

Notes from the August 2021 meeting of the Hamilton, NY, Town Board (8.12.21)

A special committee appointed by the Town Council recently concluded three years' work reviewing and recommending changes to the Town of Hamilton Zoning Law. The Town Council is studying the committee's recommendations in detail and will present the revised Code for public consideration and comment prior to its eventual passage in the near future.

Several residents of Spring Street addressed the Council at its regular monthly meeting August 12, and the residents' concerns illustrate the importance of keeping the Code up to date. A new owner has converted a former small Spring Street residence to a short-term rental property, which the Spring Street neighbors said has changed the character of their residential neighborhood. They described loud gatherings of transient, short-term renters disrupting the peace and creating traffic issues, and asked the Council to intervene.

During the informative give-and-take between Council and residents it became clear that the situation on Spring Street is representative of a wider, growing concern in the residential neighborhoods in the village and town as new owners – both resident and absentee – refurbish properties for short-term rental. Increasingly, it was said, those properties are advertised on the Internet through services such as *Airbnb*. As in many communities, Hamilton will need to adapt its code to address those issues with enforceable measures.

Following the public comments the Council turned to its agenda, which included regular reports from Highway Superintendent Luke Dowsland, Bookkeeper Brynley Wilcox, Town Clerk Sue Reymers, and Codes Enforcement Officer Mark Miller.

Notably in Wilcox's report covering the past month, the Town received \$55,000 in FEMA funds from New York State for storm damage in 2013. The Town also received \$94,000 from the State, the first half of funds that will come to the Town from the Federal government's American Rescue Plan. And the Town's second quarter sales tax revenues from Madison County were \$142,000; the Town budgeted cautiously for sales tax receipts during the pandemic, but consumer spending is exceeding expectations and creating a positive cash flow from sales taxes.

Wilcox and Town Supervisor Eve Ann Schwartz noted that the installation of LED lighting in the Town has reduced electric costs substantially.

Schwartz reported from her meeting with the board of the Southern Madison County Ambulance Corps that SOMAC has completed a successful audit of its books, and expressed appreciation for the assistance received from the Towns of Hamilton and Lebanon. In addition to direct financial support from the Town of Hamilton, the Town's highway department has been helping maintain SOMAC's fleet, greatly reducing repair costs.

Landscape architect Jocelyn Gavitt has been working with the Town on plans to develop a recently acquired seven-acre property along Wickwire Road in Hubbardsville adjacent to Sangerfield River. The site will be developed into a public park providing access to Nine-Mile Swamp. Interested

members of the general public are invited to a workshop at the site August 21 (rain date August 28) from 10:00 to Noon to participate in planning for the site with Gavitt and members of the Town Council.

New York State's newly passed cannabis law requires that the Town – like other municipalities – decide whether to allow licensed marijuana dispensaries to operate within the Town's jurisdiction. Members of the Council reviewed a legal briefing on the issue and held a preliminary discussion at their August meeting. The Council plans to vote on the matter at its September meeting (September 9 at 7:00 p.m.), and has scheduled that meeting at the Poolville Community Center to accommodate any members of the public who wish to comment prior to the Council taking action.

Town Clerk Reymers said the Town Office will be open from 10:00 until Noon on Saturdays September 11, 18 and 25, especially for the sale of hunting licenses. The Highway Department is hosting a clean-up day September 25.

Supervisor Shwartz reviewed the County's plan for allocating the \$6.7 million in its first payment from the American Rescue Plan.

The Town Council has changed its monthly meeting time to 7:00 p.m. on the second Thursday, and will meet next on September 9 at Poolville Community Center.

Jim Leach for the Hamilton Town Board