

# Town board meeting times don't work for working Clarence residents

I want to thank the 4,341 residents who put their faith in Katie Webster for town council in this year's election. While we did not achieve the result we wanted, we want you to know that we heard you and we will continue to advocate for better practices in our government.

A common complaint that we heard was about the inaccessibility of town board meetings. According to census data, over 60% of Clarence's population is active in the workforce, yet Clarence is the only town in Erie County holding its regular town board meetings during weekday mornings, limiting access to working residents. The town board can change these meeting times back to their pre-COVID-19 pandemic time of 8 p.m. However, this is looking unlikely given exchanges among its members at a recent board meeting.

On Nov. 8, the town board decided to discuss meeting times during the "For the Good of the Town" portion of the meeting. Items discussed at this time do not appear on the agenda so there was no fair warning that this discussion would occur. During the talks, the board gave several reasons why they would like to continue

to hold morning weekday meetings.

The first reason they offered is contrary to the fundamental principle that elected officials serve the public. The reason cited was conducting public meetings while public employees are already in their offices was convenient for them. Placing their convenience over those of concerned Clarence residents belies their claim to want increased citizen input.

They also argued that the virtual attendance option for board meetings is sufficient to include working residents in these meetings. While this may improve the visibility of these meetings, it does not improve the public's access to participation, which is an important component of the democratic process. If you attend a meeting virtually, you are not allowed to comment on any of the issues discussed. To do so, you must attend these meetings in person. This creates an unfair situation for working residents who wish to voice their concerns or participate in the decision-making process. They also pointed to generally low at-

tendance records for neighboring town board meetings. This may be an accurate observation, but if anything, that means that there needs to be even fewer barriers to attending these meetings to encourage participation. It should be the goal of the town board to expand accessibility and opportunities to have our voices heard.

Clarence is an exceptional town in so many positive ways, but our town council meeting times continue to be unfair to its working residents and others who have daily family and volunteer commitments. These residents make up most of the population. Rest assured, the Clarence Democratic Committee will continue to advocate for accessible meeting times. We welcome your input into this and any other issues that are important to you.

On behalf of the Clarence Democratic Committee, I wish everyone a happy, healthy and safe holiday season, a very merry Christmas, and a happy New Year!



**Alexander  
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**CLARENCE  
DEMOCRATIC  
COMMITTEE MEMBER**