

## Notes from the July 2020 meeting of the Hamilton, NY, Town Council (7.9.20)

The July regular meeting of the Hamilton Town Board – conducted via Zoom due to the ongoing coronavirus pandemic – opened with a public hearing regarding a proposed local law dealing with unsafe buildings and structures in the Town. Though no members of the public appeared in person at the hearing, a letter from Deborah and Karen Hotaling was read into the record detailing the authors’ “strong disagreement” with the proposed law, and stating “There are already procedures in place to condemn a structure and protect the community from a dangerous or nuisance property.”

In the discussion that ensued, Town Supervisor Eve Ann Shwartz explained that the Town drafted the law to establish the authority to act when buildings are found to be unsafe. She said the Town has asked owners to address unsafe conditions at their properties in the past, but that some owners have elected to ignore those requests because the Town lacks enforcement authority. Without the law, said Shwartz, “We don’t have the tools to do anything about these unsafe structures.”

Councilor Darrell Griff described the process established by the law, which stipulates a formal inspection by the Codes Enforcement Officer or Town Engineer and a subsequent written report to the Town Board. In cases other than emergencies that present a “clear and imminent danger,” the Town Board’s action on the written report is subject to a hearing requiring five days’ notice to the owner. Noting the narrow focus of the law, Griff said it addresses concerns for public health and safety exclusively.

Following lengthy discussion by the Board, the law was adopted unanimously.

In other business the Board learned that mortgage tax receipts from the sale of houses in the town are substantially ahead of budget for the first half of the fiscal year. Further, since February when the Town began investing its funds in a AAA-rated pool with other NYS municipalities, interest earnings are up three to four times over those of earlier years. Bookkeeper Brynley Wilcox reported that sales tax receipts have been on schedule for the first half of the year, and that third- and fourth-quarter receipts will reflect the pandemic’s effect on business in the Town.

Highway Superintendent Luke Dowsland said that the Town is approximately \$100,000 to the good on its expenditure of NYS highway improvement funds, owing largely to work performed by members of the Town crew rather than being contracted out. Board discussion centered on how those funds might be apportioned to help mitigate the pandemic’s anticipated impact on the budget.

Supervisor Shwartz said the report of Code Enforcement Officer Mark Miller reflected “a busy June,” and Councilor Peter Darby noted that Miller has been a “huge help on the construction of the Town Office Building,” in addition to the ongoing work of his position. The Zoning Update Committee will meet with the Town Board July 16 to complete work on housing density for the updated zoning law.

Town Clerk Sue Reymers’ report reflected the many and varied responsibilities of her office, including writing and managing grants, animal-licensing, receiving gifts-in-kind, overseeing the

reopening of public services during the pandemic, and coordinating efforts to have the new Town Office Building open by the end of August.

Providing youth activities in the summer of coronavirus presents a challenge, and Councilor Mary Dinski said that Renee Merkt is doing an “awesome” job coordinating a virtual summer program in Hamilton that has enrolled 100 young people working from home. The Town helps underwrite that programming. Councilor Shari Taylor, who is also the librarian for Earlville, reported on summer reading programs at the Earlville and Hamilton libraries, and said the two librarians are collaborating to provide services for youth in Lebanon.

The July 9 meeting of the Town Council came the day after a virtual town hall for the community in which Colgate described its plans for reopening in fall 2020. The Town Board’s extended discussion of Colgate’s planned reopening reflected the broad range of comments that members of the Board have heard from their constituents.

Regular meetings of the Town Council are open to the public. The next meeting is scheduled August 13 at 6:30 p.m., via Zoom.

*Submitted by Jim Leach*