

Notes from the May 2021 meeting of the Hamilton, NY, Town Council (5.13.21)

It's true for the Hamilton Town Council, as it is for most legislative bodies, that the time spent actually voting to enact laws and policies is brief compared to the time spent taking stock of conditions in the Town and determining what new laws and actions might be needed, how current laws and policies are working, and how the Town's activities are funded.

That was the case at the regular monthly meeting May 13, when the Council convened in person for the first time since the onset of the coronavirus pandemic. Of special note at the May meeting were zoning issues and regulations; funding and oversight for the Southern Madison County Ambulance Corps (SOMAC); the newly acquired access to Nine Mile Swamp; cemetery maintenance; PCD's grant assistance for public initiatives; and the ongoing effects of the pandemic on government funding at all levels.

Zoning ordinances governing large public gatherings have been a recent focus of the Council's attention. John and Cathy Oates of Poolville were the latest to address the Council on that concern during open public comments at the outset of Thursday's meeting. Chris Rossi is chair of a citizen committee that has been meeting for months to recommend changes to the Town's Zoning Laws; the Council received the committee's report Thursday and will begin a months-long review of the recommendations prior to a public hearing and eventual passage of amendments to the zoning rules. Mark Miller enforces the Town's codes; in addition to his usual accounting of permits issued, Miller's report to the Council in May included updates with photos on enforcement of recently passed laws affecting public health and safety.

Some years ago, the Town committed to funding and oversight of SOMAC to ensure ambulance coverage for Town residents. Council member Peter Darby is liaison to SOMAC, and the Council reviews SOMAC operations monthly. Neighboring communities' growing reliance on SOMAC is a concern, and members of the Council will reach out to address that issue.

The Town recently acquired property in Hubbardsville that provides access to Nine Mile Swamp. PCD is assisting Council representatives as they plan for the best use of that property. Deb Hotaling, whose family owns property adjoining the site, offered helpful history on the public's use of the site over the years.

Shari Taylor is the Council's liaison to the Earlville for Earlville effort. She reported on a recent informational meeting between Earlville's volunteer fire department and advocates for a new skate park, children's park, and walking trails.

The Council received Luke Dowsland's monthly report from the Highway Department, and reviewed Brynley Wilcox's monthly budget analysis (no surprises). Town Clerk Sue Reymers said that the Town will once again have the services of a summer intern from Colgate. Reymers' monthly report provides insights into the many details involved in keeping day-to-day Town operations functioning smoothly (no mean feat).

Town Supervisor Eve Ann Shwartz said the County continues to see increases in sales tax revenues. The County is allocating more funds to mental health efforts, especially to address issues that surfaced during the pandemic.

The May meeting of the Council was its first in the new Town Hall as a hybrid (in-person and Zoom). The next monthly meeting will convene at 6:30 pm, June 10. Check the Town's website for details.

Jim Leach for the Town Council