

Notes from the April 2020 meeting of the Hamilton, NY, Town Council (4.9.20)

A novel coronavirus has changed the way the world goes about its business. And so the Hamilton Town Council held its April 2020 meeting in the ether, Council members, department heads, staff and visitors attending online, via Zoom, their likenesses projected in a patchwork on computer screens in remote kitchens and home offices.

How to adapt in ways that keep the Town's essential processes in motion while also protecting citizens and Town employees from contracting the pervasive virus was the thread that wound its way through three hours of reports and discussion.

Kyle Sylvester, head paramedic and director of operations for SOMAC, the Southern Madison County Ambulance Corps, was just in from an ambulance call. He said more than 40 local residents stepped up to volunteer as drivers and health-care providers, replacing the Colgate student volunteers who returned home when the University converted to on-line classes mid semester. The volume of ambulance calls, which dipped by two-thirds when the community first sheltered at home, has returned to the usual three to four calls per day, though calls now are more likely to relate to the virus. Sylvester detailed the process of sterilizing equipment and vehicles after each call. Maintaining supplies of personal protective equipment (PPE) – masks, gloves, protective suits etc. for SOMAC staff – is a constant effort. Sylvester thanked the community for its support; the Council members praised SOMAC's effort.

What effect the shutdown will have on the Town budget is a question that can't yet be answered. Bookkeeper Brynley Wilcox presented the Council a spreadsheet of variables such as sales tax revenues, the cost of contractual services (*e.g.* legal, cleaning, maintenance), the duration of closure and its effect on scheduled events, and one-time budget adjustments that might become necessary. "The impact on the budget will become more clear as we progress," said Town Supervisor Eve Ann Shwartz.

Given the anticipated breadth and depth of economic uncertainty, the Council voted to postpone the reassessment of properties in the Town, a project that had been planned for 2021.

Highway Superintendent Luke Dowsland and his crew are among those sidelined by "stay-at-home" orders. Dowsland reported on the crew's work before the shutdown, and said that he and some of the crew volunteered as SOMAC drivers while they were furloughed. The Council discussed social-distancing protocols and projects for which the crew might be brought back to work, but delayed taking action for a week. Dowsland has identified three roads for resurfacing in 2020 (Morse, Bonney Hill, and Rhoades at a total cost estimated below budget.

Work on the Town Hall ceased in response to New York State's emergency response to the virus. The Council voted to designate the Town Hall an "essential project," which will allow a small team to execute select change orders while staying within State guidelines.

Town Clerk Sue Reymers and her deputy, Elisa Robertson are working from home to continue the flow of work related to maintaining the Town's accounts, issuing and renewing licenses, responding to queries, communicating Town actions, and supporting the work of committees and boards. Even activities as routine as handling the mail are complicated by the coronavirus, which requires wearing gloves and sanitization to avoid spreading the disease. Adapting to the crisis, Code Enforcement Officer Mark Miller sometimes reviews photographs in lieu of field inspections on some construction projects.

Guest Chris Rossi reported that the Climate Preparedness Working Group had resubmitted the Town's application to be designated a Climate Smart Community. She is optimistic about success. She also reported on progress in the work of the Zoning Update Committee, which she chairs.

Council member Mary Dinski reported on the PCD's efforts to assist small businesses affected by the coronavirus changes. PCD is also assisting with grant-writing in support of the Earlville for Earlville project.

The next regular monthly meeting of the Council is scheduled Thursday, May 14 at 6:30. Consult the Town's website (<https://www.townofhamiltonny.org/>) for details.

Submitted by Jim Leach (not a member of the Town Council)