

Notes from the April 2021 meeting of the Hamilton, NY, Town Council (4.8.21)

Hamilton Town Council was still convening via Zoom for its April monthly meeting, but serious discussion of a potential return to in-person sessions was a hopeful sign that the COVID pandemic might soon be sufficiently contained to allow for more public gatherings.

Town Supervisor Eve Ann Shwartz did note that masking will still be required when public meetings resume, and that online provisions will be made for those who are unable or not yet willing to attend in person.

When the Council does reconvene public meetings, they will be held at the newly constructed Town Hall Building on Milford Street, which was a freight train station originally built in 1870 erected along the New York, Ontario & Western Railway. Town employees have been working from offices in the new building for several months, though most interactions with the public have been remote or by curbside.

Fine tuning the mechanical systems in the energy-efficient structure is a work in progress. Town Councilor Mary Dinski and Town Clerk Sue Reymers have applied for grants to furnish the public meeting room in the new facility. Supervisor Shwartz reported that the release of State funds – temporarily embargoed during the height of the pandemic – should allow for the funding of grants that had been awarded earlier to support the Town Hall construction.

Clerk Reymers, who has been cautiously increasing in-person contacts at the building, anticipates Saturday walk-in hours in the fall to accommodate the sale of hunting licenses. COVID uncertainties preclude setting a date, but the Town Council will schedule an open house /ribbon cutting ceremony as soon as reasonable caution allows.

The Council passed a resolution awarding low bidder Barton and Loguidice a contract to assess the condition of the Town Garage. The Town has received the insurance payment for the truck destroyed by an electrical fire earlier this year.

Chris Rossi, reporting for the committee drafting revisions to Town Zoning Codes, anticipated that the draft will be forwarded to the Town Council soon. Supervisor Shwartz said the draft will be subject to review by the Board and by the Town's legal counsel prior to scheduling a public review.

The Council discussed but deferred taking action on "Stretch Codes," which New York State is proposing and is likely to adopt, requiring additional energy-saving, climate-protecting measures in new construction and renovations. The requirements will raise construction costs, but those initial increases would be recovered through more efficient operations and energy savings. The State offers incentives for municipalities who adopt the codes early; the Council wanted more time to review the specific provisions before enacting the code locally.

Reliable ambulance service is a challenge for many rural communities. Town of Hamilton takes an active role in providing for and overseeing SOMAC (Southern Madison County Ambulance Corps), and SOMAC operations are a regular topic for Council discussion. This month the

discussion also explored shared services and how other neighboring communities are addressing costs and the need for emergency service.

Councilor Shari Taylor reported that the Earlville-for-Earlville group has received final design plans from Design Connect, a team of Cornell graduate students. The plan responds to community input and includes a trail, skate park and playground. Supervisor Shwartz said the drawings can be helpful in substantiating grant applications.

Town representatives have been meeting with the director of the Partnership for Community Development to explore the availability of design assistance and grant funding to support development of the Town's newly acquired access to Nine-Mile Swamp.

In her Madison County update, Supervisor Shwartz said that first-quarter sales taxes are up nine percent over a comparable time period. Of the coronavirus vaccine locally, she said the focus is on encouraging more people to be vaccinated – supplies of the vaccine currently exceed demand in the County. The Madison County Health Department's goal is to educate the public on the safety and efficacy of the various vaccines to overcome "vaccine hesitancy" and work toward vaccinating enough residents to stop the spread of the virus and return our economy and community to "normal" (The Council's next monthly meeting is scheduled May 13. Check the Town's website for details (www.townofhamiltonny.org)).

Written by Jim Leach for the Town Council