



MIKE GRAZIANO WANTS ANOTHER TERM

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



Politics is a very competitive business by design. Clarkstown is the one town where this exists when talking about the Town Council. Mike Graziano is running for reelection in Ward 2 which consists of Congers, Valley Cottage, Upper Nyack, and part of Central Nyack.



Mike Graziano – Ward 2 Councilman

Why are you running again?

“Well, I, first of all, I do enjoy the position. I’m in it because I do help many people out. The biggest joy I do get is when I help somebody out or help the community out and they smile and they say, Mike, thank you for helping us out. That’s why I’m doing it, Keith. But it is more for that. Trust me, if it was for financial, I wouldn’t be doing this because it doesn’t pay enough for me to do. I lose money doing this job for my, for my actual job.”

“I’m in telecom. I build networks of banks and brokerage firms, and this job takes approximately 32 to 35 hours a week, the town job, and I lose a lot of time. Thank God I have great bosses at LightPath. They understand. I have full disclosure that I am in politics, and they enjoy it. They like that I’m involved in my community.”

“So that’s why I’m running, mainly for the people of our community and it’s not just my ward, but a lot of people from all different wards call me. I help them out and if I can’t, I will relay it to the appropriate, wardsman, councilmen, and they’ll take care of the issue, but generally, I’m all for Clarkstown, not just for Ward two.”

There are a lot of issues that are facing local communities today, not the least of which is affordability, which at one side of the political spectrum keeps saying, oh, we have to have affordability to make everything affordable. So far areas that they are in control of haven’t become more affordable, rather they have become less affordable, How do you feel about the affordability issue in Clarkstown and what can you do as part of the council to help improve it?

<https://youtu.be/wS93hfICkek>

You pulled a lot of stuff into that, Let’s talk about taxes & the economy. One big problem in New York State is businesses are fleeing New York because of regulations and things like that, the high taxes.

What can you do again as a, I know you’re only 1 out of 5 people on the board, but what can you do to try to talk, work with the board to help keep the taxes in Clarkstown down and improve the economy?

“To keep the taxes down, it’s kind of threefold. Number one is you want business to stay here. As in Clarkstown, we’re trying, we are working to making Clarkstown business friendly. Possibly with tax incentives. If they sign a 20-year lease, maybe we give them a tax incentive for 5 years but keep them here because they are a big contributor to our tax bracket. I am all for it. I’m pro-business. I want business to stay here. The more business we have, the more taxes we have coming from, commercial, it lessens the tax burden on residents.”

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So that’s another twofold way is to work to make sure the businesses stay here and get businesses that want to come here to create jobs. That’s another way. People get hired, people paying taxes. That’s how you can make things affordable. But it’s difficult for us to work here when you have the state parameters of taxes, and they’re killing the businesses. You mentioned to yourself, people are fleeing. Businesses are fleeing. We lost over \$10 billion in tax revenues because of what Hochul did up in Albany.”

She says that she now wants to have people to come back. Remember that she’s begging them to come back. Have your rich friends, asking your rich friends to come back. Don’t move to Florida and Texas.

But she wants them to come back to help take care of all these social programs.

“She wants to do these social programs; you have to get rid of them. Go back to the migrants Do we have to house the world? We can’t house our own people, our own residents, our vets. It’s difficult. She’d rather help these people than the vets. It makes no sense to me. In Clarkstown, how do you achieve affordability? We’re trying to do that with businesses and keep them here so it’s a more of a tax benefit and they contribute to our taxes, so it doesn’t go into the residents.”

The economy overall, How do you feel about the economy in Clarkstown? I know you guys have 60% of the rateables in the county. Well, business, and the two malls in Clarkstown are probably a big part of that, tax base, the shops in Nanuet and the Palisades Mall. What can you do? The Palisades Mall has a lot of stores going in and out. I don’t know about the shops in Nanuet. I don’t see as much turnover there as I do in the Palisades Mall.

What can you do to help, Get more businesses to come into the Palisades Mall and help to further help the economy?

“To get more businesses here, like I said before hopefully maybe we give them some tax incentives to start a business here and stay here. That’s number one, give them tax incentives to come and create a business here. I mean, it’s a challenge. You mentioned yourself that we are responsible for 60% of the rateables in the county.

“We’re getting a fraction of that money back from the rateables that we get back from the county. We’ve been asking the county exec to give us more money. It’s not right that we give 60% of our taxes, sales taxes to Rockland County, and we get less than like 4% back.”

He says it’s a joke with that. If they get that money, it helps them with the tax burden in Clarkstown to have people pay helps with their taxes. Well, it’s all going to the county and helping all the other areas and particularly up in Monsey. It’s a joke. They have so much money to go to them in that part of the county, and Michael Specht is very lucky that we’re contributing so much to the taxes, and he’s getting so much more than they do and he contributes very little.

<https://youtu.be/KF8gYuSYsxQ>

You mentioned the migrants earlier. Is there much of a migrant issue in Clarkstown and what’s the government doing to mitigate it?

“Well, you know, we do have a crisis here. We do have an issue here in Clarkstown as well as in Rockland County with migrants. I mean, you drive around and you see them, you know that that they’re not actually born here. You can tell by demographics who they are.”

“We’re talking the legal over the illegal.”
“We have homes that the code enforcements have been, going & looking to. People have been complaining.

I go to senior clubs and they complain. Next to them there's a home with 15 people and 8 cars, where it's a residential. Typically, you have 2 cars in a home, maybe 3, maybe 4 if you have a husband and a wife and 2 kids that are driving 4 cars maybe, but when you see 7 or 8. 9 cars and 15 - 20 people living in there and all sorts of hours people coming in and out and the amounts of garbage there is and toys there are. They don't care, they just don't care where they live and how they live. That's an issue. We're working with the code enforcement to crack down on this."

To help with the volume of cases they have just hired another code enforcer which makes it 5 who's Spanish speaking because a lot of these migrants are from South America. It is an issue for them and it puts financial strain on their resources, code enforcement, fire inspector, police, building. Planning, all these people are affected by it and have to go look at this thing and look at the property. Was the property zoned for two family, 3 family, multi-family. The zoning and the planning departments are going to go there.

"Then he's going to go to zoning. They have to look into this legal courts, all these costs are a burden on us. It all costs us and it goes into our taxes, which is what upsets me with these migrants. We're not a sanctuary town. We refuse to be a sanctuary town. I'm glad Rockland County shut it down back in February because the state is, doesn't mean we want it."

Another issue that can be associated with the migrant issue as well as just in the community in general is crime.

The police in Clarkstown have been touted as some of the best in the state, if not the country, What's the situation of crime in Clarkstown? How prevalent is this in Clarkstown? I know there is crime, but is it a lot? What types of crimes are we dealing with?

"Someone who oversees it is the police commissioner for Clarkstown, first of all, as you mentioned, we do have probably the best fire, & police departments in the country they're fantastic. The men and women that work there are diligent and whenever they get a call and they look into it or when they're patrolling they're looking, They have the foresight, they see things, and then they're proactive, they're not reactive. But crime is crime, there is crime everywhere. The great thing about it is it's not really violent crime. It's not crimes that you might have a murder or two once a year."

He added that unfortunately it does happen, but the crimes that generally they're having are petty crimes, shopliftings, particularly at the mall, You know, some domestic calls obviously which is terrible. He's a proponent to protect women and when he sees and hears these reports and the domestic calls, it bothers him.

"I hope that the people are safe, the women are safe. These are the kind of crimes that you typically see in Clarkstown. Nothing violent, nothing gang related, even though there are gangs in Rockland County and they are being watched by the by the county as well as Clarkstown. So, thank God it's in check and we live relatively safely here in Clarkstown. Public safety overall parks and things like that."

What's public safety like overall?

"Oh, public safety is very good. I will say that as a volunteer fireman for Congers for 38 years and I was a fire commissioner for 20. I haven't been a fire commissioner in 6 years, but it was always safe. As someone who's always run the fire department you hear things. Someone who goes to church all the time like myself, I go to church at least 5 times a week. There's people parishioners there, and they ask me, Mike, you know this, and they tell me things. I ask them."

I ask also real estate agents. I work with them and I think real estate agents are the best resource. Why are you trying to sell Clarkstown? They tell us all the time. We look at the police reports, relative safety, good schools, cleanliness, that's a pet peeve I have is to keep our streets clean.

I hate the fact when I see people driving and they throw garbage out the out the window, it bothers the hell out of me.

That tells me these people are not from around this area and they're driving through and they just maybe in their country, I don't know what country they come from, it's a norm but it's not here and that's my goal. I believe in cleanliness, keep it safe. Those are the things I have issues with family values. I believe in family values, and we need to keep that whole here in, in the country as well as in Rockland County and Clarkstown."

Getting back to a little bit of the economy and business, the mall recently sold for \$175 million, and it still has a, had a \$418 million debt. You've got a lot of stores coming in and out of there. It's becoming more of an entertainment venue than a shopping venue.

"Well, they came to us two years ago, the new people that came in who bought the mall and also well up in Nanuet. The one in West Clarkstown, they came to us. They wanted to actually turn the mall into a city with entertainment, as well as shops, and make it into a little city, which I love. I love the idea because the retails, the brick and mortar, retails are pretty much going out of business because of Amazon. Including myself, you want something, you look at your phone, you order it, and it's there in 2 days or in a day. It's convenient. You don't like it, you return it."

According to Graziano, the brick-and-mortar days are gone. The big shops like Lord and Taylor and, and Sears and all these stores are gone. It's unfortunate. So why not make that mall into a, a retail store where you have actual shops and people can walk in the mall and make it like a downtown Main Street with housing in there and also entertainment, restaurants, theater, movie theaters, and when I say theater, they came in, they wanted to do like plays, so I thought that was a great idea.

"Why not bring a little bit of culture into Rockland County, into Clarkstown? That's what we need. You don't have to go down to Broadway and watch a Broadway show. You have one here at the mall, you know, maybe open up 4th theater like that and you have 4 different plays going on, you know, and rotate it every 6 weeks, 2 weeks, 2 months. I really believe in that, and I do hope that plan comes to fruition. Hopefully they come back.

They haven't come back to us, but I do hope they come back with a great plan like that."

Graziano is a proponent of mixed use, dealing with housing and the shops like they have out in Ridge Hill and that Plaza over there. There have been talks about mixed use but they haven't heard anything back yet in over a year. They've been reaching out to them.

"It's a big financial risk, right and it takes a lot of planning. They're getting their ducks in order in order to come back to the town. They only just bought it in February. Here we are only in July. So, it's been five months. Give them time. Pyramid was not good for Rockland County or Clarkstown."

<https://youtu.be/4hCPiBdmuoM>

Let's talk about data centers. There are people protesting against them all over the place up in Fishkill about two months ago they had a protest against a data center that, they wanted to put one in around there and there was a protest against it, talking about the water usage and things like that. How do you feel about having a data center here in Clarkstown and what would be for? What, what would be the advantages of it and disadvantages?

"I don't see it as a disadvantage. I don't, Keith, because first of all, it's not a smokestack, creating pollution. What you're doing is that you absorb a lot of energy. It takes a lot of energy to do it. The problem is that we don't have the infrastructure here in the United States for these data centers, OK? We don't. That's why in Fishkill also they had issues. It was very lacking power. I think our, our governor is not equipped to manage these type of businesses. She should definitely be out. You need energy. You need lots of energy."

He gave an example of what he was talking about. Case in point is a huge, large data company worldwide. You can look it up. The reason why they're not doing a few projects because they don't have enough power.

Upstate they were going to do it up there and she says they're not astute to deal with these people and negotiate data centers.

"They were going to build a mini nuclear plant up there, this data center for to power it. Now these data centers are doing mini nuclear power plants and that's what they're doing in Miami. Miami's going to be cleaning it up and, and in Dore, Florida. They're going to be building these mini nuclear power plants for power for these data centers. That's what they wanted to do up in mid New York and Hochul put a kibosh on that."

What are the advantages?

"It's going to create jobs. It's going to pay taxes into the tax bracket. It's going to elevate our taxes, hopefully to mitigate the taxes for the residents. That's what you want. You want businesses like that, big business come in, put big money in our taxes to reduce the taxes for the residents of course."

You're talking about how the government doing things in the state and whatnot, one of the things that people, the opposition here in Clarkstown has been screaming about, especially the last couple of weeks, is government accountability and transparency.

Is the government under George Hoehman being accountable and transparent to the Clarkstown populace?

Well that's a little difficult question for me to answer because right now there is an ongoing investigation, as you know.

I know about that, but let's talk about overall accountability and transparency, not specific.

"I believe in complete transparency. I believe the board has acted as transparent as we can with the information we are given. I've been given all sorts of information. I believe we should have full transparency. I really believe let's disclose everything that has to be, and no, as I mentioned before, the town board does not go solicit bids.

The town does and I mean with the town is the attorney, controller, the department heads who run these departments who need these who, who are for a project solicit these bids, the chief of staff, the Town Supervisor, town advisor, these are the people that actually see the proposals. The town board does not unfortunately. It's very rare we get to see them."

Graziano says that they try to get as much research as they can and make a decision based on that at the town board meeting. He does believe in full transparency, people should be knowing what's going on. The board doesn't approve the proposals. They get recommendations run by them by the by the building heads and by the supervisor and by the controller, by the attorney. They do review once in a while, when they do have the opportunity to, and they make a decision based on their information.

What's are some things that the residents of your ward and the town have come to you about in the way of problems that they're facing?

"Roads. I try to educate people about 303 and 304, that these are state roads. Everyone thinks these are town roads. If these were town roads, trust me, the town board would have these roads paved and done, you know, but people complain about roads."

"Cleanliness. Thank God they say we're safe. Thank you to the town board for having a great police department."

"Taxes are always, everyone's always going to complain about taxes. There's one thing that's secure that, that I always say that's a, it's a given, is taxes are going to increase and debt. It's unfortunate, but you have to pay people's salaries, and you have to put that in the taxes it happens the unions, they fight and they for their workers. They want certain things for the workers, and we compromise. We don't just give them anything what they want. That's the police union and the CSEA union, we came to a compromise. When two parties are not happy, that means you negotiated well. If one party was all happy, that means one party got everything. You can't have that."

He says it's going to be a collective effort. He was not completely happy with the CSEA contract, and he said neither were they because they wanted a lot more. He added that when two parties are not happy, that means you have a fair and equitable contract for both parties. mise is where you get some of what you want and most of what you don't want, and you live with it.

The next question after all of these topics have been covered is, Why vote for Mike Graziano?

<https://youtu.be/izCt1w7Kf44>

<https://youtu.be/BO2HAdtcYLU>