

Notes from the Hamilton Town Council September Meeting

The September Town of Hamilton meeting opened with discussion about the Town Office project. Residents delivered a petition requesting a public referendum (vote) on whether to move forward with the project as described in the recent public notice. Supervisor Shwartz reviewed the three-year timeline of the project for those who have not been actively following its progress online, in the press, or in person at Town meetings. The Town Office had been located in the old office space on Broad Street for close to 100 years. The space did not provide privacy, was not handicap accessible, could barely fit people for meetings, and had no storage for Town records. It also occupied prime retail space. Looking for something that would meet needs of the community, the Town purchased the train depot building on Milford St. Unfortunately, it became clear that the costs to renovate that space would far exceed the \$500,000 estimated and approved for the work. After much discussion and with input from the local historical community, the Town opted to take the building down and create something smaller and more cost efficient, while maintaining the look of the old building. The new building would be handicapped accessible, have adequate space for the clerk's office and town staff to conduct business, a large room for Town meetings (also for community events), offices that ensure privacy when meeting with the assessor or CEO, and secure storage for Town records.

Budget officer Darby provided information on the costs of the project, which would be funded through a variety of sources and paid off over time. The estimate includes purchase of the property, architect fees, legal fees, and filing fees, as well as construction costs. Funding includes a \$400,000 bond (a loan for a municipality) that will be paid off by the Town over 10 years. The Town has three grants, which total \$200,000, to apply to the costs. The remaining balance of the money will come from the Town's existing fund balance, which will be gradually rebuilt over the next 10 years. This current plan is projected at a total cost not to exceed \$1,100,000. The resulting cost to the taxpayer will be approximately \$28 per year per \$100,000 home value. That means if your house is worth \$100,000 your Town taxes will increase \$28 for this project in 2018.

Meeting attendees posed concerns about lack of information about the project and the costs to the taxpayers. A discussion followed about the best way to get information to the community. The Town does post notes and minutes on our webpage and utilizes Facebook, NextDoor Hamilton at times, and publishes regular articles in the local newspapers. We also welcome calls to the Town office and encourage people to attend our meetings. Suggestions were made about alternative building options, including modular homes and renting. The Town is looking into these possibilities and others to bring costs down and to improve communications with residents. The referendum will be held in November, with an informational public meeting hosted before then. Details to come.

After the public comment portion, the meeting turned to updates on regular Town business. The Town is soliciting bids for fuel oil, with postings in the Oneida Dispatch and Mid-York Weekly. Bids will be awarded in October. Councilman Holcomb shared SOMAC's latest report, showing an increase in ambulance trips and transfers.

Bruce Moseley, Partnership for Community Development (PCD) chair, reported that the group has facilitated the award of three major grants to local businesses to date this year, and are working on another for FOJO Coffee. The overall Community

Development Block Grant awards total \$441,000 creating 24 full time jobs in the local community. The PCD is also involved in improving local trails and providing housing grants.

The Town of Hamilton has been officially designated a Clean Energy Community by NYSERDA. Many thanks to Colgate University for their \$10,000 contribution towards the purchase of an Electrical Vehicle (EV) charging station and to the Village of Hamilton for their cooperation and help in installing the charging station in the Village Parking lot behind the Hamilton Library. This timely support from the University and the Village helped the Town achieve this designation. The Town is now eligible for a \$50,000 grant, which is currently destined to defray the cost of the new Town office.

Supervisor Shwartz shared news from the County. The Board of Supervisors is contacting the Public Service Commission (PSC) with complaints about the bad phone and internet service provided by Frontier Communications in Lebanon and Hubbardsville. The proposed countywide plastic bag ban has been revised and another public hearing will be held before the Board votes on it later this year.

With growing concerns about extreme weather events New York State is sponsoring an emergency preparedness event on Tuesday October 3 at 7pm at Hamilton Central School. All are invited to attend.

The Hamilton Town Council meets on the second Thursday of the month at the Village Courthouse in the Village of Hamilton at 6:30 pm. **Our next meeting is October 12.** We invite and encourage you to join us. For more info visit www.townofhamiltonny.org

Submitted by Chris Rossi, for the Hamilton Town Council