

MINUTES OF THE ROCKVILLE CENTRE CIVICS ASSOCIATION MEETING
HELD MARCH 10, 2026
LOCATION: ROCKVILLE CENTRE PUBLIC LIBRARY
221 N. VILLAGE AVE, ROCKVILLE CENTRE, NY 11570

PRESENT: President Meghan Kearns, Vice President Catie Carter, Treasurer Emily Kearns, Membership Director Rich Collett, and Recording Secretary Caitlin McEntee

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

MINUTES: A motion to adopt the minutes from the February 10, 2026 meeting was made by Vice President Carter, seconded by Treasurer Kearns and carried.

UPDATES FROM PRESIDENT MEGHAN KEARNS:

- Website traffic is 2,363 per month with the average session being 3 minutes and 46 seconds. Last month there were 62 unique visitors and 79% of those unique visitors were new. People are finding the website via Google or through a shared link.

UPDATES FROM VICE PRESIDENT CATIE CARTER:

- Any members that are part of a committee please look out for an email regarding meeting one last time before the annual meeting and April 13, 2026. Also if you are a member who is interested in joining a committee next year, you will be able to sign up at the next meeting.

UPDATES FROM MEMBERSHIP DIRECTOR RICH COLLETT

UPDATES FROM TREASURER EMILY KEARNS:

- Dues have been collected from 61 members for a total of \$1,465.00.
- Treasurer Kearns will share first year's financial statements as well as a budget and forecast for the next 5 years. Dues
- Dues will be collected for the next fiscal year. Dues are \$24.

PRESENTATION BY ATTORNEY STEVE LEVENTHAL ON THE OPEN MEETINGS LAW, FOIL REQUESTS AND GOVERNMENT ETHICS:

Steve has served as an attorney on the Village of Rockville Centre planning board as well as on the Rockville Centre Board of Ethics. He currently serves as a village justice for 2 villages, he is a past president of the Nassau County Bar Association and currently the co-chair of the New York State Bar Association on Ethics committee.

- Goals of local government board of ethics:
 - To inspire public confidence in government by ensuring not only the reality but also the appearance of integrity in government.
 - To guide and protect local officers and employees and to help them to know what the rules are and to understand the rules in order to avoid unintended ethics violations.

- Ethics boards are available to all officers and employees of a municipality to give free confidential ethics advice at any time or whenever an ethics issue is encountered. A good example is Mayor Michael Bloomberg. During his mayorship, he chose to consult with the New York City Board of Ethics on any ethics issues he encountered versus the most gifted legal minds he could hire. He knew that if he had the opinion from the Board Ethics blessing his conduct then he was completely covered.
- Pillars of a well-designed government ethics program:
 - Clear and comprehensive set of rules.
 - Reasonable disclosure requirements.
 - Effective enforcement of the code of ethics.
- State Law Article 18 the New York General Municipal Law is the governing code of conduct for every municipality (city, county, town, village, local municipality, and special district) in the state excluding New York City. New York City's code ethics is considered the model for the entire world.
 - Local municipalities like the Village of Rockville Centre have the option to adopt their own code of ethics as long as it prohibits conduct that the state allows and does not allow conduct that the state prevails. This gives local municipalities autonomy to cover areas where the state's code of ethics has flaws or gaps in its coverage. Certain provisions of the state's code of ethics are not as clear as they should be and conversely are more rigid than they should be in other areas.
- Conflicts of interest and the proper way to proceed:
 - You must disclose the conflict and you must recuse yourself.
 - Understanding the distinction between abstention versus recusal:
 - Abstention: You can participate in the discussions; you can participate in the deliberations, but you do not participate in the vote. An example, it's snowing on the evening that an important matter is to be voted on but most of the public stayed home because of the in-climate weather. You choose not to vote as more people should be heard on the issue at hand before you vote.
 - Recusal is where you have absolutely nothing to do with the matter at hand. You cannot influence the outcome in any way whatsoever. An example, a building inspector must go inspect a home that happens to belong to their sister and brother-in-law. The inspector goes to their supervisor and recuses themselves from any involvement whatsoever.
- You do not have recuse yourself in the following situations:
 - Matters that affect all or substantially all Village Officers employees, residents, or taxpayers alike. For example, the Village Board gets together and decides to rezone a very large portion of the Village. The rezoning of this portion of the village that contains that many, many homes, is going to cause property values to increase. Even if the Village Board members' homes are included in the area to be rezoned, they are allowed to vote to rezone it. This is because that zone change will not affect the board members any differently than it will affect a very large number of other similarly situated residents or property owners. A prohibited conflict of interest is one that's personal or private to you. It's not one that you share with many others.

- Actions that involve no judgment or discretion also known as ministerial acts. You're a deputy clerk working in the Village Clerk's office. Your responsibility may include at a certain time of day standing at the counter and date stamping documents that are to be filed in the clerk's office. You also are responsible for taking that document and placing it in the basket. The clerk's child walks in with a file that they take, stamp and place in the basket. The clerk did not have to exercise any judgement or discretion to complete that task so there can be no conflict of interest. Any person who came into the office to have a file stamped would be treated the exact same way.
- The Rule of Necessity. In the Village of Rockville Centre, like in many municipalities, the members of the board of trustees are compensated. The board members' compensation is set in the Village budget and the Village budget is set by the trustees. This is not considered a conflict of interest, because a Village must have a budget and there is no one else to whom the Board of Trustees can lawfully delegate authority to approve the Village budget. It must be done; therefore, it can be done.
- There are 3 different rules that all involve the same principal of moonlighting, having an outside business or an investment. These are all prohibited if they give rise to a conflict of interest. The legal ruling came down from the New York State Court of Appeals in 1874. Unless there's a constitutional provision or statute, you can hold 2 positions as long as they are not inherently incompatible. An ethics board comes to this conclusion by comparing the duties of both roles. For example, if a person is Chief Financial Officer in one position and auditor in the other position than that would be prohibited.
- Government Transparency and Accountability: The public having access to information about what their government is doing is essential for a democracy to work. It's how elected officials are held accountable. There are 2 laws that are implemented day in and day out by all local governments the Open Meetings Law.
 - The Open Meetings Law: States that most, not all, but most government meetings are available for attendance by the public with some exceptions. The exceptions allow the government body to adjourn into executive session to discuss particular topics. Those topics include matters that would be perilous to public safety, discussions that would reveal the identity of law enforcement agent, or informant, disclosure that would compromise a criminal investigation, discussions about litigation. They also include collective bargaining and contract negotiations, medical, financial, credit, or appointment history, a particular person, and matters leading to the appointment. These are the only topics that a government body is permitted to discuss outside of public session. The Village Board is also ethically required to give a reason as to why they are adjourning to executive session. It should also be noted that a public discussion is not required to be permitted during a public meeting and that if public discussion is allowed, a reasonable time limit may be imposed.
 - Freedom of Information Law (FOIL): The law that gives the public the right to inspect and copy most government documents, not all, but most. To clarify, FOIL is the right of a member of the public to have the right to inspect or copy a record. Not ask question. It's not an interrogatory function. There are specific categories of documents that the government is given the discretion to withhold that discretion, like any act of discretion by a local municipality, is subject to judicial review, in Article 78, proceedings. Once a FOIL request is submitted, the municipality has 5 days to acknowledge receipt of your request. After that

acknowledgement, they must provide you a date, 20 days later, when they will provide you the document. If they fail to do that, that is a constructive denial of your request. They may deny also deny the request, or they may grant it in part and deny it in part. They can also provide you with a document with portions redacted, because they believe those portions they are allowed to withhold. If you get a denial or partial denial, it's constructive denial which you can appeal that to the FOIL appeals officer. If the FOIL request is a enough matter to you, you can bring in Article 78 against the municipality and if you win, the court can award you your attorney's fees.

- Resources: The New York State Committee on Open Government has an excellent website. On their website, they have the law and training materials, they have advisory opinions on both the Open Meetings Law and the Freedom of Information Law <https://opengovernment.ny.gov>

UPCOMING EVENTS IN ROCKVILLE CENTRE:

- The Rockville Centre St. Patrick's Day Parade Saturday March 21st at 12:00PM.
- The next Board of Zoning Appeals (BZA) meeting is to be held on Wednesday April 8, 2026, at 7:00PM at Village Hall.
- The next Board of Trustees meeting is to be held on Monday April 13, 2026, at 7:00PM at Village Hall.

UPCOMING CIVICS ASSOCIATION MEETINGS:

- Tuesday April 14, 2026 7:00PM at the Rockville Centre Public Library on the basement level. This will be our annual meeting and will be open to members only. A full member is a resident of the Village of Rockville Centre and has paid their annual dues.
- Tuesday May 12, 2026. The location for this meeting is TBD as the library is unavailable.

MOTION TO ADJOURN: Motion made by President Kearns, seconded by Vice President Carter, and carried.

Please email any questions and concerns to RVC.Civic@gmail.com