

Notes from the November 2020 meeting of the Hamilton, NY, Town Board (11.12.20)

At their regular monthly meeting November 12, members of the Hamilton Town Council voted unanimously to adopt the Town's 2021 operating budget. Totaling \$2,026,068 for the coming year, the Town's budget is the product of a months-long development process that was complicated this year by the financial uncertainties caused by the coronavirus pandemic.

Somewhat surprisingly, Bookkeeper Brynley Wilcox reported that the Town's sales tax receipts for 2020 to date are 1.6 percent above sales tax receipts for the comparable period in 2019, before the pandemic. Town Supervisor Eve Ann Shwartz reported that sales tax receipts in Madison County as a whole were up approximately 2 percent through September, with fourth-quarter sales taxes still to be determined.

The financial side effects of the pandemic have had an impact on New York State's support for municipalities. That impact is reflected locally in a 20 percent reduction in State funds such as PAVE-NY and EWR (Extreme Winter Recovery), which support the repair and maintenance of local highways.

Those limitations notwithstanding, Highway Superintendent Luke Dowsland reported an active month for the highway crew, including both fall maintenance and preparations for the coming winter.

The Council approved a resolution to secure and repair a neglected private property in the Town that poses health and safety concerns for its neighbors. As stipulated in a recently-enacted Town law, the owners will be notified and the Town will schedule a hearing November 30 prior to taking action. Costs associated with the remediation will be billed to the property owner.

Southern Madison County Ambulance Corps (SOMAC) has been averaging fewer calls during the pandemic, owing largely to Colgate University closing during the spring and restricting activities in the fall. Still, activity is trending back toward normal with 85 and 88 calls the past two months. SOMAC's projected losses – which are made up in part from the Town's budget – are expected to be less than projected: a welcome development. In his report to the Council, SOMAC liaison Peter Darby included the account of an emergency procedure that saved the life of a local worker who had gone into cardiac arrest.

Councilor Mary Dinski, liaison to the Partnership for Community Development, said PCD is launching another round of grants to support first-time home buyers, as well as a USDA-sponsored grant in support of rural business technology. Councilor Shari Taylor said the Earlville for Earlville project is proceeding in the design stage with plans for a skateboard park, playground and trail system. PCD will help seek grants to support construction.

Clerk Sue Reymers said the Town's new website is up and functioning at www.townofhamilton.org, and encouraged citizens to visit the site and offer comments. Business is brisk at the new Town Office Building and patrons are observing pandemic protocols. The Council approved a temporary change in

hours at the Town Office Building: on Fridays through April 30 the office will be open by appointment only, allowing staff to catch up on work that was disrupted by both the pandemic and the move to the new facility.

Chris Rossi, who chairs the committee considering revisions in the Town's zoning regulations, reported progress on issues relating to housing density. Rossi is also the Town's representative to the Hamilton Climate Preparedness Working Group (HCPWG); she said work continues on developing a climate action plan. She also said she had been part of good meeting, organized by Colgate students, with a group in the Finger Lakes that supports energy projects for low-income homeowners (www.fingerlakesclimatefund.org); it might be a model for local consideration.

The Town Council's next meeting is scheduled December 10 (via Zoom until further notice). Contact Town Clerk Sue Reymers at the Town Office (315-824-3380) for details.

Reported for the Town Board by Jim Leach