

Notes from the September 2020 meeting of the Hamilton, NY, Town Board (9.10.20)

Though Town boards and committees continue to meet via Zoom during the pandemic, the Town Office has recently moved into its newly configured quarters at 38 Milford Street and resumed normal business hours: Mondays through Fridays 9-1 and 2-4. At the September meeting of the Town Board, Supervisor Eve Ann Shwartz said the Town will delay a ribbon cutting until the public can safely gather in person, and the community meeting room will remain closed for the time being. But other Town business is being conducted on a walk-in basis, mask required. Town Clerk Sue Reymers gave special thanks to the Town crew, Town staff, and bookkeeper Brynley Wilcox for their efforts during the move.

The September regular meeting of the Town of Hamilton Board, held via Zoom, opened with public comments and a request for a moratorium on the issuance of special permits during the coronavirus pandemic. At issue generally was the question of accessibility to board discussions and public hearings during the pandemic, when most meetings are being held over the Internet. The discussion also turned to the responsibility and capacity for enforcing regulations that govern public health and organized gatherings. Though no specific action was taken, the board resolved to refer the matter to the Planning Board and Zoning Board of Appeals, and to continue discussion at a later date, preferably at a time when the public can attend in person.

Chris Rossi provided brief updates on the Zoning Update Committee, which she heads, and the Hamilton Climate Preparedness Working Group, where she represents the Town. Consideration of housing density is the current focus of the Zoning Update Committee. The Town and Village are working together on a Climate Action Plan, one goal of which is a 30 percent reduction in greenhouse gas production by 2030, and a total reduction by 2050, Rossi said.

Highway Superintendent Luke Dowsland reported on the Town crew's efforts over the past month, including highway repairs and paving, tree removal, and preparing for winter by stockpiling sand. The Town's planned rotation of snow plowing equipment calls for a replacement truck to be purchased in 2021. Given the budget uncertainties created by COVID, the Board discussed the replacement schedule at length and agreed to wait until 2021 to make a final determination on purchase of the new truck.

Bookkeeper Wilcox reported that the budget committee held its initial meeting September 4 and is looking for ways to keep the 2021 budget "flat compared to 2020," especially in light of uncertain revenues from sales tax, casino income, and state aid. The budget timeline calls for the Board to review the tentative budget at a 6:30 p.m. meeting September 30. The Board set October 28 at 6:30 for a public hearing on the Preliminary Budget, with the expectation that the budget will be adopted by the Board at its regularly scheduled meeting November 12.

The Board scheduled a public hearing October 8 at 6:30 p.m. on a resolution establishing a local law that overrides the tax levy limit established by general municipal law. Supervisor Shwartz explained that the measure is "precautionary"; it will be rescinded if the budget stays within the established limit.

Fluctuating interest rates are affecting the Town's accounts; Wilcox is managing those funds for the greatest returns.

Peter Darby, liaison to Southern Madison County Ambulance Corps, said that Colgate students are returning to the SOMAC volunteer ranks.

Mary Dinski, liaison to the Partnership for Community Development, reported on PCD's assistance to 'Gate Grubs, a service that is delivering meals from local restaurants to Colgate students. She said that PCD is considering a name change for its business incubator (currently TIA, for Thought Into Action).

Shari Taylor said that the Earlville for Earlville project is soliciting responses to a survey of residents' hopes for the project.

Supervisor Shwartz said that August sales tax revenues in the county were down approximately 10 percent.

Regular meetings of the Town Council are open to the public. The next meeting is scheduled October 8 at 6:30 p.m.

Submitted by Jim Leach