

Notes from the August 2020 meeting of the Hamilton, NY, Town Council (8.13.20)

As it has since April, the Town Board of the Town of Hamilton convened for its monthly meeting on August 13 via Zoom as a precaution against the ongoing coronavirus. By the time of the Board's next regular monthly meeting (September 10), the Town will have moved into the new Town Office Building at the former railway depot on Milford Street. The Board reviewed the myriad details involved with completing that project and relocating the Town's operations.

Chris Rossi, who leads the committee recommending updates to the Town's zoning regulations, gave a positive report of her committee's review for the Town Board and the Zoning Board of Appeals. It was "a great start and a good conversation" with no unexpected reactions, Rossi said. Town Supervisor Eve Ann Shwartz suggested that the committee wait until groups can safely convene in person to present its recommendations to the public.

Rossi, who also represents the Town on the Hamilton Climate Preparedness Working Group (HCPWG), said that the Town and Village are beginning work on Climate Action Plans that will guide both municipal operations and community efforts in the future. Colgate is a partner in those efforts, which have already resulted in the Town and Village meeting New York State's rigid requirements for certification as Climate Smart Communities.

Coronavirus is affecting the economy in virtually every sector worldwide. In the Town that impact results in reduced revenues from sales tax at the same time that it threatens the State's capability to fund programs that support municipalities.

One of those State programs is CHIPS – the Consolidate Highway Improvement Program – that helps fund maintenance and improvement of the Town's roadways. Led by Highway Superintendent Luke Dowsland and members of the Highway Committee, Peter Darby and Derrell Griff, the Council discussed at length how best to allocate its remaining CHIPS money and other budgeted highway funds to meet the Town's most pressing needs into 2021. That includes maintenance and renewal of the Town's roadways (resurfacing and drainage as well as snow removal), maintenance and scheduled replacement of highway equipment, and repairs and improvements at the Town Garage.

Based on sales tax receipts for the first three quarters of 2020, Bookkeeper Brynley Wilcox projected the possibility that total sales tax receipts for the year could fall roughly two percent or \$8,400 below budget. She and Highway Superintendent Dowsland identified \$8,000 that can be recovered in budgeted costs for snow removal, and the Board unanimously approved a resolution to make that budget adjustment. The Town's investment in the federally-insured NYCLASS investment pool continues to return interest at a rate more than twice that of previous investments.

In addition to her regular duties as Town Clerk – all of which are complicated by coronavirus protocols – Sue Reymers has been managing the details of the move to the new Office Building, a role that Supervisor Shwartz described as "quarterback" as she praised Reymers. Reymers in turn credited Dowsland and Codes Office Mark Miller for their help throughout the building process.

Darby, the Board's liaison with SOMAC, said that the ambulance corps' revenues are up while expenditures are down during the pandemic, reflecting both an increase in support and fewer calls. Shwartz said that condition will contribute to building SOMAC's reserve fund.

Mary Dinski is the Board liaison to the Partnership for Community Development. She reported on a consolidation of efforts by PCD and the Hamilton Business Alliance, including support for a delivery service that will make local restaurants' services more accessible during the pandemic. PCD is developing signage to encourage safe practices in shops and restaurants. Shwartz said that a regular meeting of PCD's "partners" (mayor, supervisor and Colgate president) provided an opportunity to discuss Colgate's plans for students' return to campus.

Shari Taylor reported on plans for a survey of the community in support of the Earlville for Earlville project.

The Board gave unanimous approval to: a Policy Against Harassment and Discrimination; a Schedule for Records Retention; and a resolution scheduling property reappraisals for 2022.

Regular meetings of the Town Council are open to the public. The next meeting is scheduled September 10 at 6:30 p.m.

Submitted by Jim Leach