

VALLEY STREAM

NY Senate bill aims at IDA tax breaks

■ **Would require** notice by firms before filing grievance

■ **Follows controversy** of Green Acres Mall breaks

BY STEFANIE DAZIO
stefanie.dazio@newsday.com

Following an outcry over the Green Acres Mall's tax breaks, the State Senate unanimously passed a bill this week that would require businesses that make payments in lieu of taxes from industrial development agencies to notify local governments and school districts of their intents to grieve their tax assessments.

IDAs across the state grant businesses the ability to make payments in lieu of taxes, known as PILOTs, to spur economic development and job creation. PILOTs sometimes begin at the property's current taxes and the payments can be frozen

at that level for several years and then gradually increased. IDA officials may also take into account pending tax grievance cases and grant a lower number — bigger tax break — than the current taxes, anticipating the case being resolved in favor of the business.

For the Green Acres Mall in Valley Stream in 2014, the Hempstead Town IDA used a tax level lower than the mall's then-taxes for a PILOT because of a tax grievance case, which remains pending. Taxpayers and local elected officials blamed the PILOT and the lower PILOT payments for increases in their school property taxes in 2016, which turned out to be largely due to school budgeting practices.

The Senate's bill would require the businesses that receive PILOT incentives to alert local governments and school districts — which receive portions of PILOT payments — of their intentions to

grieve their taxes. The notifications would have to be made in writing 30 days before filing a grievance.

"It gives them a chance to plan ahead," said state Sen. Carl Marcellino (R-Syosset), a sponsor of the bill.

State Sen. Todd Kaminsky (D-Long Beach), another sponsor, said, "Long Island has begun to wake up" to IDAs and PILOTs after furor following Green Acres and other controversial tax incentive plans. He said he hopes this bill is only the beginning of IDA reform from the State Legislature.

"This is really a notice bill," he said. "I certainly think this is a very harmless rule that should be instituted."

The Assembly's version is currently in the Real Property Taxation Committee and has not been scheduled for a vote. The sponsor, Assemb. William Magnarelli (D-Syracuse), could not be reached for comment Wednesday.



HOWARD SCHNAP

Robert Besedin Sr., with his attorney Frederick Brewington as they announce a lawsuit alleging assault by two Nassau police officers.

BALDWIN MAN, 72, SUES, SAYS OFFICERS BEAT HIM

BY MICHAEL O'KEEFFE
michael.okeeffe@newsday.com

CRIME & courts

A 72-year-old mechanic suffered serious injuries last year after two Nassau County police officers assaulted him outside his Baldwin home, according to a federal lawsuit filed Wednesday that claims the man's civil rights were violated.

Attorney Frederick K. Brewington said his client, Robert Besedin Sr., was charged with second-degree assault and other crimes last year after officers Stephen Beckwith and John Mantovani lied and claimed the Air Force veteran pushed and struck them during the Feb. 7, 2017, incident.

"These officers attacked me, physically abused me and then lied about it," Besedin said during a news conference at Brewington's Hempstead office Wednesday afternoon. "They are the ones who should have been charged after they threw me off the steps of my porch."

Prosecutors last month dropped the charges against Besedin.

Brewington said Besedin called 911 last year after his neighbor's trash blew onto his lawn. The attorney said Besedin invited Beckwith and Mantovani into his home to talk about the complaint. But the situation became violent when the officers were preparing to leave the home.

Beckwith claimed in a felony complaint filed last year that Besedin "did violently flail his arms, kick and scream and push officer Mantovani down 4 steps."

Brewington played a video

from a security system at the Harrison Avenue home during the news conference that he said showed Besedin was not acting aggressively before the officers threw him to the ground and arrested him.

"This videotape turned the case around and allowed the truth to come out," said Mineola defense attorney Lloyd Nadel, who represented Besedin in the criminal case.

Besedin said he had not met the officers before the incident.

Besedin was knocked unconscious during the incident and suffered post-concussion syndrome, Brewington said. He said his client also suffered from multiple lacerations, as well as mental pain and suffering.

Besedin spent several days in jail before he was finally released. The charges against Besedin were dismissed by Nassau District Judge Erica Prager on Jan. 29 after prosecutor Karen Lipton said her office would not prosecute Besedin because his conduct was not criminal.

The lawsuit names Nassau County, Nassau police and Beckwith and Mantovani as defendants.

The Nassau County police department and district attorney's office declined to comment. Nassau county officials could not be reached. Officials at the Nassau County Police Benevolent Association did not respond to a request for comment.

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NORTH HEMPSTEAD

Town seeks bids for new list of outside law firms

BY CHRISTINE CHUNG
christine.chung@newsday.com

North Hempstead Town is reviewing its outside legal counsel and is seeking proposals from law firms to represent the town.

The town recently issued a request for proposals to establish a "panel of stand-by counsel" that it will consult as needed, according to the document.

Town spokeswoman Carole Trottere said that the existing roster of law firms was selected four years ago and that it was time to "take a fresh look."

In 2017, the town attorney's office spent about \$63,000 on outside counsel. That year, it also spent \$913,183 for department staff salaries.

This year's dedicated out-

side counsel budget cannot be determined because it is folded into the broader category of professional services, which also includes payment for insurance advisers and expert witnesses, Trottere said. The town has budgeted \$180,000 for professional services this year, \$30,000 less than allocated for the previous year.

Trottere said that the town attorney's office has been handling a broader range of litigation. Staff lawyers are encouraged to get admitted to federal court to represent the town. The town attorney's office now also oversees labor matters, such as employee arbitrations and discrimination cases.

Previously, outside firms were enlisted for many of those cases, Trottere added.

"Just because firms are on the list it does not mean that these firms were actually retained to perform work for the town," she added.

The town now relies on a list of 13 law firms across the state. Among them is Uniondale-based Harris Beach. Newsday previously reported that the law firm was involved in transactions in Oyster Bay that led to federal charges against former Nassau County Executive Edward Mangano and former Oyster Bay Supervisor John Venditto.

Harris Beach remains counsel on litigation involving the Roslyn Country Club and the town. It will stay on the panel if it submits a "good proposal," Trottere said.

Bids are due Feb. 27.