

Notes from the January 2021 meeting of the Hamilton, NY, Town Council

Hamilton's Town Council convened via Zoom January 14, 2021, for its annual organizational meeting, followed by its regular monthly meeting.

Town Supervisor Eve Ann Shwartz asked for a moment of silence at the outset of the evening to remember "those who have passed away locally and around the world" during a coronavirus pandemic that is still raging after a year.

The Annual Organizational Meeting:

Approved to continue in their positions with one-year appointments are Historian Jack Loop; Dog Control Office Gordon Baker; Zoning and Code Enforcement Office Mark Miller; and Elisa Robertson in the positions of Deputy Town Clerk/Collector, Planning/Zoning Clerk, and Secretary of the Planning Board and Zoning Board of Appeals. Costello, Cooney & Fearon were approved for a one-year contractual appointment as Attorney for the Town. Two-year appointments were approved for Sue Reymers, who continues in her responsibilities as Town Clerk/Collector, Records Management Office, and Records Access Officer; and Luke Dowsland, who continues as Highway Superintendent.

The Council approved the annual appointment of Mike Welshko as chair of the Planning Board, and approved a new five-year term on the Planning Board for Bettyann Miller. For the Zoning Board of Appeals the Council approved the annual appointment of Harmon Hoff as Chair, and a new five-year term for Harvey Kliman.

Supervisor Shwartz appointed Peter Darby as Deputy Supervisor and Budget Officer, and assigned members of the Council as liaisons with various agencies, committees, and municipalities in the Town.

The January Monthly Meeting:

Luke Dowsland's monthly report for the Highway Department reflected the change in seasons with increases in snowplowing, sanding, and brining highways. Members of the crew were called out over the holiday to deal with the effects of a Christmas day rainstorm, including clogged pipes and washouts on Horton and Preston Hill Road.

Area highway departments frequently assist one another with manpower and equipment as a way to contain costs. Members of the Town Crew recently assisted with snow removal in Earlville, for instance. More formal agreements for sharing services with Madison County are stipulated in resolutions that were approved by the Town Board at its January meeting.

Equipment maintenance and renewal is an ongoing consideration for the Highway Department, with repairs done in-house whenever possible. Dowsland reported that he has ordered a new truck that is budgeted in the Town's scheduled equipment replacement; he anticipates delivery in November.

Bookkeeper Brynley Wilcox detailed income for November and year-to-date, including payments from the County for snowplowing (annual budget of \$120,000), franchise fees from Charter

Communications (\$11,700 YTD), NYS Department of Transportation in support of local highways (\$132,000 YTD), FEMA's share (75 percent) of the cost of repairs on Borden Road (\$43,700), and proceeds from the sale of a Town dump truck to Hamilton Central School (\$54,000).

Wilcox responded to Board questions on year-end financial statements, and presented the Board with a five-year analysis of the fund balance, including significant items affecting the fund balance year to year.

Historian Jack Loop approached Town Clerk Sue Reymers about the possibility of storing back issues of the *Mid-York Weekly* in the Town Office Building when the Mid-York closes its Hamilton office. Reymers led the Council through a discussion of the project; the Town will store the files for the Historic Commission, pending digitization at some future time.

In his monthly report to the Council, Codes Enforcement Officer Mark Miller noted that he has solicited bids for work on a Willey Road property that is the subject for enforcement under a local law addressing unsafe buildings and structures. As proscribed in the local law, the Council reconvened a public hearing on the action and – in the absence of objection – approved remediation at the site.

Town Justice Donald Haight presented his annual written report to the Council, noting that 2020 was “a very different type of year” with changes brought about by the new Bail Reform law and Discovery law, a Traffic Diversion program initiated by the District Attorney, and interruptions resulting from COVID-19 requirements. The Town Court handled 157 cases in 2020, with total revenue of \$17,611.

Reporting for the Zoning Update Committee, Chris Rossi said that work continues with good progress on density issues. She hoped she might be able to forward a draft to the Council for consideration in another month, opening the possibility of hearings by mid-fall.

Rossi noted this is the time of year the Council normally reviews the comprehensive plan to gauge progress toward the goals stipulated there.

She also represents the Town in discussions with the Hamilton Climate Preparedness Working Group aimed at creating a municipal climate action plan. She hoped she might forward the Council a draft plan by February or March.

Peter Darby is the Council's liaison with the Southern Madison County Ambulance Corps (SOMAC). He briefed the Council on year-end statistics for SOMAC, noting there were fewer calls in 2020 – largely a function of the impact of coronavirus, with students being away in the spring and activity in the community being suppressed as residents sheltered at home. Thirty-eight student volunteers will return to help staff the service in the spring semester; SOMAC is raising money to renovate an adjacent building to serve as a dormitory for student volunteers when they are on call.

The Council discussed next steps for the 9-Mile Swamp access property it has recently acquired. An ad hoc committee of Eve Ann Shwartz, Darrell Griff and Luke Dowsland will walk the property and propose improvements and a timetable.

In her report on activities at the County level, Supervisor Shwartz said that the current focus is on setting up locations to provide coronavirus vaccinations. The Emergency Management department is taking over the distribution. They have the personnel but not the vaccines at this point, said Shwartz.

The next meeting of the Hamilton Town Council is scheduled at 6:30 Thursday, February 11, via Zoom, and is open to the public. Contact the Town Clerk (315-824-3380) for details.

Reported by Jim Leach for the Hamilton Town Council