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PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 119th CONGRESS, SECOND SESSION

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House of Representatives
RECOGNIZING SHORELINE PUBLISHING
CONGRESSMAN GEORGE LATIMER SPEAKING ON THE FLOOR

Mr. Speaker, in a world where local newspapers and radio stations are disappearing, it is valuable to recognize and salute those organizations that are continuing to provide information about our local communities' life and times.

In Westchester County we owe a public debt of gratitude to Shoreline Publishing, which serves the people of southern Westchester with five community newspapers; a countywide Jewish monthly newspaper and a full-color quarterly magazine, *Westchester Women*.

Under the leadership of president and publisher Edward Shapiro, Shoreline provides and information lifeline across our towns with the *Pelham Post*, *Scarsdale Sentinel*, *Harrison Herald*, *Larchmont Ledger*--as you can see, alliteration still has its appeal--and the *New Rochelle Review*.

Editors Cynthia Pena and Joyce Farrell ensure timely local news reaches the readers in each community, as well as the readers of *Westchester Jewish Life*, which is always available in the local synagogues and temples. Other key Shoreline executives round out the local team, including Lauren Levine and Mary DeYoung.

I thank Shoreline Publishing from the floor of the House of Representatives for continuing to keep local news at the forefront of our hometowns.

Mamaroneck Town Supervisor Focuses on Flooding in Annual Address

BY STEPHEN E. LIPKEN

Mamaroneck Town Supervisor Jaine Elkind Eney began the January 14 Board of Trustees meeting by "swearing in elected and re-elected Town Officials and attending to the organizational requirements of the Town."

Former Town Justice Dolores Battalia swore in Eney; Justice Ronald W. Meister swore in Councilwoman Robin Nichinsky. Justice Jean Marie Brescia swore in Justice Meister and new Councilman Darren Moss.

Eney then presented her 2026 Supervisor's Annual Address, beginning with flooding. "Flooding remains the most pressing issue facing our community," Eney began. "In 2024, for the first time,

the Town completed a comprehensive evaluation of our stormwater sewer system—funded entirely through grants from Westchester County and Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)."

That study identified 13 flood-prone areas across the Town. The recommended remediation projects carry an estimated total of \$60 million.

"We advanced design development for five of the thirteen priority basins identified in the study," she said. Three mitigation projects are currently being pursued for grant funding and are expected to be ready for construction in 2026.

"We are also involved in efforts to revitalize the Long Island Sound Watershed Intermunicipal Council (LISWIC)—an

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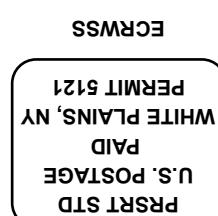
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HOULIHAN LAWRENCE

Mamaroneck Chamber of Commerce Names 2026 Executive Committee

At the Mamaroneck Chamber of Commerce's Annual Holiday Party, Chamber President Michael Murphy formally introduced the organization's 2026 Executive Committee, celebrating both leadership continuity and community impact.

The newly announced executive committee are Jennifer O'Neill, President, Vanessa Ridder, Vice President, Shelly Blaufeux, Treasurer, Michael Sepkowski, Secretary, Joe Mileto, Government Liaison.

The announcement was met with enthusiastic support from Chamber members and guests, reflecting the Chamber's continued commitment to strong leadership and collaborative service to the Mamaroneck business community.

In the spirit of the holiday season, the Chamber also hosted a toy drive and presented a \$500 donation to Dr. Kevin Maloney MD, who coordinates the distribution of toys to local children in need during the holidays. The initiative underscores the Chamber's ongoing dedication to giving back and supporting families throughout the community.

"The holiday party is always a meaningful moment for the VOM business community to reflect on the year behind us and look ahead to the future," said Murphy. "Introducing our 2026 leadership team while supporting children in our community perfectly captures the mission and heart of the Chamber. I have every confidence that the new Board is fully up to the task and will do a tremendous job."

The Mamaroneck Chamber of Commerce is dedicated to supporting local businesses, fostering economic vitality, and strengthening community connections throughout the Village of Mamaroneck. For more information, visit <https://mamaroneckchamberofcommerce.org/>



Larchmont Holds Holiday Stroll

Larchmont was brimming with holiday cheer at the Chamber of Commerce's Holiday Stroll on December 6. This expanded event hosted 24 activities in five hours with free holiday events on every block across the two business districts.

The day began with a ribbon cutting that included U.S. Rep. George Latimer, County Executive

Ken Jenkins, Town of Mamaroneck Supervisor Jaine Elkind Eney and Mayor Sarah Bauer.

Activities included carolers, horse-drawn carriage rides, a pet costume contest, scavenger hunts, story times, singalongs, tastings, and an appearance from the Grinch! New this year was the inclusion of activities that celebrated Hannukah. All events were complimentary thanks to the Larchmont Chamber of Commerce and sponsors from the local business community.

"Our goal was to create holiday fun for everyone and encourage the community to explore all parts of the business districts and maybe discover something new to them," said Gina Proia, President of the Larchmont Chamber of Commerce. "The holiday program is a way to give something back to our community and we hope the commu-



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Mamaroneck Boards and Organizations Need Volunteers

The Town of Mamaroneck is looking for qualified residents to volunteer for the following:

1. Recreation Commission
2. Planning Board (Alternate)
3. Zoning Board (Alternate)
4. Board of Architectural Review (Alternate)
5. Sustainability Collaborative
6. Town of Mamaroneck Fire Department (TMFD)
7. Volunteer EMTs (VAC)

The Recreation Commission is comprised of seven members, three from the unincorporated area of the Town, two from the Village of Mamaroneck, and two from the Village of Larchmont. The Recreation Commission was established in 1954 to review and recommend recreation programs, activities, and the development or expansion of facilities. To maintain the commission's representative balance, we are currently seeking three members, one from the unincorporated area of the Town of Mamaroneck, one from the Village of Mamaroneck and one from the Village of Larchmont. Meetings are typically held on the second Tuesday of the month at 7 PM.

The Planning Board is comprised of five members, each serving a term of five years. It was established in 1954 to review plans for the development of vacant ar-

eas, streets, and parks considering the environment, neighboring properties, traffic and parking. It reviews permits for subdivisions, site plans, freshwater wetlands, and special uses. At this time, we have an opening for an alternate member. In order to maintain a qualified and diverse board, we are currently seeking candidates with construction, engineering or architectural expertise rather than legal knowledge of this subject. The alternate serves an important function and may be called upon to vote on applications when a quorum of members is not available. Meetings are held on the second Wednesday of the month at 7:30 PM.

The Zoning Board of Appeals is comprised of five members, each serving a term of five years. Established in 1920, the Zoning Board has jurisdiction over residential special use permits and variances and interprets the zoning code. The Zoning Board currently has an opening for an alternate position. A resident with construction, architecture, or legal experience would be preferred. Meetings are typically held on the fourth Wednesday of the month at 7 PM.

The Board of Architectural Review is comprised of five members, each serving a term of three years. It was established in 1990 to review exterior plans

or modifications to all structures except one- or two-family houses. All members of the Board of Architectural Review shall be specially qualified either by reason of training or experience in architecture, land development, city planning, real estate, landscape architecture, professional property values or other relevant business or profession or by reason of civic interest and sound judgment, to judge the effects of a proposed building or alteration or remodeling thereof upon the property values and development of surrounding areas. Meetings are held on the third Monday of the month at 7 PM.

The Sustainability Collaborative is a volunteer committee created to advise the Town on environmental issues. Volunteers with the Sustainability Collaborative have worked on projects involving electric vehicles, solar power, clean energy in homes, food scrap recycling, bike lanes and have given input on legislative initiatives and have assisted the Town in becoming a bronze-certified New York State "Climate Smart Community." They also hold events such as the annual Repair Café, Compost Giveaway Day, Tree Walks and more. If you would like to make your community a healthier, more sustainable place to live, or are just

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**Mamaroneck Town Supervisor
Focuses on Flooding in Annual
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organization of fourteen municipalities that had waned over the past decade. Today, it is once again becoming active and focusing on shared regional priorities, including flooding, stormwater management and climate resilience," Enye said.

"Safety and Infrastructure: Walkability and pedestrian safety remain top priorities for the Town. I am pleased to announce that the Town was awarded a \$176,000 federal "Safe Streets and Roads for All" grant to update our 2022 Safety Action Plan," she said.

The Town also installed sidewalks on Colonial Avenue, North Chatsworth Avenue at New Jefferson Street, and Weaver Street at Leatherstocking Trail, featuring flashing signage.

Regarding Environment, Mamaroneck was designated a New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) Climate Smart Community at Silver Level, the program's highest certification. Gas-powered leaf blowers were banned in 2025. In 2026 Electric Vehicle (EV) chargers will be installed in the Washington Square area to enable apartment dwellers to charge their EVs.



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Assemblyman Steve Otis Addresses Larchmont-Mamaroneck Local Summit

Assemblyman Steve Otis addressed the Larchmont-Mamaroneck Local Summit's program on January 13 ahead of Governor Kathy Hochul's State of the State address, offering attendees a preview of issues likely to be addressed by the Governor and a deeper discussion of three primary policy areas: technology, the environment, and immigration.

As chair of the Assembly Science and Technology Committee for the past five years, Otis has taken a leading role in grappling with the rapid emergence of artificial intelligence and its implications. He spoke about the Governor's intention to build on the Empire AI initiative, which brings together colleges and universities across New York to advance what he described as "AI for the public good." Examples include applications in medical research and special education.

Otis emphasized that innovation must be paired with safeguards. In December, he passed legislation to strengthen labor protections for public-sector employees as AI becomes more prevalent in the workplace. He also underscored the importance of transparency, noting that the public should know what AI tools are being used and for what purposes. Additional proposals, he said, would push for broader disclosures and protections as the technology continues to evolve.

Another legislative achievement Otis highlighted was the Emergency Medical Services (EMS) reform bill he sponsored with State Senator Shelley Mayer, which the Governor signed into law in



Assemblyman Steve Otis

December. The bill allows for greater local control of EMS to address challenges related to diminished services and difficulties recruiting and retaining EMS workers. "We do not believe in a one size fits all approach," said Otis, explaining that flexibility is essential given the wide variation in community needs. While the new law establishes a framework for reform, he acknowledged that funding streams remain unresolved.

Environmental concerns, particularly flooding and water infrastructure, was one of the themes of the discussion. Otis noted that the Governor is ex-

pected to announce an additional phase of the clean water grant program, with the hope that some funding will be devoted to stormwater management. He reminded attendees that in 2015 he helped create a funding program for municipalities to improve drinking water and sanitary sewer systems, easing the financial burden of infrastructure upgrades.

Speaking directly to the local area, Otis stressed the urgency of addressing flooding in the Village of Mamaroneck. "We are in Mamaroneck, no place more impacted by flooding and extreme storms," he said. He explained that stormwater systems across New York State were not designed to handle the current volume and frequency of intense rainfall, requiring municipalities to increase system capacity. Otis pointed to funding secured through the State bond act and additional appropriations he and

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Larchmont Holds Holiday Stroll

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nity will continue to do their business locally whenever possible."

The Larchmont Chamber also offered an opportunity for local nonprofits to win grants during its holiday event and this year an all-new contest was launched. The Holiday Dream Home contest paired six local nonprofit organizations with local businesses in the home services space as their coaches to create the best gingerbread house. The organizations had an opportunity to win \$1,000 in prizes.

The Girl Scouts won the top prize

and community vote, and the Rye YMCA won second place. Also participating were the Community Counseling Center, Community Resource Center, Lions Club and Sheldrake Environmental Center.

Key sponsors for the holiday events included Houlihan Lawrence, Julia B Fee Sotheby's International Realty, Chase Home Lending, Anna & Jack's Treehouse, Clarke Auction House, Wonder, Mercedes-Benz of New Rochelle, Saujette, Atelier Modern and many more local businesses.

Larchmont Chamber Ushers in a Healthy Fresh Start

A Healthy Fresh Start was the theme of the Larchmont Chamber of Commerce's first membership meeting of the year. This gathering of the local business community showcased local Health and Wellness businesses offering a broad range of services to the community.

From nutrition to therapies to fitness to recreation, the evening was full of options to enhance your health and wellbeing.

Exhibiting businesses included Aviva Chansky Guttman, Daria Ventura Nutrition, Enhance Your Stance Chiropractic, Hopp Pelvic Floor Therapy, Living Lotus Yoga, Mama Bear, REP Athletics, Rye YMCA, and Shara M. Brofman, Psy.D. The event was hosted at Salon K, 1949 Palmer Avenue, Larchmont.

DeCicco & Sons offered healthy snacks and local company ForElle brought samples of its granola bites.

"With a brand-new year, many people are naturally thinking of ways to enhance their health, and we are fortunate to have many local businesses to offer expertise and services to help," said Larchmont Chamber President Gina Proia.

Local officials attended the gathering, including Village of Larchmont Deputy Mayor Peter Fanelli, Town of Mamaroneck Supervisor Jaine Elkind Eney and Westchester County Director of Policy & Programs Shari Rosen Ascher.

The Larchmont Chamber of Commerce is comprised of more than 250 members of the local business community with a mission to support, strengthen and advocate.

Mamaroneck Boards and Organizations Need Volunteers

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curious to hear about their work, please consider attending a meeting. All are welcome! Meetings are generally held on the first Tuesday of the month at 6 PM at the Mamaroneck Senior Center.

TMFD Needs You! Are you age 14 or older, and looking for a way to volunteer and give back to your community? The Town of Mamaroneck Fire Department may be the perfect answer! The TMFD is always looking for new volunteers. To learn more about volunteering, call (914) 834-2192 and press 3.

VAC Needs You! Volunteers are members of the community just like you. Volunteer Ambulance Corps' diverse group includes teachers, contractors, business professionals, and many other professions in their ranks. The volunteers fill shifts around their professional schedules, guaranteeing that an ambulance is ready to respond

24/7/365 and ensuring the well-being of their neighbors. Their annual call volume continues to climb. They answered over 1,700 calls for service in 2023; often turning out two ambulances simultaneously multiple times a week. VAC is always looking for new members, ages 17 and older, to fill the day and night shifts. No prior experience is necessary! In addition, financial contributions are always welcome to help support their critical mission. If you're interested in learning more or submitting an application, visit VAC online at <https://www.larchmont-vac.org/join-us.html>

If you are interested in being considered for any of the boards or committees, contact Mamaroneck Town Supervisor Jaine Elkind Eney by email at supervisor@townofmamaroneckny.gov and include a letter of interest and your resume.



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Transforming Challenges to Triumphs

County Executive Ken Jenkins Addresses Local Summit: Budget, Initiatives and Westchester's Future

BY MICHELLE CALVI

Westchester County Executive Ken Jenkins painted a picture of fiscal responsibility and community resilience during his December 16 appearance at the Larchmont-Mamaroneck Local Summit, sharing insights on everything from the County's newly signed tax-cap compliant \$2.5 billion budget to immigration enforcement, flooding projects, affordable housing, and more.

Balancing Act in Tough Times

Jenkins announced that Westchester's 2026 budget, signed just days before his presentation, required difficult decisions including an 8 percent cut across most departments and elimination of 180 positions, though notably without layoffs. Despite these cuts, the county avoided dipping into reserves while maintaining critical services. For the average Mamaroneck homeowner, the increase amounts to just \$6 a month. "We're still trying to balance things out because we didn't go into our savings account," Jenkins explained, emphasizing investments in parks, infrastructure, flooding mitigation, and affordable housing despite fiscal constraints. The budget was crafted amid uncertainty about federal funding—a particularly pressing concern given that \$700 million of the county's \$2.5 billion budget comes from federal sources.

Concern about Eroding Public Trust

"What keeps me up at night is that people have lost faith in government," Jenkins shared. Using immigration activity as an example, he reported that according to Homeland Security, there

has only been one actual ICE arrest in the County in 2025. However, as discussed at the November Local Summit program, there has been a high level of ICE activity locally resulting in residents living in fear. The County Executive expressed particular concern about the eroding public trust in government institutions, especially

among immigrant communities. Jenkins noted that the current reality is counter to the intention of the County's Immigrant Protection Act, enacted during the first Trump administration, which was designed to ensure people feel safe reporting to law enforcement crimes such as wage theft without fear of deportation. Jenkins also highlighted increased food insecurity, noting the County contributed an additional \$50,000 to Feeding Westchester when SNAP benefits were abruptly disrupted this fall. His administration has worked to ensure safe access to food distribution sites, including creative solutions like vending machine-style ordering systems.



County Executive Ken Jenkins

Flooding Progress and Affordable Housing Initiatives

On the long-awaited Army Corps flooding mitigation project, now entering its 19th year, Jenkins reported genuine progress. The County has committed \$18 million toward the Ward Avenue bridge component, with work

continuing on multiple fronts including downstream improvements at Glen Island that remain on schedule. Jenkins also emphasized his commitment to address Westchester's severe affordable housing crunch, acknowledging the critical need for affordable workforce housing, which includes public employees and volunteer first responders. The County's new "HomeSeeker" program centralizes information about affordable housing opportunities across Westchester, enabling qualified residents to more easily learn about and apply for affordable rental and homeownership opportunities. In another innovative move, Jenkins announced interest in a new program targeting a different housing gap: empty nesters and residents who want to downsize but

stay in Westchester. These are people who don't qualify for affordable housing yet struggle to find suitable market-rate ownership options. The County would serve as facilitator, convening developers and municipalities to create condos and townhouses—crucially, without spending county money, but instead bringing private resources together to meet this clear market need. "How do I make sure that people who want to stay in Westchester can do that?" Jenkins asked.

Looking Ahead

Jenkins acknowledged the challenge of protecting "our little bubble here in Westchester" amid federal turbulence, which threatens cuts to critical programs and significant increases to the cost of healthcare coverage for many. He emphasized the importance of municipal partnerships, creative problem-solving, and maintaining services that support both vulnerable residents and the broader community – from mandated services to the nationally accredited park system to library funding and senior programs. As Westchester navigates these uncertain times, Jenkins' message was clear: through collaboration, fiscal discipline, and unwavering commitment to community values, the County will continue protecting what makes it special addressing the real challenges its residents face.

The Larchmont/Mamaroneck Local Summit is an informal community council that seeks to make a better life for the community by keeping it informed of major issues of concern. For more information, go to <https://www.localsummitlm.org/>. To view recorded programs on LMC Media, go to <https://lmcmmedia.org/>.

Larchmont Village Board Amends Ban on Gas-Powered Leaf Blowers, Appoints New Police Officer

BY STEPHEN E. LIPKEN

Village of Larchmont Mayor Sarah Bauer opened the January 26 Board of Trustees meeting with Public Hearing Amending Chapter 180, "Leaf Blowers." All gas-powered leaf blowers are prohibited, only electric leaf blowers are permitted.

Electric leaf blowers are permitted only during designated seasonal cleanup periods: March 15 to April 30 and October 15 to December 15. Operating hours are Monday to Friday from 8 AM to 5:30 PM; Saturday from 10 AM to 5:30 PM; and Sundays/Holidays from 10 AM to 5 PM (prop-

erty owners only). Fines for violations are up to \$250 for first offense; \$500 for a second; and \$1,000 for third or subsequent offenses. Both the operator and property owner can be cited for violations.

Next, a motion was made to adopt the Battery Energy Storage System Law (BESS). Objectives include providing a regulatory scheme for designation of properties suitable for location, construction and operation of BESS; to ensure compatible land uses in the vicinity of areas affected by BESS; to mitigate impacts of BESS on public and private infrastructure, existing property development and

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Assemblyman Steve Otis Addresses Larchmont-Mamaroneck Local Summit
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Senator Mayer advocated for, noting that Mamaroneck has been identified as a priority due to repeated flood impacts.

Audience questions also touched on affordability and housing, particularly for firefighters and EMS volunteers struggling to remain in the community. Otis acknowledged that over time, housing stock has become less diversified and emphasized the need for more affordable housing, noting that some preference policies for these volunteers and employees are constrained by federal discrimination laws.

Transportation and safety along the Boston Post Road corridor were also discussed. Otis described ongoing coordination with Senator Mayer and the Department of Transportation to repave the road and improve traffic and pedestrian safety while managing rising costs and jurisdictional complexities.

The Larchmont-Mamaroneck Local Summit is an informal community council that seeks to make a better life for the community by keeping it informed of major issues of concern. The next meeting, on Tuesday, February 10 at 8 AM at the Nautilus Diner in Mamaroneck, will discuss "AI: Uses, Abuses and Protections."

For more information, go to <https://www.localsummitlm.org/>. To view recorded programs on LMC Media, go to <https://lmcmmedia.org/>.



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A Miracle On 34th Street in Larchmont



The Larchmont Mamaroneck Lions Club and its partners presented a live audio theater recreation of the 1949 Lux Radio Theater's version of the Holiday Classic movie *Miracle On 34th Street*. The production took place before a live audience on December 21 at the Larchmont Village Center. The event also included the Christmas episode of the TV sitcom *Ozzie & Harriet*, including Ricky Nelson singing *The Christmas Song*.

The production was led by Jason Summers and the Sandbox Theatre. The audience and performers featured professional, blind, disabled and local school theater students.

A Miracle on 34th Street was co-sponsored by the Larchmont Library, the Sandbox Theatre, SPERDVAC (The Society for the Preservation of Radio Drama, Variety and Comedy), The Westchester Council for the Blind, LMC Media and the Larchmont Mamaroneck Lions Club.

The Larchmont Lions celebrated their Centennial and hosted their annual Points of Light Celebration of Service on January 11 at the Orienta Beach Club. More than 60 local community service groups were honored. The Jack Coughlin Community Service Awards were presented to Larchmont Friends of the Family and Pat Allen. The keynote speaker was the past president of Lions International, Douglas Alexander.

Larchmont Pastor and Bishop John S. Bonnici Appointed Bishop of the Diocese of Rochester



Pope Leo XIV appointed Bishop John S. Bonnici, auxiliary bishop of the Archdiocese of New York since 2022 and pastor of the parishes of Ss. John and Paul and St. Augustine in Larchmont since 2021, as the new bishop of the Diocese of Rochester in the western region of New York.

He succeeds Bishop Salvatore R. Matano who will reach the age of 80 in September. Bishop Bonnici's installation is scheduled for Thursday, March 19.

Cardinal Timothy Dolan said in a statement: "The Most Reverend John Bonnici has been a faithful priest, beloved pastor, trusted auxiliary bishop, wise counselor, and good friend during the nearly 17 years that I have been privileged to serve as Archbishop of New York. Pope Leo has chosen well in appointing him to serve as the Bishop of Rochester! While we will sure miss him here in the Archdiocese of New York, we are grateful that one of our neighboring dioceses will now experience his pastoral love."



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Larchmont Village Board Amends Ban on Gas-Powered Leaf Blowers, Appoints New Police Officer

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environmental resources; and to create a proper balance between BESS development and public safety, particularly from fire and explosion.

Larchmont Village Police Lieutenant Joseph Paprota reported two arrests. "On January 7, an investigation that began in September 2024 concluded with the arrest of a suspect who presented fraudulent identification and purchased jewelry valued at over \$2,000 from a business on Palmer Avenue. Detective Joseph Aboudi was able to identify the suspect.

"On January 6, Detective Michael Genkerell completed another long-term investigation with the arrest of a suspect who used fraudulent information to make

a purchase of \$2,000 from a business on Larchmont Avenue.

"Emanuel Aguiar graduated from the Police Academy and was appointed Police Officer to the Larchmont Police Department. On Thursday, February 26, Detective Natalie Hecht will conduct a Scam Awareness Presentation at the Larchmont Public Library at 2 PM, a senior scam alert," Paprota concluded.

Finally, upon the resignation of Treasurer James Cazzorla, Deputy Village Treasurer Maria Broderick was appointed Acting Village Treasurer. Also appointed were Dana Post and Kim Taylor, Co-Chairs, Parks and Trees Committee; and Nora McMillan, Alternate Member, Traffic Commission.

Spotlight on Your Emergency Services Personnel: Meet Firefighter Kris Walters

Firefighter Kris Walters was hired by the Larchmont Fire Department in February 2022. In addition to being a Firefighter and New York State Emergency Medical Technician, he is also the lead of the Larchmont Fire Department's Marine unit which is dispatched to emergencies within the Long Island Sound.



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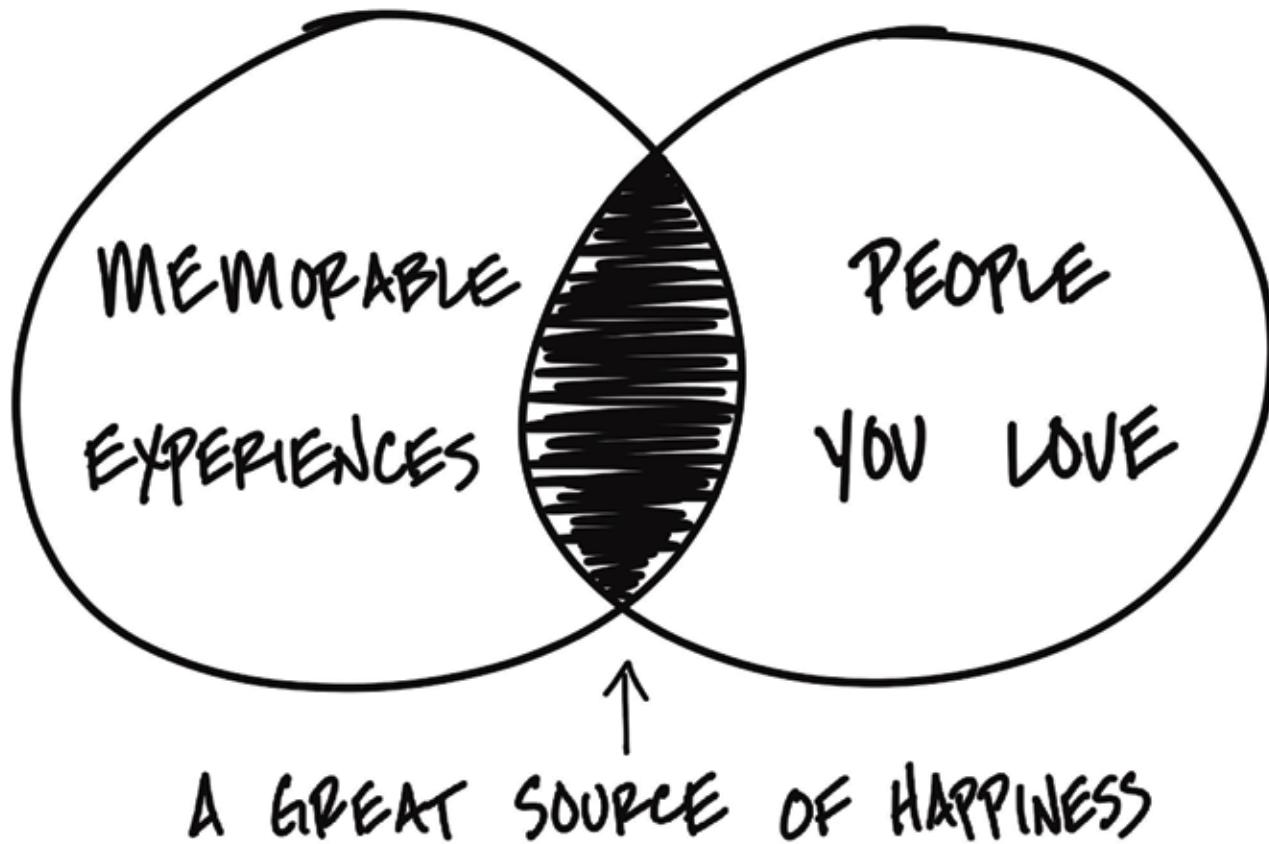
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New Year's Resolutions

BY BERNARD A. KROOKS, CERTIFIED
ELDER LAW ATTORNEY
SPECIAL GUEST CONTRIBUTOR:
JOEL KROOKS, ESQ.

As we enter 2026, there are important federal and New York State estate tax changes that should be on every client's radar. Whether you're updating an existing estate plan or starting one for the first time, understanding the updated exemption amounts, gift tax figures, and planning opportunities is essential to protect your legacy and minimize tax exposure.

Due to the One Big Beautiful Bill, the federal estate and gift tax exemption for 2026 is \$15 million for each individual, up from \$13.99 million in 2025. Thus, in 2026, a married couple can give away during lifetime or on death (or a combination thereof) \$30 million without incurring federal estate or gift tax.

New York, of course, has its own estate tax which kicks in for taxable estates over \$7.35 million, up from \$7.16 million in 2025. However, New York does not have a gift tax, although any lifetime gifts made within three years of death are "clawed back" into the decedent's New York taxable estate for purposes of calculating their New York state estate tax. New York's estate tax has a notable "cliff" provision: if your estate's value exceeds the exemption by more than 5 percent, the entire estate—not just the excess—is subject to tax. This makes precise valuation and planning critical for estates close to the exemption threshold.

In addition, each individual is still permitted to give \$19,000 in 2026 to as many people as they wish in any calendar year. This number did not increase from 2025. Thus, a married couple who has three children and seven grandchildren, can give \$38,000 (\$19,000 each) to each of them in 2026, an aggregate of \$380,000, without paying gift taxes or even having to file a gift tax return. Moreover, gifts made for educational or medical purposes are not subject to the \$19,000 limit so long as the gifts are made directly to the educational or medical provider. Annual gifting remains a highly effective tool to reduce the size of your taxable estate over time. Coordinating gifts with your overall estate plan can shift future appreciation out of your taxable estate and help avoid both federal and state estate taxes.

Lastly, beginning in 2026, new limitations will apply to charitable deductions for taxpayers who itemize.

Charitable contributions will be deductible only to the extent they exceed 0.5 percent of the donor's adjusted gross income (AGI). This means that smaller charitable gifts may not generate any tax benefit for itemizers unless total contributions rise above this threshold. As a result, clients may wish to reconsider the structure of charitable giving, particularly with respect to year-end contributions and donor-advised funds. Furthermore, taxpayers who claim the standard deduction will be eligible for an above-the-line charitable deduction starting in 2026. This provision allows deductions of up to \$1,000 for individual filers and \$2,000

for married couples filing jointly, providing a limited tax incentive for charitable giving even when itemizing is not advantageous.

If you do not yet have an estate plan in place, consider making it a priority this year to have one prepared by an experienced estate planning attorney. If your existing plan has not been reviewed recently—or if you have experienced significant life changes—now is an ideal time to revisit your strategy. With the updated 2026 exemption amounts in effect, coordinating with an estate planning attorney and your financial advisor can help ensure your legacy goals are preserved

as the tax landscape continues to evolve.

Bernard A. Krooks, Esq., is a founding partner of Littman Krooks LLP. He was named 2021 "Lawyer of the Year" by Best Lawyers in America® for excellence in Elder Law and has been honored as one of the "Best Lawyers" in America since 2008. He was elected to the Estate Planning Hall of Fame by the National Association of Estate Planners & Councils (NAEPC). Krooks is past Chair of the Elder Law Committee of the American College of Trust and Estate Counsel (ACTEC). Mr. Krooks may be reached at 914-684-2100 or by visiting the firm's website at www.littmankrooks.com.

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Evaluate Your Pet Insurance



BY JOHN CATTAU,
MANAGING PARTNER OF KIRK CREEK
INSURANCE SERVICES, LLC

Here are a few of my favorite things..

Chocolate. Grapes. Raisins. Sugar-free gum, mints, peanut butter. Alcohol. Onions, Garlic. Chives. Macadamia Nuts. Avocado. Coffee, Tea. Nutmeg. Peach, Cherry and Apricot Pits. Vitamins...

...But not when our beloved Doggie (or Kitty) gulps them down. If you've ever called poison control in these situations, a visit to emergency pet care can be scary. And very expensive. Vet ERs (VEG ER in White Plains is great!): Blood tests, IV fluids, overnight observation, imaging and hospitalization, possible surgery.. you can easily get to \$5,000++ for even routine cases.

So as you think about getting a pet, evaluate your options. It's not without drawbacks. Premiums can be costly. A quick guide:

- What is considered a pre-existing condition? Some insurers exclude any condition in which your pet has ever shown symptoms.
- What percentage is reimbursed—and after what deductible? Reimbursement can be 70 percent, 80 percent, or 90 percent. Check whether deductible is annual or per incident.
- Annual or lifetime payout limits?

Lower premiums sometimes come with caps that may not cover major illnesses or surgeries.

- Claims paid and how long does reimbursement take? Most plans require you to pay upfront and submit claims for reimbursement later.

- Do policy premiums increase as my pet ages? Age-based increases are common and should be factored into long-term cost.

- What is not covered? Always review exclusions.

Your Vet will have an exhaustive list of no-nos. ASPCA Poison Control is amazing and works with ER rooms. Peace of mind is always a plus.

John Cattau, Managing Partner of Kirk Creek Insurance Services, LLC is a New York State licensed insurance broker BR-1917908. He can be reached at 929-456-2265. Visit www.kirkcreekinsurance.com for more information.

Notes From A Therapist



BY HILLARY VOLPER, LCSW

Zen meditation teachers often share a story that illustrates how our minds can quickly derail when faced with pain or difficulty. Imagine being struck by an arrow. Of course, you would feel pain. Yet, instead of simply acknowledging it, the mind adds another layer: "Why me?" It might spiral into anger, self-pity, or withdrawal. This second arrow—our reaction—often hurts more than the first.

The teaching invites us to notice how our thoughts amplify suffering. The original pain may be real, but the stories we construct around it prolong and deepen our distress. When we obsess or ruminate, we nurture emotional wounds rather than heal them.

The remedy is awareness. Catch yourself as the "runaway horses" of your mind begin to gallop.

Take a deep breath and observe what you're doing as the emotional wave rises.

If breathing alone doesn't help, shift your focus. Engage in an activity to "change the channel" of your mind.

If that still fails, change your surroundings. Walk, move, or exercise to return your body to the present moment.

As a meditator, I can tell you it works. But like any skill, it takes intention. And consistent effort. . .

Hillary Volper, LCSW, conducts individual psychotherapy both in-person and via telehealth. She has offices in New York City and in Larchmont and can be reached at 914-980-7980. Visit www.HillaryVolper.com for more information.

Mamaroneck School Board Given Update on Bond Projects

The Mamaroneck Board of Education's December meeting opened with a musical performance by 4th grade students at Central Avenue School called 'Turn Off Your Phone' followed by a report from student liaison Robert Grimes who covered a range of recent and upcoming high school activities.

An update on districtwide facilities and bond projects was delivered by members of the architectural and construction management team at LAN Associates. The presentation provided a comprehensive overview of the 2024 Bond Program, including completed work, projects currently underway, and upcoming phases across all district schools.

The update highlighted completed Phase 1 improvements at Hommocks Middle School, Mamaroneck High School, and Mamaroneck Avenue School. These projects include pool and locker room renovations, roofing and flooring upgrades, HVAC replacements, plumbing and electrical improvements, masonry restoration, classroom and corridor upgrades, and enhanced accessibility features. Together, these improvements address critical infrastructure needs while modernizing learning, athletic, and support spaces.

The presentation also outlined work scheduled for completion in 2026 and beyond, including continued masonry restoration, corridor door replacements, HVAC and chiller

upgrades, pool and natatorium system replacements, cafeteria reconfigurations, new full cooking kitchens and serving lines, fire alarm and sanitary piping upgrades, and additional ADA improvements such as ramps, entrances, and restrooms.

Phase 2 projects extend into 2027 and include major programmatic enhancements, such as new music spaces, renovated gymnasiums, and expanded dining areas.

Next steps include continued Phase 1 construction through 2026, with Phase 2 projects beginning in earnest in 2026 and extending into 2027.

A public hearing was held for the District-Wide Emergency Management Plan (Safety Plan), after which the plan was adopted.

Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum & Instruction Jeff Moore reviewed the latest PSAT scores which the district recently received, providing an overview of the results and how assessment data is used to support student learning across the secondary level. While overall scores are an important part of the picture, the focus was on how PSAT data helps educators reflect on instruction, identify patterns, and make informed programmatic decisions.

PSAT participation was strong among 10th and 11th grade students, with a small group of 9th graders also participating. Overall performance data shows that:

- Many students met or exceeded college and career readiness benchmarks in reading, writing, and math.

- Reading and writing remain relative strengths across grade levels.
- Math results indicate areas where continued focus on foundational skills and instructional alignment is needed.

Beyond overall performance, PSAT data provides insight into specific skill areas, such as reading comprehension, writing conventions, algebraic reasoning, and problem solving. These patterns help educators examine curriculum pacing, coherence across courses, and opportunities for targeted support or challenge.

PSAT results are one of several data points used to better understand students over time. When considered alongside classroom assessments, coursework, and educator observations, the data helps inform decisions about course pathways, academic supports, and access to opportunities at key transition points. This information supports the district's commitment to personalization by helping schools respond to student needs, offer the right level of academic support and learning challenge, and create meaningful options for students. In doing so, assessment data helps shape a secondary experience where students are supported academically and

continued on page 13

Mamaroneck School Board Given Update on Bond Projects

continued from page 12

encouraged to grow, take ownership of their learning, and explore pathways aligned with their strengths and goals.

Hommocks Middle School Principal Matthew Samuelson and Mamaroneck High School Principal Lina Cannavo then shared how assessment data is used within their buildings to support personalization. Principal Samuelson described how personalization is advanced through the Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) framework, which provides educators with data to make informed decisions about student growth, support, and enrichment. He emphasized that teachers use data daily to adjust instruction and respond to student needs in real time. Both principals highlighted the importance of common assessments with common rubrics, noting that shared expectations allow educators to better understand student progress and ensure consistency. At the high school level, Principal Cannavo emphasized a strong focus on building horizontal consistency across classes, so students have equitable experiences regardless of teacher or course section. Together, these practices help schools make thoughtful decisions about courses and enrichment, while ensuring students have a more consistent and supportive experience across classrooms.

In his Superintendent's Report, Dr. Chuck Sampson said that administrators would engage with Learning Center Collaborative for professional development. He provided a brief look-ahead to the 2026-27 budget and related factors. He also recognized the winter concert series and the holiday celebrations across the buildings.

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Larchmont Calendar



From Near and Far: Celebrating Birds Across the Americas
Monday, February 2 to Thursday, February 26
Larchmont Public Library, Oresman Gallery, 121 Larchmont Avenue
This exhibit showcases some of the most photogenic bird species in a selection of bird photographs captured by Bedford Audubon members throughout the Americas.

Beyond the birds seen locally, both year-round residents and migratory species, there is a vast array of fascinating bird species we never experience here in New York – almost 11,000 species globally! Opening reception is Sunday, February 8, 2 PM to 4 PM. For more information, visit bedfordaudubon.org.



Henna Workshop

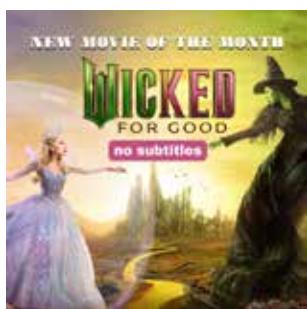
Henna Workshop
Thursday, February 5, 4 PM to 5:30 PM
Larchmont Public Library, 121 Larchmont Avenue
Students in grades 6 through 12 are invited to learn the art of henna painting. For centuries, henna painting on the body has been practiced in India, Africa, and the Middle East, where the henna plant is believed to bring love and good fortune. The henna used is all natural, made from henna, lemon juice and essential oils. Everyone will go home with a henna tattoo. With proper care a henna stain can last two to three weeks. Participants will also learn how to henna on...cookies!

To register, go to <https://larchmont.librarycalendar.com/event/henna-31558>



Teodosia: An Alt-Valentine Oratorio
Saturday, February 14, 4 PM
St. James Church, 296 Titicus Road, North Salem
The Academy of Sacred Drama will present an outrageous alternative to the romance story: Alessandro Scarlatti's Il martirio di Santa Teodosia, the story of a fearless saint who spurns suitors, turns down marriage, and embraces martyrdom instead of

a wedding veil. With dazzling baroque arias, dramatic duets, and an inspiring chorus, the performance flips the usual love-song script on its head. For tickets, go to <https://luma.com/teodosia-ns>



Movie of the Month: Wicked: For Good
Friday, February 27, 1 PM
Larchmont Public Library, 121 Larchmont Avenue
The epic conclusion to the untold story of the witches of Oz. Elphaba and Glinda are now estranged, each living with the consequences of their choices. Elphaba (Cynthia Erivo), now demonized as The Wicked Witch of the West, lives in exile, continuing her fight to expose The Wizard. Meanwhile, Glinda (Ariana Grande) has become a glamorous symbol of Goodness, basking in the perks

of fame and popularity. As the angry citizens of Oz rise up against the Wicked Witch, Glinda and Elphaba must reunite and truly see each other—if they are to change themselves, and all of Oz. The movie will be shown with subtitles on Tuesday, February 24 at 1 PM. For more information, call (914) 834-2281 ext. 3.

2026 Tax Filing Essentials
Friday, February 6, 11 AM
Mamaroneck Public Library, 136 Prospect Avenue, Mamaroneck
Navigate the 2026 tax filing season with confidence. Topics include new tax rules and updates, Roth IRA conversions and tax planning for families, retirees and small businesses. To register, go to mamaronecklibrary.org/events

Lunar New Year Celebration
Sunday, February 8, Noon to 3 PM
Katonah Museum of Art, 134 Jay Street
Mark the Lunar New Year with a day of creativity and cultural tradition for the whole family! Discover the work of artist Shen Wei, experience a dynamic Lion Dance, enjoy performances by the Li Garden Dance Company, and create Lunar New Year-themed art projects. All ages and abilities welcome. To register, go to <https://www.katonahmuseum.org/events/?eid=962>

Virtual—Demystifying Artificial Intelligence, Monday, February 9, 7 PM
Join Eddi Khaytman, MBA, for a discussion of how AI is used in the real world and why many people are excited and/or concerned about it, as well as its implications on society. Learn about some of the most powerful and useful AI tools, such as ChatGPT, Midjourney, Sara and more. To register, go to mamaronecklibrary.org/events.

250 Independence
Tuesday, February 10 through Saturday, February 28
Mamaroneck Artists' Guild, 1987 Palmer Avenue, Larchmont
Members of the Mamaroneck Artists' Guild will show their works commemorating America's 250th anniversary. Reception is Saturday, February 14, 3 PM to 5 PM. For more information, call (914) 834-1111.

Valentine's Day Brunch, Saturday, February 14, 11 AM to 1 PM
Hilltop Hanover Farm, 1271 Hanover St., Yorktown Heights
Attendees will prepare a three-course meal together to share while picking up new skills to learn how to cook for your loved ones! \$15 per person. Pre-registration is required. For more information, call (914) 862-5050.

Winter Mini Camps
Tuesday, February 17 to Friday, February 20
Children can experience and learn about nature and the outdoors in winter at Winter Mini Camps during the school break at Cranberry Lake Preserve in North White Plains and Alfred B. DelBello Muscoot Farm in Katonah.
Cranberry Lake Preserve Mini Winter Camp
Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday, February 17, 18 and 19, from 9 AM to 3 PM.
Fee: \$225 for Westchester County residents; \$255 for non-residents.
Muscoot Farm Winter Skills
Tuesday, February 17 through Friday, February 20, from 9 AM to 3 PM.
Camp is available per day or as a week-long (four-day) session.
Fee: \$75 per day/\$250 for the week (\$50 discount if signed up for all four days) for Westchester County residents and non-residents.
For more information, go to <https://parks.westchestergov.com/winter-mini-camps-at-cranberry-lake-and-muscoot-farm>.

Disney Princess Sing-A-Long with Yara
Friday, February 20, 3:30 PM to 4:15 PM
Larchmont Public Library, 121 Larchmont Avenue
Calling all Disney fans and princesses in training! Dress in costume and join soprano singer Yara Hoppenstein to sing along to your favorite songs. For ages 3 to 10 with a caregiver. To register, go to <https://larchmont.librarycalendar.com/event/disney-sing-along>

Comedy From Scratch
Saturday, February 28, 8 PM
The Idea Kitchen, 1940 Palmer Avenue, Larchmont
Top comedians from TV and New York City's major clubs perform long sets on an intimate stage. Tonight's show features Elon Altman (Netflix's Roast of Tom Brady, Comedy Cellar), Val Parker (AV Club, Late Night with Stephen Colbert) and Ben Asher (New York Comedy Festival). For more information, go to standupwestchester.com.

Save the Date!
STEM-tastic 2026, Friday, May 8, 6 PM to 9 PM
This free festival brings STEM—science, technology, engineering and math—to life with dozens of hands-on activities. Participants of all ages can learn, create and connect through interactive experiences. Learn more at theSTEMalliance.org.

Two New Legislators Join Westchester County Board

The Westchester County Board of Legislators welcomed two newly elected members at its annual Organizational Meeting on January 5, the start of the 2026 legislative term. Westchester County Clerk, Hon. Thomas M. Roach, administered the Oath of Office to Legislators Jenn Puja and Anant Nambiar, along with 15 returning legislators. Nambiar's election follows recent diversity milestones for the Board. In 2021, Chairman Vedat Gashi became the first Albanian American and Muslim to serve and, in 2023, Legislator David Imamura was elected as the first Asian American member.

Chairman Vedat Gashi (D-New Castle, Ossining, Somers, Yorktown) said, "We are excited to welcome two new dynamic legislators to the Board—Jenn Puja and Anant Nambiar. As our first South Asian American and Hindu member, Anant's election marks another important milestone in our growing diversity. Both he and Jenn bring valuable expertise and perspectives, and I look forward to working closely with them as we address concerns that matter most to Westchester residents."

Legislator Jenn Puja will represent District 5, which includes Scarsdale, West Harrison, and portions of White Plains, succeeding former Legislator Ben Boykin, who retired due to term limits. Puja said, "It is an incredible honor to serve as a Westchester County Legislator for the district I've called home my entire life. I'm grateful for the trust that residents have placed in me. Together, rooted in shared history and united by a common future, we will move this district forward."

Jenn Puja joins the Board following six years of service on the White Plains Common Council where she was the youngest woman ever elected to that office. Raised in Harrison's Silver Lake neighborhood, she grew up with a deep commitment to public service. Puja is the Executive Director of the Westchester/Put-



nam Central Labor Body AFL-CIO, a nonprofit organization representing more than 100,000 working families in Westchester and Putnam. She is also an Advisory Board Member for the Mount Sinai Selikoff Center for Occupational Health and has been a member of the Labor and Human Rights Committee of the Board of Legislators since 2018. Legislator Puja is a summa cum laude graduate of both Iona College (bachelor's) and Long Island University (dual masters). She lives in White Plains with her husband and two children.

Legislator Anant Nambiar will represent District 7, covering Larchmont, Mamaroneck, Rye, and parts of Harrison. He succeeds former Legislator Catherine Parker, who retired due to term limits. Nambiar said, "I am very honored to be elected to represent District 7 on the Westchester County Board of Legislators. I'm also very proud to be the first South Asian and Hindu elected, and look forward to working with my colleagues and the County Executive and team to solve the difficult, important problems that our residents prioritize."

Anant Nambiar is a dedicated public servant, business leader, and resident of Westchester for more than two decades. He has held senior executive roles in the financial industry over a 25-year career, where he led strategy and product management teams and earned 12 U.S. patents for innovation. When the Mamaroneck schools faced financial crises in 2008–2009, Nambiar joined the school board to find and deliver solutions. Then, in 2024, he joined the Town of Mamaroneck Board to help the town navigate post-COVID financial challenges. Legislator Nambiar holds an MBA from Wilfrid Laurier University and a bachelor's degree in engineering from the University of Waterloo. He and his wife raised three children, all of whom are graduates of the Mamaroneck public schools.

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