

Notes from the March 2022 meeting of the Hamilton, NY, Town Board (3.10.22)

The March monthly meeting of the Hamilton Town Council focused primarily on updates of ongoing projects.

A major undertaking for the Town is the re-evaluation of properties in the Village and Town of Hamilton along with portions of the Village of Earlville. Assessor Rochelle Harris has scheduled several days where property owners can meet with her to discuss their new assessments, Town Clerk Sue Reymers, whose office has been handling the scheduling details, said that Harris has already met with more than 300 property owners, accommodating everyone who has made a request. A side benefit: the Town has been able to distribute COVID test kits to those meeting at the Town Office Building.

In response to a question, Town Supervisor Eve Ann Shwartz explained that Madison County apportions sales tax revenues on the basis of municipalities' total taxable assessment. This round of re-evaluation has increased the total property values in the Villages and Town by roughly \$92 million. While the new number is certain to change as evaluations are questioned and reconsidered, "the silver lining," said Shwartz, is that the Town and Villages will benefit from increased shares of sales tax revenues.

Shwartz reported that the Town had hosted a second public meeting with the landscape architect designing a small park, parking area, and improved access at the Hubbardsville launch site for 9-Mile Swamp. The meeting attracted about 30 people and the architect collected spoken and written comments, which were generally positive. Three members of the public addressed the Council's Thursday evening meeting, urging the Council to reconsider the plan or delay implementation based on either design questions or economic concerns. Shwartz recorded the comments and said everyone should be heard. She also said that the plan needs to be reviewed by the Department of Environmental Conservation and the Office of Historic Preservation before construction estimates can be solicited. She added that other priorities – including the re-evaluation and the beginning of planning for a new town garage – have currently taken precedence over park planning.

Southern Madison County Ambulance Corps (SOMAC) is a subject of constant review by the Town, which provides financial support for the essential service. Both equipment needs and staffing are ongoing and expensive concerns. A Town liaison attends regular SOMAC board meetings, and the Town Council reviews SOMAC's call sheets monthly. Bright spots are the volunteer engagement of Colgate students on SOMAC's staff, the savings realized from having SOMAC equipment maintained by the Town Highway Department, and the implementation of a new Madison County "fly car," which is relieving some of the demand. The challenges of maintaining reliable emergency transportation affect many small municipalities locally and across the state.

Chris Rossi represents Hamilton at meetings of the Hamilton Climate Preparedness Working Group. She reported that the Town co-sponsored a Heat-Smart presentation describing alternative forms of energy-efficient home heating. Fifteen persons enrolled in the program; if five or more of those persons install new heating systems, the Town will qualify for a \$5,000 grant from the State as part of the Climate Smart Communities program (CSC).

The State is expected to adopt, this year, code revisions requiring more energy efficient construction. Towns who adopt those "stretch code" revisions before the State mandate can be rewarded by grants of \$10,000 to \$20,000. Cautious of what the new restrictions will mean to

homeowners, contractors and code enforcers, the Council is studying the issues carefully before taking action. Rossi said that Hamilton has accumulated more CSC points than any other central New York Community.

Bookkeeper Brynley Wilcox's report included the receipt of a \$50,000 grant from the State to support the construction of the new Town Office Building. Schwartz said the latest grant brings to \$150,000 the total of grants received to date in support of the roughly \$1 million project.

Highway Superintendent Luke Dowsland had researched a used chipper, available from the County, that would improve the Town's efficiency and capabilities. The Council authorized purchase of the chipper for \$10,000; comparable used chippers range from \$20,000 to \$70,000 in the current market.

In response to requests from homeowners in the area, the Council had asked the State to review the speed limit on Route 12 in the area near the Larkin Road intersection. The Department of Transportation reported back in February to say, "...our investigation determined that a lower speed limit is not appropriate at this time."

In her report on activities at the County level, Schwartz said that sales tax receipts continue to track upward – a good sign for municipal budgets.

The Council's next regular meeting is scheduled April 14. Visit the Town website for details (<https://www.townofhamiltonny.gov/>)

Jim Leach for the Town Council