

Retirement Speech – January 22, 2008.

There comes a time when one has to announce his or her retirement. For me that time is now and I am officially making public my plans to retire effective March 28, 2008. In giving thought to this public announcement I have looked back on my 28 year career as Village Manager of Croton-on-Hudson and I am hopeful that I have made a positive contribution in my years of public service.

I was hired by the Village in late 1980 after nine years as the Deputy Village Manager of the Village of Scarsdale. The Village Board that appointed me at the time was headed by Mayor Bob Price along with Trustees Roland Bogardus, Paul Hoffman, Chuck Trendell and Jan Buessem.

At that time much of the Village was undeveloped particularly the northern part of the Village. Today the Village is almost fully developed and property values have increased substantially.

My first major issue evolved around the ultimate closing of the Croton landfill. Recognizing that the landfill could not be closed as Westchester County had planned in 1981, Mayor Price and I were able to work out an agreement with the County which kept the landfill open until the Resource Recovery Facility at Charles Point in Peekskill was completed in exchange for millions of dollars. This provided the Village with its first capital improvements budget and we were able to undertake many capital improvement projects that upgraded the Village in ways that we could not otherwise have afforded..

Some of these included:

- Many very needed road improvement projects
- The improvements to the Community Room which has served as the primary meeting place for the Croton Seniors Club and many other groups.
- The first construction of Fireman's Field and Manes Field
- The construction of the dam at Black Rock Park and the overall improvements to the Black Rock property

During the mid 1980's many developers had plans for high density projects throughout the Village totaling a proposed 1400 additional housing units. Many residents began questioning the proposed increase in density and the many likely changes in the overall quality and character of Croton which had always maintained a small town, semi rural atmosphere.

The prospect of such major development heightened the need for environmental legislation to ensure responsible development. After a number of building moratoriums some of the environmental laws approved included laws regulating:

- Steep slopes
- Wetlands, Water Bodies and Water Courses
- Aquifer Protection
- Environmental Compliance
- Excavation, Filling and Topsoil Removal
- Erosion and Sediment Control

I found myself as Village Manager trying to balance this all out and work with the various Village Boards and interest groups on the future of what would become of our community. Some residents may recall the “Croton We Want” forums. In the end I believe these laws helped bring about a pretty good blend of housing, open space, and other types of development.

In the 1990’s more of the emphasis was on the future vision of the Village relating to the Hudson River, trails and open space. The LWRP was approved; the Village joined the Hudson Valley Greenway program and became a “model community.” The SEPRIEO Property, now called Croton Landing, was purchased with the assistance of the Open Space Institute. And the Village purchased the private portion of the parking lot at the Croton Harmon Train Station which significantly added to the Village’s parking lot revenues.

Croton together with the Village of Ossining called upon the NYSDOT to include a sidewalk area protected from traffic in the plans for the replacement bridge over the Croton River – “the Crossining.” The Pedestrian Bridge was built as another linkage to the Hudson River. The Brook Street Grade Crossing Elimination Project led to the ultimate construction of Elliott Way which really opened up the access and enjoyment of the Hudson River for the community. None of these were funded by Village taxpayers.

Since 1998 the issue concerning the use of the property at 1A Croton Point Avenue has taken up a lot of our time and money. I have always believed that the Village should acquire this site or part of it as a new DPW facility and it is my sincere hope that this will be able to be achieved in the not too distant future.

I would like to acknowledge each of the 5 Mayors and 34 Trustees I have worked for during my time with the Village. The list includes:

Mayors:

Bob Price
Roland Bogardus
Sam Vassallo
Bob Elliott
Greg Schmidt

Trustees

Roland Bogardus
Jan Buessem
Paul Hoffman
Chuck Trendell
Vince Matal
Bill Pohlmann
Tom Burniston
Joe Fiorito
Mike Sullivan
Vince Giglio

Brian Divney
Jesse Beller
Richard Barbuto
Maria Modica-Snow
Sam Vassallo
Ed Glass
Merrily Schalansky
Bob Elliott
Ann Lindau
John Harbeson
Sam Watkins
Bud O'Connor
Ann Gallelli
Don Daubney
Georgianna Grant
Glenn Rickles
Debby McCarthy
Jim Harkins
Leo Wiegman
Greg Schmidt
Charles Kane
Tom Brennan
Jim Steinberg
Susan Konig

I would also like to acknowledge all the many fine members of our Boards, Councils, Committees and Commissions I have worked with over the years. The volunteers in our community to include the members of the Croton Volunteer Fire Department, the Croton Caring Committee, the Historical Society and all the others truly make Croton-on-Hudson a very special place.

The job of being a Village Manager is definitely not your typical 9 to 5 job. The work days are usually very long with many night meetings and 24/7 types of issues and problems to deal with. Personnel issues, union issues, emergency management issues, political issues, financial issues, grant deadlines, legal issues, etc., have kept me pretty busy.

I found this work however to be very exciting and satisfying. In looking back on my career here I believe that it has been the greatest job in the world. I have been continuously challenged day after day, week after week, month after month, year after year. I have worked with terrific people who really care about the job they do and are extremely dedicated to the Village. The team we now have on staff is outstanding and I can only express my thanks to them for their hard work, dedication, service and loyalty to me and to the Village of Croton-on-Hudson. Together, the Village Board of Trustees and the various boards and committees and the staff have accomplished a great deal to make the Village a better place. Some of our major accomplishments during my tenure have been:

- Obtaining over 30 million dollars in grants and outside funding for a variety of improvements to infrastructure throughout the Village.
- Working with Westchester County on the closing and capping of the Croton Point Landfill.

- Responsible major development projects to include: Half Moon Bay, Discovery Cove, River Landing, Arrowcrest, Westwind, Hudson National Golf Course.
- 7 Affordable Housing Projects in collaboration with the Croton Housing Network.
- Rebuilding of the Harmon Firehouse and the improvements and addition to Grand Street Firehouse.
- Acquisition and upgrades to the Croton Harmon Parking Facility.
- Construction of a new well and major improvements to the Village water supply and distribution system.
- The Sidewalk Improvement Program.
- The development of the Village website through Virtual Town Hall and all the other technology improvements including a Geographic Information System.
- Acquisition of the Half Moon Bay Bridge and Half Moon Bay Road which led the way for the Elliott Way project.
- Improved access to the Hudson River – Pedestrian Bridge, Brook Street Grade Crossing Elimination project. Handicapped accessible trail system, the Croton Landing project and the Riverwalk Project.
- Extensive planning for the future through the LWRP, Greenway Vision Plan, Comprehensive Plan, Stormwater Management Plan., etc.
- Reconstruction of the Croton River Bridge and the addition of the “Crossing”.
- Improvements using Community Development Block Grants to all three of the Village’s commercial areas.
- Development of the Village’s recycling program and being one of the leaders in recycling in Westchester County.

There are few jobs where one can see the concrete results of your work so quickly and the job of Village Manager is certainly one of them. I have always come to work in a positive frame of mind and worked towards the goals and objectives that we have set together.

The basis of the Council-Manager Form of Government is that the Board of Trustees sets the “course” or “goals” and the Village Manager steers the ship, that being the staff and the organization. I believe that this form of government has served the Village well and will continue to do so in the years ahead.

My wife Linda will tell you that my enthusiasm for my job doesn’t end at the office as I have always brought work home and she has had to put up with piles of documents to be read and even note taking in the middle of the night.

It is not easy to leave a job that you love after all of these years. But that time has come and I am in the process of completing my retirement papers effective March 28, 2008. I want the community to know that I am not ending my time here without a transition plan going forward. I will be working with the Mayor and the Board and the designated interim manager until March 27th and I will be available to attend meetings and for consultation on Village issues until the end of September.

I leave the Village in excellent financial condition with the help of the Treasurers I have served with—Richard Campbell, Bob Reardon and Abe Zambrano. Our last financial statement from Bennett, Kielson shows that we ended FY 2006-2007 with a \$3.4 million unrestricted fund balance.

I truly appreciate the honor of serving as your Village Manager all these years. Croton-on-Hudson will always be part of me and I hope that I have made the Village a little bit better than when I came here in December of 1980.

Richard F. Herbek,
Village Manager
January 22, 2008