

Notes from the September 2021 meeting of the Hamilton, NY, Town Board (9.9.21)

The Hamilton Town Council moved its September meeting to the Poolville Community Center to accommodate public comments in advance of taking a position on the Marijuana Regulation and Taxation Act. Several members of the public addressed the marijuana act; others addressed the Council about its proposed moratorium on seasonal accommodations.

Of the half dozen citizens who spoke about the marijuana act, five were in favor of the Town opting in, with two of those emphasizing the potential tax revenues for municipalities that opt in (those that opt out of having dispensaries in their communities will not share in marijuana tax revenues). One commenter spoke neither in favor nor against but urged further study of tax questions.

Town Supervisor Eve Ann Shwartz thanked those in attendance for participating in the discussion and, noting the December 31 deadline for opting out, said the Council felt that it should make its position official. Later in the agenda, in fact, the Council voted its unanimous approval for opting into the act, ensuring the Town will share in tax revenues received by dispensaries operating within the Town.

In advance of the September meeting, the Council had announced that it was considering a moratorium on seasonal accommodations. Shwartz said the action was prompted by community comments at the August meeting drawing the Council's attention to a specific case that it thought exemplified a wider issue. As the Town is nearing the end of a three-year-long process of reviewing and revising its zoning laws, the Council felt it wise to pause and study the issue before incorporating regulations in the new Code, she said. She also said the moratorium was not something that could be "done with impunity," and said the moratorium would focus narrowly on short-term rentals by absentee landlords and would not affect properties within the villages of Hamilton and Earlville (which are governed by their own zoning regulations).

Shwartz said the law establishing the moratorium would be subject to a full public hearing at the Council's October meeting prior to enactment. She offered those who wished to speak to the issue a minute each to register their comments at the September meeting. Three citizens spoke to specific aspects of the issue. Shwartz encouraged others with concerns or comments to direct them to members of the Council before the October meeting. The Council unanimously approved the resolution introducing the proposed Law that would establish the moratorium if enacted in October (full text available on the Town of Hamilton website).

In other business, the Council opened bids from four fuel providers and awarded the Town contract for the year to Broedel Fuel Group.

The Council unanimously approved the Town's 2021 Municipal Climate Action Plan, which will be available on the website soon, establishing goals and initiatives for reducing greenhouse gas and continuing work toward the Town's pledge to become a "Climate Smart Community." Former Council member Chris Rossi leads the Town's representatives to the Hamilton Climate Preparedness Working Group, a State-certified cooperative effort that also includes members from the Village of Hamilton and Colgate.

The Council voted its approval of a timeline for reviewing and adopting the Town budget, which will include a public hearing on the preliminary budget at a date to be announced on or before November 4. As it does each year, the Council introduced a proposed local law that will allow for overriding the State tax levy limit, if necessary, to allow the Town to pay for the regularly increasing cost of essential expenses such as ambulance services, health insurance and retirement contributions. A public hearing on the Tax Cap Override Law will be held on October 14, 2021.

The Council received monthly reports from Highway Superintendent Luke Dowsland, Town Clerk Sue Reymers, and Bookkeeper Brynley Wilcox. The cooperation among area highway departments is often apparent in Dowsland's monthly reports; Sherburne, Brookfield and Georgetown all benefited from Hamilton's assistance in August - help that's certain to be repaid when Hamilton has future needs. As when the Town services SOMAC's vehicles, the savings to taxpayers are apparent.

Reymers noted that NYS Department of State reported a 4.6 percent drop in the Town's population over the past decade, from 6,690 in 2010 to 6,379 in the 2020 recent census.

Council member Shari Taylor said the Earlville for Earlville group has scheduled meetings October 16 and November 16 to invite input from the public. Shwartz reported an enthusiastic response from the public with about 25 people turning out August 21 for a give and take at the site of the proposed Nine Mile Swamp project.

Due to the surge in coronavirus cases locally, the October 14 meeting of the Town Council - including public comments on the seasonal accommodations moratorium - will be held via Zoom. Watch the Town website for details - www.TownofHamiltonNY.org.

Jim Leach for the Hamilton Town Board