

## BOB AXELROD VYING FOR REELECTION IN CLARKSTOWN'S WARD 4

BY: Keith S. Shikowitz, Editor in Chief/Investigative Reporter



It only seems like a year ago we were doing these interviews for Clarkstown Town Council. That's because it was. After Kathy Hochul decided that all elections in NY are to take place in even years, the recently elected and sworn in Councilmen have to go through it all again. So here we are with Bob Axelrod who is running for reelection to Ward 4 in Clarkstown.



The interview started on a pleasant note and got into the issues from there. We started with Axelrod's background, outside of the political stuff first, and then we got into the political.

"Well, I've always been an educator a speech pathologist, speech language pathologist, since 1979, just a few years. That was my major career and I've been through many different populations from pediatrics to senior citizens working with all different types of areas, schools, nursing homes, hospitals, and over the last 41 years I also at taught at Kingsboro Community College for 8 years and 33 years at Rockland Community College teaching, speech arts and speech language therapy where I worked in a speech clinic which I coordinated, for actually it was free for students who are registered there. I developed a two-year degree program in speech language therapy with transfer agreements with New Paul's and Mercy and Lehman Colleges. I've done a number of things, as well as politically at the schools."

"Believe it or not, with regard to politics, there's probably more politics, involved in higher education than probably any other area. If anybody's ever worked there there's all kinds of levels. I mean, you're talking about from students all the way up to legislature and governors in New York state.

So, there's a lot involved there and I was also the president of the SUNY Faculty Council of Community Colleges, for a couple of years, which I was elected to. This is a governance organization that represents an umbrella governance organization that represents all 30 SUNY community colleges. I was pretty busy."

Besides working as a town councilman, he's also been a trustee at the New City Library for the last 10 years, He's also on the steering committee for the RPEA, which is the Retired Public Employees Association, which is an advocacy group for, retired public employees with regards to pensions and healthcare costs and stuff. He says he keeps pretty busy.

With all he does, When does he sleep? His answer, not a lot but you know I actually enjoy it. "I'm no youngster. I'm a senior citizen myself. I don't give away my age, but I'm up there and technically, what I do it invigorates me. It just keeps me, keeps me motivated, keeps me active.

OK, With everything you do, why are you running again for, town council?

[https://youtu.be/j2dC7r\\_CTl0](https://youtu.be/j2dC7r_CTl0)

One of the biggest problems facing communities today is their infrastructure. Roads needing repair, especially after a harsh winter like the one we just had, water main issues, housing, and everything else that adds to or detracts from the quality of life in the town.

Starting with the roads. There are four levels of roads in Clarkstown. Village, town, county and state. Routes 303 & 304 have been in major need of repair for a long time. The problem with this is that these are state roads out of Clarkstown's jurisdiction. Let's look at the 304 and 303 projects. You were there at the press conference that Senator Weber had. What do you think needs to be done in the Clarkstown infrastructure?

"Well, you, you mentioned, Route 303 and 304. 1st of all, those are state roads. We're very grateful to Senator Weber especially for the work that he does.

I mean he does a lot for Rockland, brings a lot to the table for Rockland County. He's truly dedicated to us, and he's shown that at this particular point by helping to secure funds from the state and, so the Department of Transportation will be working towards repaving.

It should be resurfacing all of Route 303 and 304 through funds that were secured help of Senator Weber. We're getting \$16 million from the state to repair Route 304 all the way from West Nyack Road to 9W, and the project should be starting very shortly. We also got 303 also we got \$9 million for repairs to route 303."

The combined numbers for the two projects is about \$26 - \$27 million which Senator Weber was able to get for the town. They did say in the spring that they will start the milling and resurfacing project.

Axelrod continued, "So people are very happy with this and I'm grateful myself to be honest with you. I could also tell you what the town is doing in addition besides 303 and 304, what else needs to be done in, well, over the last few years, first of all, we have 288 town roads. I mean, a lot of people, they confuse town roads with state roads and county roads, and we're not accountable for all the roads that are out there, specifically the county and the state roads, like 304 or 9W or those particular roads Congers Road, which is technically a county road where we're responsible for the 288 miles of the total town roads. Much of this has already been paved."

According to Axelrod about 60 to 70% of them are done but there are still quite a bit of number of them and, and also others that were paved that sort of like probably need to be resurfaced in some respect because of the harsh winter that we had. They've hired a management company called the Paving Management Group that will be assessing all our roads to determine which ones just need to be patched up or which ones need to be literally torn up and resurfaced. They just hired those that particular group to do this work.

There were a number of water main breaks in West Nyack recently. Are you having similar problems in Clarkstown with, with the old water mains. Veolia is actually working on these things. If we hear about it, they come and they take care of it.

Another things that people always complain about is taxes. We hate paying them but we also know they are a necessary evil. What about taxes and the economy.

One thing that George (Hoehmann) was always saying about that they kept taxes down, haven't really raised them.

Are you looking at possible with the economy the way it is and everything going up, gas prices and everything else the way they are right now, are you looking at a possible tax increase to offset some of the stuff that now the government has to put out more money for?

<https://youtu.be/1RYflwiJt4>

Housing. According to Congressman Lawler we are many units behind what we need for housing in the 17<sup>th</sup> Congressional District. It was something you were alluding to with the code violations.

You've got a lot of housing going up. You have that apartment complex, as a senior one, I guess, on, on Main Street.

"Yes, that's, 135 Main Street right across from the Sunoco station over there."

How much room do you have to put more housing in Clarkstown?

"A lot of these developments are in its infancy. It's all the way down, all the way from like Paramount Country Club all the way to where the City Line Diner is, so there's a lot of applications that have been brought in and, a lot of this is mixed developments in commercial areas. So, some of them you might find other types that are along the side over there like, like on Eberling or Spruce, or a Squadron Boulevard. I know that they're looking to possibly put some senior housing up over there. The county has their project over in the same building.

You have that many seniors in Clarkstown that need that much senior housing?

Seniors have come to me to ask, and, I mean, you're talking about what is possible, what's out there in terms of applications. The only thing that's been really close to being up is that 135 Main Street. Then you have the reserve at on Germond's road over there.

Possible is one thing. Necessary is something else. I mean, you, if you're going to build a complex for seniors, and then it'll be big complexes probably. Are you going to have enough people to, To fill in these apartments that won't, won't cause a problem with the rateables and the tax bases?

"Well, seniors have come to me asking me about what's going on in terms of housing. Believe it or not, there's the population here, there's many, many seniors here in Clarkstown alone. We're talking about 20, 25%, in terms of seniors, and it's growing exponentially. Yes, seniors are looking for places to go and technically, there are only really what, right now, well, two places. You have Kennelly Square, in Congers, and you have the reserve in West Nyack, that's about it.

There are others are applications coming in, but you have to also realize that in 2021 when the comprehensive plan was updated, it calls for 1500 senior citizen units. I think part of that also is supposed to be like 10% of affordable housing, which whenever we have a development of, that's technically something that we look towards to having as part of that particular plan.

The affordable housing is that mandated or just something that you do?

Yes, they are mandated in the plan mandated, yes, it is. Out of the 1500 in terms of proposals and applications, we're not even halfway there in what it calls for in terms of senior housing. Yeah, so this had actually been approved back in 2021. The point is that when somebody wants to develop, and I think of this misconception, a lot of people think that, that the town board, the zoning board or the, or the planning board have a real say in whether this can be done or not, if somebody has a piece of property and they want to build on that piece of property legally, as long as they're within the right zone, as long they don't have to be rezoned or whatever, because yes, then we have a say in terms of whether we want to rezone or give them the opportunity to do that, whether they want if they're within the right zone and they're basically everything is done legally, but then they have to go through a process, tremendous process.

[https://youtu.be/LTqO\\_3EG8TA](https://youtu.be/LTqO_3EG8TA)

Along with all of the other land and open space laws passed they just passed a resolution called, Natural Capital.

"It's natural capital, and again, what we have in terms of open space, in terms of farmland, in terms of wetland, in terms of forests, in terms of parks, these are assets that people have, the town has and uses to some extent. These are assets that we want, and we could actually use the benefits of these assets are for clean air, clean water, for recreation, for flood help in terms of flooding, especially in terms of wetlands."

According to Axelrod, these are things that are beneficial and it'll also help in terms of, credit ratings, and possibly securing low cost, loans or bonds which they already are in terms of having probably a AA rating in terms of bonds, which is the best in the entire county.

The Palisades Mall is a major tax boon for the county and the Town of Clarkstown, which was recently purchased for Let's see, let's look at the mall because the mall was just recently purchased under foreclosure for \$175 million way lower than what it owed. Anyway, the mall is still suffering. I've been in there recently. There are a lot of empty spaces,

a lot of things closed down, but you're also now having a lot more entertainment venues coming.

You guys and the Democrats last year talked about the possibility of mixed-use on the mall, housing and retail together on that, on that property. Has anybody talked to you about that from the new owners?

"Well, first of all, that the \$175 million is they that this was back in February. Where they were able to purchase it for. That's obviously a bargain, as you're saying. but there's a lot..."

The previous owners owe \$418 million. You have a sale for \$175 million. There's about a \$240 million dollar gap in there.

"...to be done in that mall. I mean, you look at the garage. People don't even go in the garage anymore because this all has to be repaired. They know this. In terms of the type of businesses that are in there a lot of entertainment arcades, these, mystery rooms and virtual reality stuff. But, you know, you get a lot of kids in there like hanging out, but, whether it's making a lot of money, there's some revenue from what I understand. There's revenue from there, so it's, whether it's losing money or not at the, at this particular point, it could affect us again as a buffer with the taxes. That sucks up a big tax base in the county and in the town.

<https://youtu.be/xrBQs5UBG7U>

When President Trump took over, one thing he said was we're closing down the border and stop the illegal immigration, getting them out of the country because they have no legal status here. He's done that very effectively. We have these Indivisible groups and all of these ICE protests and No Kings protests, and it's just funny. Really, if Trump was really a king, they wouldn't be able to protest. They'd be arrested just for the thinking about it. I know there was some problem with illegal immigrants. Has that been pretty much dealt with, or you still have a problem with illegal immigrants in the town, you know, creating problems or, you know, with housing and stuff?

"Well, in terms of the housing, I mean, we've heard that from a number of residents about, multiple families in housing and they've been We've been going after these particular places and, in terms of the owners and again what I mentioned in terms of trying to fight this with, the violations and, so we do have code enforcers, we have 5 code enforcers we just hired a Spanish speaking code enforcer which was, which was very good. It was just recently last week we hired this person and that'll be instrumental. As I indicated earlier, we are, towards trying to locate these places and dealing with them."

Axelrod says that it's not always easy, you fine them, they come back, they fine them again. They try, they try to double, triple, quadruple fine them. They could even go to prison, if they keep on violating at some time or other.

It doesn't seem to bother them.

“Well, the owners eventually, hopefully it does, but initially that we had to increase the number of penalties to try to offset this because initially they felt that what they were making through the illegal housing was way more than the penalties that they had to pay. They'd rather pay the penalties. So, we've had to increase them significantly. As a matter of fact, I was instrumental in having a, what we call the town Deputy Attorney who's just responsible for code enforcement. It's called the town Deputy Attorney Designation Act, which was a resolution that was passed. We had it passed, unanimously by the board.”

So, this is the first time this has ever been done. Where they have an actual a deputy town attorney that's designated solely for code enforcement, and this will actually help to enhance pursuit of these violators in court. He explained.

Let's move on, from that to public safety. That definitely creates a public safety issue with all this, housing and illegals in here. Last time, all of you were saying how Clarkstown is one of the safest places in the state, if not in the country. Has it stayed that way? Has it gotten a little worse?

“No. I think we're blessed with ONE of the best, if not THE best police departments in the country. It's tremendous transparency. If you ever go to a town hall meeting, we usually have one of the captains of the police department reading off all the statistics. Yes, we have our statistics, we have robberies, we have break-ins, but we're talking about minimal. We're talking about, car parking violations, areas like that, but in terms of major, major crime issues, we are probably at a minimal at, at, at this particular point. Our law enforcement is right on top of it.

He also said not only that, but they also have to thank their auxiliary police. That they work they do is so unbelievable. They work really hard for Clarkstown and again, second to none. Last year alone, they put in over 8000 hour. This is all volunteer. So, you find them every place. You find them in every single fair, at openings, you find them at whatever function it is, it could be candle lighting, or Christmas lighting or whatever. It doesn't matter if the weather is 0 degrees or 100 degrees. They are there and they are so instrumental in keeping people safe and keeping and giving direction to people. They reinforce what they have in terms of their Clarkstown Police Department. So, he wanted to give thanks a shout out to them as well.

The past couple of years when I do interviews with you guys, Having Clarkstown become its own city. Has anything been thought about that, to leave, because as you said, you guys are 60% of the rateables of the county, and sometimes you guys feel you have an unfair burden, for the 4 towns, basically make almost like 10% each.

“Sometimes we feel that we don't always get our fair share from the county in terms of, tax revenue. Especially when we talk about in terms of sales tax, property tax, things like that, but that's not happening. We have no, there's no thought of leaving. We try to compensate best we can to help out.

A couple of more thing and then we'll close this up. Government accountability. One thing the Democrats across the country are screaming about is accountability, accountability, accountability, but then when it comes time for them to be accountable, sorry, we're hiding everything.

But they still want the Republican administrations to be accountable to the people.

How is the Clarkstown government, especially since you've got a 5 - 0 Republican, majority. How are you guys being accountable and transparent?

“I don't think it could be any more transparent in terms of the town. First of all, if you go to any one of these meetings, like I said, if you go to a town board meeting, we have open public sessions where people can ask whatever they like, complain to whatever they, they feel like, and it's responded to. If it's not responded to directly by the board, Supervisor Hoehmann or the board members, it's directed to somebody who can answer that, whether it be from the planning board, from the assessment department or the legal department. It's totally open-ended.”

According to Axelrod, there are other ways the government is transparent with the people. “George has many times held these teleconferences where people call in for whatever they want, have questions answered. Sometimes they have these coffee, clutch types of sessions in various parts of the town where people come to have questions asked and answered. We as town councilmen go to senior clubs. Our senior centers twice a year we go there or whenever we're invited to be able to talk to the people there, tell them what's going on, or have questions answered over there.”

They go to the civic association meetings to have them to discuss openly with the public to what's going on in their particular area or town.

Supervisor George Hoehmann has a newsletter that he sends out. They have a website that if you go onto the website, it tells when meetings are. It talks about the minutes of the meetings so people can attend all of these particularly.

“Tonight I'm going to a traffic and safety board meeting because one of the residents has a problem within their area in West Nyack in terms of traffic and speeding. I said, well, what you could do is come to this board meeting and you can give your grievance or complaint and bring whoever you like from the neighborhood, and they will come and help you and I will be there to support and back you up.”

He says there is a tremendous amount of openness and transparency, and he doesn't see how they could be any more accountable to the people. That's the thing that they, everybody on the other side of the aisle keeps bitching about. More transparency, more transparency. You know me, I stick everybody's feet to the fire.

We've covered a number of issues; there's probably a lot more we could cover. Why put you back in? What have you done as a councilman this past year that would make people say, you know what, let's give him a chance at a full term.

<https://youtu.be/ANuzYX-qP1w>

He concluded, “I've also been working with various organizations in terms of various health issues, mental health issues. Last year, I had a number of different sessions with regard to, to NAMI, which is the National Alliance on Mental Illness. I've been all over the place. I go to meetings so I could gather information I can give it to my constituency groups. I work with my team. We work together towards making Clarkstown the best possible place it is in terms of, in terms of safety, in terms of the amenities that we have. I mean, if you look at our parks that we have, we have the most amazing, beautiful parks at Germonds at, Lake Nanuet, at, Zucker field over here, a New City. We have parks that have been developed and created.”

“They have multi-purpose fields. We have new turf that's put on there. The kids love it. We go to these opening days in terms of the Little Leagues and we see how, how happy these kids are, what they have in terms of playing. This is what it's all about in terms of having one of the best towns in terms of quality of life in New York, if not the country, so I'm very proud of, of, of what I've done.”

“I'm very proud in terms of working with my with my team. I'm very proud of working with the people in in town hall, in terms of helping in terms of the infrastructure we talked about in terms of preserving open space in terms of resolutions that will continue to do this type of work for Clarkstown and that's basically why I hope that people give me another opportunity to continue my work to be able to do the things that are necessary to keep Clarkstown and the people in Clarkstown living this type of quality of life that they're accustomed to.”