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ORCHARD PARK

Clerk takes heat for cutting comments from minutes

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It was a matter of minutes that got most of the attention Wednesday night during the Orchard Park Town Board meeting — specifically, how the town clerk records them.

For years, the Town Board's minutes have been among the most complete when it came to describing what residents had to say during the public comment part of meetings.

But in recent months, that has changed — and the residents who usually make the comments aren't happy about it.

"Every resident deserves to be heard, to be responded to and for their concerns to be a part of the official record," Ed Flynn said.

Another speaker, Chris Willett, said, "The most important aspect has been omitted — who spoke about what topic."

What happened, said Town Clerk Janis Colarusso, was that responsibility for minutes is hers, and she made the decision to cut back to names of speakers with a list of topics.

At first, she listed the names and then had a separate list of topics, but she said that has changed.

"Now I put their names and one sentence," she said.

Colarusso said she had been considering the change for a year.

Ron Stadelmaier, who runs the "Orchard Park Front Door" blog, quoted an e-mail from Colarusso saying the work involved in doing minutes entries for public comment had become "overloaded."

The Town Board largely supported Colarusso, while acknowledging minutes are under her jurisdiction, not theirs.

Councilwoman Nan Ackerman said the minutes the board passed Wednesday night for the June 18 meeting corresponded with her notes.

"This is a record of what was said, not a transcript," she said. "Based on these particular minutes, I don't see a problem."



Some members of the audience, though, saw the move as part of a larger trend, following limiting speakers to four minutes at the microphone and restricting the board's responses to public comment.

The board no longer responds immediately, if at all.

Ackerman defended the board's decisions, saying they were in response to a decrease in civility in public meetings.

Meanwhile, Colarusso took some umbrage at the shots being lobbed her way from the audience — particularly by members of the Democratic organization. She singled out Democratic committeeman Dave Schuster and former Councilwoman Deborah Yeomans, who both spoke out against the change.

"You're my committee friend, my committee person and you get up there — I'm so disappointed," she said.

"So am I," responded Schuster, from the crowd.

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