground and parking would save only \$300,000. The Maser estimates appear to understate the cost of the project as they are based on the use of black crumb rubber infill, a specific type of artificial turf that may be carcinogenic and which the Council has already indicated it will not use. Maser has stated that other artificial turf alternatives are more expensive by a factor of approximately two to one. Funding for the Witte Field project requires the adoption of a bond ordinance to authorize new borough debt, and the issuance of bonds.

The 2017 budget does not provide funds for a project of the magnitude envisioned by the Mayor. This year, a more limited plan was presented to the Council. On August 9, the Council was unable to adopt a bond ordinance for a smaller \$1.3 million field project because a bond ordinance requires the affirmative vote of at least four council members. Council members Carrol McMorro, Mark Park and Bill Woo supported the \$1.3 million bond ordinance. Councilpersons Ed Aversa, Ellen Park and Gloria Oh voted against it and stated that they would support improvements to the field that utilized only natural grass. Maser estimated the cost of restoring the field using natural grass to be \$366,000.

Commentary: Kranjac's comments foreshadow the introduction in 2018 of a multi-million dollar bond ordinance to finance the project he supports. Our field needs attention. It was resurfaced with grass almost twenty years ago and has developed drainage problems. It is not clear that it needs anything more than regrading, new topsoil, and new grass. Witte Field is our major park in town. It was never intended to become an artificial playing field like the one recently built in Edgewater with bright night lighting. Residents should be concerned about the scope and cost of the Mayor's vision.

Salary Ordinance Updated: The annual borough Salary Ordinance which establishes the salaries for most borough employees for 2017 was adopted in October 2016. At the October 11 meeting, the borough Salary Ordinance was amended, by unanimous vote of the Council, to provide a 2 percent pay increase for our school crossing guards.

On March 8, the Salary Ordinance was amended to add the salaries for two new full-time administrative employees hired by the borough. One new salary was required because the Council voted to divide the position of the Borough Clerk/Borough Administrator into two separate positions: Borough Clerk and Borough Administrator. The Borough Clerk will continue to be Lisette Duffy, who had been paid \$101,420 to fill *both* of these positions in 2016. She will now be paid \$90,168 for only the Borough Clerk position. In addition, the new Borough Administrator position, which has been filled, will be paid \$ 92,000. The March 8 amendment also added a \$50,000 salary for a full-time Recreation Director. The part - time Assistant Recreation Director will continue to be paid \$12,000. Each of the new full-time positions also has related benefit costs. The salary for the newly established Public Safety Director administrative position has not been announced.

The March 8 amendment to the Salary Ordinance was approved by Councilpersons McMorrow, Park and Woo. Councilpersons Oh and Aversa voted against the Ordinance. Councilwoman Ellen Park abstained.

McMorrow Tells Borough Attorney to Resign: During the last moments of the October 11 Mayor and Council meeting, Borough Attorney Rizzuto lectured the Council on the need to end the politics that seemed to erupt during the latter half of the meeting. Ms Rizzuto stated, "*These kinds of things are not for the public agenda....*" Carrol McMorrow cut her off questioning "*Are you running the meeting?*" Ms. Rizzuto responded that she was "*giving legal advice,*" and went on, stating "*this kind of behavior of raising things for political points on one side or the other are not appropriate subjects at Mayor and Council meetings. Go have political meetings if that is what you want to do. Have debates in public.*" On the borough videotape of the meeting, you can see Carrol McMorrow turn to the Borough Attorney and say to her: "*Resign.*"

Rizzuto's firm is the third law firm to serve as Borough Attorney since January 2016. The law firm of Schwartz Simon Edelstein & Celso was retained in January 2016, and resigned eight months later. In September 2016, the firm of Dorsey & Semrau was hired, but did not seek to be reappointed for 2017. Anne Marie Rizzuto, who worked as an attorney for Dorsey & Semrau and now has her own firm, has served as Borough Attorney since January 2017.

Board of Education Update

At its October 2 meeting, the Board of Education voted to approve a \$437,000 contract to renovate the Upper School field which was last improved more than thirty-five years ago. It is currently unfit for school recreation. The project will use grass seed to renovate the field, not more expensive sod. No lights will be installed. The Board also approved \$126,000 for an outdoor accessible bathroom. Specific policies have yet to be developed for the after school use of the new field, including hours of use and who may use the field, but the Board has already stipulated that the new field will be limited to use by our community. The Board also discussed the air conditioning project for both schools. Current estimates are too costly and the Board is trying to determine how it can reduce the cost. These major projects are funded out of the accumulated capital reserve fund and will not raise school taxes. The PTA is funding other smaller capital improvements.

Planning Board Update

800 Sylvan Avenue, a 28 acre site situated on 9W between Unilever and CNBC, is one of the largest sites in our community, comparable in size to the LG site. Normandy Associates, the owners/ developers of the property, made application to the Planning Board for approval to divide the site into two building lots (one 7.6 acres and the other 20.7 acres). They planned to construct on the larger site a brand new state of the art glass fronted office building that might attract a corporate tenant of the caliber of LG, CNBC and Unilever. To implement their development plan for the two sites, they need several variances from the Planning Board. In 2016, the owners of this property paid over \$1 million in property tax revenues to the borough. The new project would have a higher assessed value resulting in increased annual property taxes paid to the borough. In addition, it would provide revenues for building permits and fees. Similar to the new LG building, the added new revenue would potentially reduce residential property taxes.

Over the past few months, Normandy Associates met with residents to try to address their concerns. Normandy revised its initial plan by adding more evergreen trees to enhance the buffer near the adjacent residential properties, modified the type of reflective glass that was to be used in the new office building to one which reduced light spillover to the surrounding properties, agreed to relocate a parking garage on the property where it would not be as visible to nearby

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residents, and to preserve many of the old trees. They met with a current tenant to determine what might be done to remediate the disturbing noises that were emanating from its premises. They also conducted studies, with Saratoga Associates, in concert with the Conservation Community, to verify that there would not be any impact on the Palisades.

At its October 12 meeting, the Planning Board rejected the proposed plan for 800 Sylvan Avenue. Planning Board Chairman Porrino, and members O'Shea, Villari, and Lee voted to deny the application citing concerns about the placement of a two story parking garage in front of the main building, failure to remediate noises emanating from a current tenant, and division of the property into two separate sites. Planning Board members Chinman, Kilmartin and Bai voted to approve the plan. The developer now has the option to appeal the Planning Board's decision in State Superior Court.

Commentary: Englewood Cliffs has regulations which specify and limit noise levels. If there is a noise violation, ultimately it is the borough's responsibility to see that the property owner addresses the noise issue, not the responsibility of the Planning Board or the developer. Although a parking garage in front of the building is not generally preferable, the unique topography of the site makes it a viable option. The alternative is to move it to the rear of the property where it might impact residences. It was evident from testimony at the Planning Board hearings that Normandy Associates wanted the new building to be attractive when viewed from 9W. The front parking garage, as designed, was to be nestled in a slope, camouflaged by extensive evergreen trees. Our community is recognized for its world class corporate headquarters, and should continue to promote reasonable, desirable and valuable first class development in our borough.

Meet the Board of Directors of EC for Responsible Government

Carin Geiger: President Carin has lived in Englewood Cliffs since 1980 with her husband. Their two children were raised here. Carin served on our Board of Education for six years. As Board President, she spearheaded efforts to end Englewood Cliffs sending-receiving relationship with Dwight Morrow High School. She later worked with Board members to prevent forced school regionalization. Most recently, as leader of an Englewood Cliffs residents group, she battled with Mayor Parisi to restore our zoning back to the traditional 35 feet maximum building height, paving the way for the historic Settlement Agreement with LG. Carin holds a Masters in Public Administration from NYU and, until she retired, served as Deputy Assistant Budget Director for the City of New York. She has taught Government Budgeting and is certified in New Jersey as a School Business Administrator.

Deborah Tsabari: Vice President Debbie has lived in Englewood Cliffs since 1991 with her husband, who passed away last year. Their two children were raised here. Debbie served on the Englewood Cliffs Board of Education from 2002-2007, and chaired the Board's Finance Committee for two years. She also served as our Girl Scout Troop Leader for four years. Professionally, Debbie is the CEO for Oestreicher Properties, a New York based real estate and construction company, where she has worked for twenty five years. Debbie has a BA in accounting from Baruch College.

Deborah Fehre: Secretary Debbie has lived in Englewood Cliffs since 1991 with her husband. Their three daughters were raised here. Her husband Edwin grew up in Englewood Cliffs. Debbie served on our Board of Education from 1997-2007, and was its President for five years. On the Board, she led the successful effort to lift the injunction that prohibited us from sending our children to other public high schools in New Jersey. She was President of the Englewood Cliffs Homeowners Organization which led the fight against forced school regionalization. She was PTA President for two years. Debbie has worked for the Borough of Englewood Cliffs as Administrator and Municipal Clerk from 2007-2010, and served as Assistant Administrator and Deputy Clerk from 1999-2007. She is a New Jersey State Registered Municipal Clerk.

Lynn Liaskos: Treasurer Lynn has lived in Englewood Cliffs since 1965 and graduated from our Upper School. Lynn served on our Board of Education for nine years and held the position of Vice President. She served as Treasurer/Trustee on The Center for Food Action for 12 years; as Trustee and President of Visiting Homemakers Home Health Aides for 20 years. Lynn has also served as a guest lecturer for classes in finance. Lynn has a Masters Degree in School Business Administration and Community Service from William Paterson University. She is certified in New Jersey as a School Business Administrator. Professionally, Lynn has worked in banking and financial services for 35 years. She is a Registered Investment Advisor and holds a CLTC designation.

The next Mayor and Council meeting is Thursday November 9 at 8 P.M. Did you know that you can watch all Mayor and Council meetings on-line? Go to www.EnglewoodCliffsNJ.org Click on it. The borough website appears. On the left side of the screen you will see "Agendas/Min/Recordings". Click on it. You will then see "for video recordings please click here." Click on the word "here." When the image appears, click on the arrow to start the video. For past meetings, click on the three white bars at the top left side of the video, and a list of prior meetings will appear. Click on the meeting that you would like to view.

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Important news for Englewood Cliffs residents

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**Residential Customer
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EC for Responsible Government stands behind its newsletter. Our newsletter is factual and everything we print can be verified. Residents, armed with the facts, can agree or disagree with the editorial commentary. Most importantly, residents can be proactive when they know what is going on. We believe that our newsletter provides an important service to our community that was lost when local newspapers stopped covering meetings. Our organization's members are affiliated with *both* political parties, as is our Board of Directors. We are funded entirely by resident contributions, not by candidates or political parties. Our individual political affiliations and beliefs and who we personally support in any election is not important. What is important is that we provide accurate and timely information to the residents of our community. We promise to continue to do that.

It is distressing, but not surprising, that Mario Kranjac has attempted to discredit us and undermine our efforts. We will not let him control what we report. We will report the truth whether he agrees or not. It has become far too easy today for politicians to smear those who do not praise them. Kranjac cannot point to a single factual error in our newsletters. We work hard to make sure that what we report is correct.

Our previous newsletter reported the initial rejection by Kranjac's council candidates of our invitation to participate in a League of Women Voters moderated Meet the Candidates Night, and expressed our hope that they would reconsider. We reproduce below the entire email sent by our Vice President Debbie Tsabari to both Calderon and Shah on Friday, September 22, after they declined our initial invitation to participate. As you can see, they *had* been given the accurate facts about our organization, and still chose not to participate. Kranjac was aware of these facts when he sent his misleading letter to you last week.

From Debbie Tsabari to Shah and Calderon:

I am in receipt of your email dated September 20, 2017 declining to participate in a Meet the Candidates night in Englewood Cliffs that was to be moderated by the League of Women Voters. As you know the League is nonpartisan and when they agree to moderate an event, they run it according to their rules. As far as EC for Responsible Government, we are the sponsoring organization.

Even though the personal political affiliations of our officers has no bearing on the purpose of our organization, both Nora Jobson and Pat Drimones resigned from their positions due to the appearance of a conflict of interest with their Democratic Party roles. Although they resigned months earlier, they were formally replaced by a unanimous vote of our members in September. Currently, Lynn Liaskos is our Treasurer and Debbie Fehre is our Secretary.

As you can see on the certificate of incorporation you attached to your email, the purpose of the organization is to promote good government in the borough of Englewood Cliffs. We are committed to transparency in government and to increased communication with the community of Englewood Cliffs about the activities of those who are our elected officials and the effect of government actions on our lives as residents. Our communication represents our own view of what is taking place in our community, not that of either the local democratic or republican party.

Now that you have the FACTS about our organization, I hope you will reconsider our invitation to attend a Meet the Candidates Night in Englewood Cliffs.

Calderon and Shah responded to this email on September 25, once again declining to participate.