



HOEHMANN LOOKING TO CLARKSTOWN'S FUTURE PART 1

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

Of all of the five towns in Rockland County, Clarkstown seems to be the only one where we actually have a horse race for governments positions. George Hoehmann is looking to again defeat Eugene Bondar to remain as Clarkstown Town Supervisor. At a meet the candidates event sponsored by the Nanuet Civic Association Hoehmann laid out as many of his plans as he could in the three minutes allotted:

<https://youtu.be/6UevXvPzp5c>

There are many issues facing people in every community in the US. At the meet the candidates, Hoehmann could not go into all of the issues facing the citizens of Clarkstown. I spoke with Hoehmann about nine that directly affect the people of Clarkstown. He elaborated on his statements from the Meet the Candidates forum.

He was not always involved in politics. He's lived here for his entire life. He started out working for a not-for-profit agency back in the 1990s, running, kind of in the entry level, working in a group home with people with developmental disabilities in the South Bronx with the Catholic Guardian Society, eventually opened up a number of programs there.

"I moved on to Abbott House where I became a regional administrator, running programs, and I became their first director of services. From there I went on to become the COO of Camp Venture. After that, I became the executive director at the Rockland Independent Living Center, which is now Bridges."

He has a background in not-for-profit work, working with people of all abilities, and he ran for town supervisor in 2015 after having been on the council for a number of years because he saw a lot of issues in the town that he wanted to correct. He says thankfully, with the help of God and with the support of the people of Clarkstown, he won.

"I've been Town Supervisor now these past 11 years. We've made a whole bunch of substantial changes. The town was in financial distress. We were on the state comptroller's list, as one of the town that was subject to fiscal stress. We've turned that completely around. The town finances are better than they've ever been. We have one of the highest bond ratings in all of the lower Hudson Valley for a town, and I want to, I'm running again because I want to continue to do the good things that we've done here in the Town of Clarkstown, and we have a number of other things we're working on that we can get to.

<https://youtu.be/CZbgIWlhg9U>

Infrastructure is something that people are very interested in especially the roads. Senator Weber got all that money for 303 and 304. What's going on with 303 and 304, what are you doing to upgrade and refurbish the infrastructure?

"So, we have done a significant amount of infrastructure investment here in, in the town. I mean, tens and tens of millions of dollars since I've been supervisor. We've redone virtually every one of our community centers. I mean, Street Community Center was, it's beautiful. It was a mess, and my predecessor wanted to tear down and was looking at a very expensive project that would have cost well over \$10 million. We were able to do it for less than half of that, fully refurbished, revitalized street Community Center, so it's good for the next 20 years." Hoehmann indicated.

They've invested tens of millions of dollars into the paving program. On average they're doing \$4 million a year in paving, which quadruples what the prior administration had done for paving. Consequently, even though they have issues with their roads, they're in better shape than they were when he first became supervisor because of the vast amount of resources they've been able to pump into that.

"In addition to that, just look at all of our fields that we've redone. We didn't have any turf fields, and now pretty much all of our fields are turf fields. Look over at Zuckor Park. We have an incredible, turf field there and at Germonds. We redid, all the Little League fields, the three infields over at Germonds, and we did a full, turf complex up above, a full multi-purpose field. We, also did a, all of the little league fields over in Nanuet with turf infields. There's much fewer rainouts for the kids, but more importantly, there was significant infrastructure upgrades that went from not having any turf fields to having more than anybody else, and that's a significant investment. We also were able to receive millions of dollars in grants for all of that. I'm very proud of the fact that since I've been town supervisor we've received over \$30 million in grants, and we've done over \$60 million in infrastructure investments. It's a sizable amount.

The economy is another thing that people are concerned with. The cost of living is up and people are concerned about putting food on the table, filling their gas tanks and paying their bills. What are you doing to help people survive in this in this climate?

"I can tell you unfortunately that's something that's really above our level of government. I'm going to go back to what we're trying to do which is just cap whatever we can in terms of our own spending and our own expenses at a government level. We need to make sure that we're keeping government as affordable as possible so that we're not passing these types of expenses along to the residents.

residents of the Town of Clarkstown. Again, some of this is way above us.

It's at the presidential level and at the state level. I can tell you that the state has not done a great job on a number of things. One of the things that I'm really excited about is we've done solar on the roof here. We did the landfill project. The landfill solar project was the first large scale solar field in the entire state, and the gentleman who actually bought it and we get the electricity from it at reduced rates." Hoehmann explained.

"Unfortunately, that gentleman was killed in a plane crash a few years back, and his family has decided that they're going to donate the solar field back to the town, so that's going to be a savings of at least \$250,000 a year starting this year or coming up for electricity. We're going to continue to do everything we can and as I said. We proposed a 0% tax increase which is either the 3rd or the 4th time we've done that since I've been supervisor. I definitely think that those are things we're trying to do to just do what we can knowing that gas prices are really driven by international and national policy decisions."

Housing and rents are high, and people are leaving Rockland County because of it and young people cannot afford to stay on their own, so they are still living with their parents. There are two issues on housing. First event with these problems, you have a moratorium on building. What's that going to do for housing in Clarkstown and how are you dealing with the housing with illegal immigrants and stuff?

"Sure. Let me take those in two parts. The moratorium. We've actually started an online survey and we've already gotten, I think close to 200 people in the first couple of days that have actually filled it out, so we're encouraging people to, tell us what they want to see in the Town of Clarkstown as it relates to housing, the moratorium is, we're taking a pause. We're going to take a look at our, our overall zoning. I think we've done a pretty good job in terms of the zoning, but I do think that there were a number of things that forced us to really take a pause. Number one is the state changed, SECRA, the State Environmental Quality Review Act. They did that to favor with regards to housing."

He explained that one of the things that happens is when you do an environmental review of a project when it comes in, they have to do mitigation, to make sure that the project isn't going to adversely impact the environment and that's typically been the club that municipalities have had to compel developers to do infrastructure upgrades, not only to mitigate the project but to improve the general conditions in the public. The state revised that and by revising CCR it essentially takes that ability of the local municipality to do something with it. It also makes it easier and for large projects to go through with no environmental review. In fact, what they did is they exempted projects of under 300 units from the typical seeker that they go through now.

"That essentially was going to open up the floodgates where there would be no mitigation that was going to be done by any of these projects. This has been like a sleeper issue nobody's talking about, but this was done by the Democrats in New York City pushing a very progressive agenda, and it's no secret we need additional housing, but it has to be built in such a way where we're not creating flood zones and problematic conditions, in terms of our downtown areas. For that, one reason it was significant enough, and for two other reasons we got the Clarkstown Preservation Act passed, we were anticipating it on the budget, but, on the ballot rather for this year for November, but the governor didn't sign it. That's actually a referendum that's going to enable the town to create a one-time fee where for every real estate action there's a fee that's charged that goes into a designated locked fund dedicated fund. It'll produce several million dollars a year in funding that the town will be able to utilize to be able to acquire environmentally sensitive and historically important properties, going forward, so we wanted to see that was the other reason."

The final reason was just traffic issues. There's traffic issues all around the county. One of the things we're looking at is the Route 303 and Route 304 safety studies. That project is coming to a close in terms of the studies. I was able to get Assemblyman Zebrowski before he left Albany to get the funding placed in through NYMTEC, which is the New York Metropolitan Transportation Infrastructure Council which funded \$800,000 and so the engineering firm was hired. They've done a full study of Route 303 and Route 304 to come up with recommendations to improve safety and traffic. Because of traffic, because of SECRA, then because of the preservation fund, we decided to go with the moratorium."

It's 6 months in length, and they're already, trying to solicit extensive public feedback so they can look at areas where they think the zoning needs to be tweaked and how they can address SECRA because even though they've exempted things with SECRA, they can actually essentially put those into a local law in their local zoning so as if they're enhancing SECRA so that they can make sure that they don't get these large scale projects coming through that are not going to be subject the way they should be, to having to do mitigation for, those projects to pursue.

<https://youtu.be/cgkEyV7v438>

Housing, the illegal immigration, or illegal housing.

"I'm very proud of what we've done for code enforcement. We actually have, the largest code enforcement program in the entire, lower Hudson Valley. When I took office as town supervisor, we had one part-time code enforcement officer. We now have 6. In fact, we don't have any more space for them in the building department. We actually had to take space from the adjoining office to create a fire room so that we could convert the fire room into office space and the conference room that the building department had to be moved out to across the hallway so we could add space for code enforcement officers, so we're up to 6. It's a very aggressive program. As I said, most towns have none, one or maybe 2. I think we have more code enforcement officers than the other 4 towns combined."

"We've done over 60 search warrants. We're the only town that uses search warrants as a tool for property maintenance and for illegal housing violations. We'll continue to be very aggressive with that. That's what people expect, I encourage people if they've got an issue or a question to contact my office. They can send an email. They can go anonymously onto the town website. They can go onto our town platform, and they can report it anonymously if they'd like."

Businesses in Clarkstown account for 60% of the ratables in the county. What are you doing to keep businesses here and what are you doing to get more businesses in?

"We've been very aggressive with that as well, and I want to thank the team we have here. Joe Simoes has been very instrumental as our town planner, and of course Jeff Gillies, who does our economic development along with me we've, reached out. I'm thrilled that we had a little bit of a bet with the Supervisor of Orangetown, Teresa Kenny. We were able to go ahead and get the first Chick Fil A in Rockland County. They have one up at Boulder Stadium, but now Clover Stadium. We ended up reaching out and we were able to get them to come on in."

"We've got a lot of good rateables that are coming in, particularly in the Nanuet area, within that corridor, we have a whole bunch of higher end or nationally known brands that are coming on in and we're excited about that which, again, we're going to be continue to be aggressive with that. We don't do PILOTs willy-nilly. There's a few Payment in Lieu Of Tax programs that have been done, primarily for affordable senior housing. It's a bit difficult when you're trying to track them in because you can have other locations like Northern New Jersey where they'll do PILOT agreements and things of that nature, but I'm really excited."

According to Hoehmann, one example is the Rockland Plaza would be an example of a regentrification redevelopment. They have the Chase Bank closing on Middletown Road, and they're building a new Chase Bank in the front of that parking lot. Right now it looks empty of a bunch of stores, but a number of stores are being torn down and then there's a number of new stores that are coming in, including some national chains that are coming in. Over there, department stores and what have you, so really excited about that, as well as some of the other things that are moving in. Best Buy is going to be moving into the former furniture store, At Home is going to be replaced by Best Buy. They've got a lot of movement, and they've got a lot of new things that are coming in, so it's a real success story and that's what you want to do because that attracts people in here as well.

"I think the other thing that we do, is to really promote. So, we do this thing called Foodie Fridays which gets tens and tens of thousands of views, and I can't tell you, I can't go anywhere without people saying, oh, you're the Foodie Friday guy. I'm not Town Supervisor; I'm the Foodie Friday guy. The reality is there are thousands and thousands of people that are watching that, and it's bringing people in. It's economic development, it's tourism, because we're bringing people in and all of the, all the businesses, in fact, we're just, we're putting out a video now of several of the success stories.

<https://youtu.be/ZhgIsmLhGU>

