

The lack of responsiveness and transparency and an ethical crisis in our town government

Examples

Ethics and Conflicts of Interest

Ethics reform

The Town Board has failed to move forward on amendments to the Ethics Law that would strengthen the law by creating an independent Ethics Board.

- In 2015, at the urging of the Ethics Board, the Town Board hired an ethics consultant to review the current law and recommend changes that would create an independent Ethics Board. In December, 2015, the consultant submitted a draft new law that would have created an independent Ethics Board. To date, there has been no Town Board review of the draft law. (See separate attachment.)

Conflicts of Interest

Supervisor Grace has been involved in at least two perceived conflicts of interest instances that appear to violate the intent of the Ethics Law

- His failure to recuse himself on the adoption of the 485b Tax Abatement local law when he knew he stood to indirectly benefit from the Unicorn Contracting Corporation development that would qualify for the tax incentive.
- His representing Yorktown Auto Body as a private attorney when he voted to grant the business the town's lucrative towing contract.

Transparency and Open Government

Honest cost estimates

- Granite Knolls was promoted for years as “no cost to the taxpayers.” Once it became public knowledge that Enbridge's payment for Atlantic Bridge would not cover the full cost of the full project, Supervisor Grace kept changing the amount that taxpayer money would be needed to finish the project, and then tried to convince residents that the supplemental money in the fund balance wasn't “taxpayer money.”
- The cost for the highway garage, another “no cost to the taxpayer” project keeps changing with the supervisor saying at one point, that the cost will depend on what's built and what's built will depend on how much money becomes available.

Conduct of Board meetings

- Public address system: Despite numerous requests from multiple residents, the Town Board continues to refuse to use the public address system in the board meeting room at work sessions so that the public can hear what is being said. The recently purchased listening assistance devices are not an effective substitute for using the PA system.

- Televising work sessions: Despite numerous requests from multiple residents, the Town Board continues to refuse to televise work sessions so that residents can see — and hear — what their elected officials are considering.

Closed Executive Session Discussions

- The decisions to create the new full time positions of town engineer and assistant town engineer, even after a Supreme Court justice directed the town that such discussions had to be conducted in the open because they had financial implications.

Public Input

Resolutions

Too many important Town Board resolutions are voted on without being on the official meeting agenda so that the public has an opportunity to review and comment on the resolution BEFORE it is voted on.

- The Immigrant Protection Act resolution , September 5, 2017
- The six year reduction in taxes for the Shrub Oak International School, April 28, 2017
- The elimination of the \$30/year open space fee for 2017, December 20, 2016

Public hearings

At public hearings on proposed legislation, some members of the Town Board have criticized residents for waiting until the 11th hour to voice their opposition to the proposed law despite the fact that the same board members have refused to let residents comment on early drafts of the legislation at work session meetings.

- In 2016, the Tree Law and the Wetlands Law.
- In 2017, the proposed amendment to the Tree Law.

Appointments to volunteer boards

The Town board has made appointments to advisory boards based solely on political affiliation and has failed to appoint members to advisory boards whose mission it does not support.

- Appointments to the Planning Board, Conservation Board and Ethics Board have all been Republican district leaders.
- The board interviewed an interested candidate for the Community Housing Board more than a year ago but has not acted on the appointment. There are multiple vacancies on the 9-member board.
- There are four vacancies on the 9-member Advisory Committee on Open Space.