

Notes from the October 2021 meeting of the Hamilton, NY, Town Board (10.14.21)

Convening online via Zoom, the Hamilton Town Council opened its October meeting with public comment on three topics:

- The speed limit on NYS Rt 12 near Larkin Road;
- A proposed local law that would allow the Town to override the State's two percent tax levy increase;
- A moratorium on seasonal accommodations.

Cathy and Nancy Schmidt, representing petitioners seeking a lower speed limit on Rt 12 near Larkin Road, described the dangerous conditions created by speeders in that area. Town Supervisor Eve Ann Schwartz – sympathetic to the concerns – explained that the Town's best options are to request that the state transportation department conduct a speed study (which could potentially lead to the state lowering the limit), and also to request increased enforcement in that area by New York State Police. The Council adopted a resolution to request the speed study.

If municipalities anticipate that increases in the costs of maintaining required services may exceed the state's two percent ceiling for tax increases, passing a local law in advance allows the municipality to override the state limit. Schwartz explained that inflation alone can sometimes push budgets past the two percent limit, compounded by increased costs in areas such as ambulance service. The Council introduced proposed override legislation at its September meeting, but after the public hearing tabled the law at the October meeting because it appears the budget increase may be kept below the two percent ceiling. Schwartz said the Council is "making hard choices," which will be described at the budget public hearing prior to the budget vote. If the override legislation is needed, it can be enacted in November.

Regarding the moratorium on seasonal housing, Schwartz said the Council had received seven letters and emails, all in support of a moratorium that will allow more time to consider changes to the code dealing with short-term rentals by absentee owners (e.g., VRBO and Airbnb). Also at the meeting, four members of the public spoke in favor of the moratorium, including a land-use lawyer who said the issues associated with the rentals – such as noise and traffic disrupting residential neighborhoods – are prominent in communities across the nation. Schwartz said the Council will be looking at how other towns are adapting as it considers changes in the zoning law. The Council voted unanimously to adopt the moratorium, which Schwartz had said in September would be narrowly focused and would not affect properties within the villages of Hamilton and Earlville.

In other business, the board heard regular reports from Highway Superintendent Luke Dowsland, Town Clerk Sue Reymers, and Bookkeeper Brynley Wilcox. Schwartz said the Town's highway committee met and is soliciting bids for a new roof and is considering expansion of the Town garage. The Town anticipates receiving approximately \$189,000 from the American Rescue Plan -- funds that may be used to address COVID-related expenses as well as a limited number of infrastructure expenditures. One such expense

will be improvements to a meeting room in the new Town Office Building to stream live events over the Internet.

Shwartz and Council member Peter Darby detailed ongoing discussions with Southern Madison County Ambulance Corps, where issues such as staffing requirements are steadily driving up costs. Unanticipated increases in sales tax revenues will help offset the increase in ambulance expenses this year, but the Council is concerned about sustaining the service over the longer term. The Town of Hamilton is working with SOMAC and Community Memorial Hospital to undertake a feasibility study to consider possible solutions. Shwartz and Darby praised Colgate's involvement in SOMAC notably in the number of students who volunteer as EMTs and drivers which help to sustain the service.

Chris Rossi, the Town's representative to the Hamilton Climate Preparedness Working Group, reported that the local group is preparing a response to the State's Climate Action Plan – the scale of the plan can create issues for smaller communities. Rossi said the Town may consider developing a wish list of actions that could be supported by HCPWG.

Council member Shari Taylor reported that the Earlville for Earlville Group has engaged architect Jocelyn Gavitt to develop plans for the Fayette Street Park. The group is soliciting public reactions, and the Partnership for Community Development is looking for grant funding.

The Council set public hearings for fire contracts and budget adoption at 7:00 p.m., October 25 at the Poolville Community Center. The next regular meeting of the Council will be November 11 at 7:00 p.m.; check the Town website for details (<https://www.townofhamiltonny.org/>)

Jim Leach for the Town Board