

**Town of Ancram
Town Board
Regular Meeting
August 18, 2011**

Present: Supervisor Arthur Bassin Councilman James Miller
 Councilman John MacArthur Councilwoman Madeline Israel
 Deputy Town Clerk Ruth Wittlinger
 Highway Superintendent James MacArthur

Absent: Councilman Chris Thomas Town Clerk Monica Cleveland

The Regular Board Meeting of the Ancram Town Board was called to order by Supervisor Bassin at 7:00pm with a salute to the flag.

A motion was made by Councilwoman Israel and seconded by Supervisor Bassin to approve the July 18, 2011 Public Hearing minutes and have them placed on the record. Motion carried.

A motion was made by Councilwoman Israel and seconded by Supervisor Bassin to approve the July 21, 2011 Town Board meeting minutes and have them placed on the record. Motion carried.

SUPERVISORS REPORT

July Financial Report: Revenues and expenses continue on budget for the first seven months of 2011, in both the Highway Department and Town Government. Ancram's total spending for the first seven months was \$905,000, including \$98,000 for a plow truck and a front end loader for the Highway Department. Cash in the bank as of 7/30/11 was \$981,000. Major financial commitments over the next few months include the conversion of the Milk Factory building to a salt shed (about \$65,000) and the purchase of another used plow truck (\$25,000). Based on forecast revenue and spending for the rest of the year, we still expect we will end the year with about \$500,000 in the bank.

Town Projects, Activities & Issues

1. **Zoning Revisions:** We will schedule a public hearing on the second package of amendments to the 1972 Zoning Ordinance for 9/12 at 7 pm, and will then consider the proposed amendments for adoption at the 9/15 Board meeting.
2. **Summer Kid's Camp:** The six week Ancram Kid's Camp ended last week. By all reports, it was a fabulous success, and financially broke even.
3. **2012 Budget Process:** I will file the tentative 2012 budget with the Town Clerk before 8/18, and will have copies for you at the 8/18 TB meeting. The tentative budget proposes that we will transfer the \$84,000 EMS payment from the Town to the County in 2012, which is how all but 3 towns handle this cost. If we do this, town taxes will decrease by the \$84,000 we now spend, and County taxes will increase by the amount of the 2012 EMS fee. We would still be responsible for negotiating the annual EMS fee, and will know what this amount is before we finalize the 2012 budget. The major difference going forward will be that the cost of the EMS service will now be part of the county tax bill, not the town tax bill. While there are a variety of other line item changes in the Tentative 2012 budget, overall spending and revenues in 2012 are budgeted flat to 2011 in total. Excluding the adjustment for EMS costs, the town property tax will be flat again in 2012.

4. **Eagle Scout Project:** Carl Jamison has received approval for his Eagle Scout community service project, and will be at the 8/18 Town Board meeting to give us an update on his plans to build a walkway to and around the flagpole at Town Hall.
5. **Highway Employee Manual:** I will email you copies of the final draft of the Highway Manual, and will have hard copy at the TB meeting. Final step will be a legal review, and we will consider this manual for adoption at the September TB meeting
6. **Financial Policy Document:** I will email you copies of the proposed Financial Policy Document, and will have hard copy at the TB meeting. Final step will be a legal review, and we will consider this document for adoption at the September TB meeting.

County/State Issues

1. **County Manager:** A resolution supporting the concept of a county manager for Columbia County was defeated at the last County Board of Supervisor's meeting. My impression is most Supervisors agree we need a full time county manager to help the BOS manage the county more efficiently, cut costs, increase non-tax revenues and improve the delivery of county services. But the vote last week indicated that the BOS is not yet ready to commit to this decision. Some supervisors are still concerned about spending the money to hire a county manager now, during difficult economic times. Some think we should consolidate the county manager and controller jobs before hiring the CM. Some just objected to the language in the defeated resolution, which suggested that we (the BOS) were not "professional", and some felt that the resolution itself was not well drafted or adequately reviewed by the committee process prior to being taken to the BOS for a vote. A revised CM resolution will be probably be brought back to the BOS at some point in the next few months. But now that the dialogue has started, it's just a matter of time before we get a full time professional county manager to help the BOS manage the county more efficiently. Hiring a full time professional County manager is an important decision, and may be the only way for the County to get better control of its operations, lower our taxes and improve the delivery of County services. We all should be watching this one closely, and encouraging the County to make this happen as soon as possible
2. **DSS Space/Walmart Project:** The mayor of the City of Hudson has proposed to buy the DSS building at 25 Railroad Avenue and rent it to the County for half of what the county is now paying for up to two years. This could save the County \$180,000 a year. The County has decided to delay a decision to buy the Walmart building to allow time to evaluate the Mayor's proposal. Even if this deal gets done, it does not solve the County's longer term problem to find a home for DSS. If we do not move DSS to Walmart, the process to find a place for DSS will start again, and may take another 5 years to resolve. One option that was rejected about a year ago but which may make sense to reconsider is for the County to buy 25 Railroad Avenue and keep DSS there long term. This may be the least expensive solution for DSS, if a contamination assessment confirms that any contamination issues associated with the 25 RR Ave site are manageable. This DSS space decision is important because it is an opportunity to cut the costs for DSS space by several hundred thousand dollars a year. The risk is the DSS space issue could trigger a consolidation of 450 county employees at Walmart, which could cost the County an incremental \$600,000 a year over time.

Eagle Scout Carl Jamison gave an update on the proposed walkway and garden around the Town Hall flag pole. The final copy of the plan has been approved by the Boy Scouts. Workdays are set for October 1, 2, 8, 9, 22 and 23, 2011. He has started fundraising and will be seeking contributions and selling custom pavers for use in the walkway to fund the project.

Mr. Bassin stated that the town has received notice of two Supreme Court cases concerning property tax assessments which have been filed against the town. These cases had gone

before the BAR and had been denied or granted less of a change in assessment than requested, so the property owners are now taking the case to the court . Mr. Bassin explained that both of the parties, the town and the property owners, will have property appraisals done. The judge will make a decision based on the information given in the appraisals. Mr. Bassin stated that it is important that the town contest the lawsuits and maintain the assessments on these properties where the Assessor and BAR felt they should be. The cost of the appraisals to the town will be \$300 to \$700 for a preliminary review, and \$1000 to \$3000 for a “court ready appraisal”. With the legal fees, the town could be looking at a \$10,000.00 cost per case. Mr. Bassin recommended that the assessor obtain an attorney to contest the supreme courts cases. A motion was made to this effect by Councilman MacArthur and seconded by Councilwoman Israel. Motion carried.

FINANCIAL REPORT

Mr. Bassin asked if there were any questions about the financial report. He stated that the 2012 tentative budget has been filed with the Town Clerk. Mr. Bassin stated 2012 tentative budget proposes no tax increase, and indicated that the Town board would review and discuss the tentative budget at the September and October Town Board meetings before holding a public hearing and adopting the final budget at the November meeting.

Mr. Bassin stated that there is an opportunity to have the county pay the rescue squad payment in 2012. He mentioned that all but three towns in the county have opted to let the county pay the rescue squad bill, and if Ancram were to do this, town taxes would go down by the amount of the rescue squad cost, and county taxes would go up by that amount, so there would be no increase in net taxes to the taxpayers.

Mr. Bassin commented that letters have gone out to property owners with open building permits from 2001 with reminders to close the permits. The amounts to close the permits range from \$250 to as much as \$4500. Mr. Bassin stated that there needs to be a way to close the permits without causing monetary hardship to the property owners. Councilwoman Israel asked if there could be a flat fee for this? Mr. Bassin stated that this was a possibility. Councilman Miller stated that this should be a “no fault” situation, where the owner pays a flat fee and closes it out. A motion was made by Councilman MacArthur that a flat fee of \$50 for any building permit before 2005 for an inspection to close the permit out and issue a CO. Motion seconded by Councilman Miller and moved for adoption. Motion carried.

TOWN BOARD ISSUES

Councilman MacArthur commented that there were two white birches that are too close to the building and are scratching it. He suggested moving the trees to the back side of the playground. Councilwoman Israel suggested that if the trees are moved, something else should replace them. She suggested a maple tree. Councilman MacArthur suggested hydrangeas, as they seem to have done well on the front of the building.

HIGHWAY SUPERINTENDENT

Superintendent MacArthur reported that the paving on East Ancram road and Weed Mine road was finished, a total of 1.8 miles. He is working on the new speed limit signs. He stated that the salt shed should be done by the September meeting. The Dan Slott land transaction is completed. The bill for the second new "used" plow truck is in with tonight's bills. Highway employee Anna Taffy Blass has sent a letter to the town board suggesting that the town possibly hire a fulltime deputy highway superintendent and there be annual performance appraisals of all highway staff members.

Ms. Blass stated in her letter that Mr. MacArthur "threw all the highway employees under the bus." She stated that all the comments made by Mr. MacArthur at the last town board meeting were false and that when Mr. MacArthur came back from his vacations, all of the items he wanted done were taken care of. Mr. Bassin suggested that this be discussed further at the next meeting because the letter was received only yesterday. Mr. Bassin commented that in the letter Ms. Blass stated that the deputy position is not a two week position but is in fact a 24 hour, 7 day a week job. This is the person who is called when Jim is not available at any time during the year, not just during vacation and holiday time.

TOWN COURT

Justice Wilcox stated that the court is running smoothly. They were the first in the town to turn in their budget.

SUMMER PROGRAM

The program went well. The camp fees and fundraising totaled \$12,550.03. The expenses were \$13,751.00. A lot of the expenses were a one-time cost to set up. The town put in \$2500.00 and it is proposed that if there is money left over once a final accounting has been done, the town will recapture the funds. Mr. Bassin stated that there were rave reviews from the parents and the children. He remarked that it was great to see so many children at the pool and playing on the ball field.

ZONING REVISIONS

Mr. Bassin stated that the town board has received the second package from the zoning revisions committee. Mr. Bassin asked if there were any questions. There will be a public hearing on the package on September 12, 2011.

The following resolution was offered by Councilman MacArthur and seconded by Councilman Miller. Motion carried with a unanimous vote.

Resolution #34 of 2001: Zoning Revisions Second Package- Lead Agency Declaration:

RESOLVED : That the Ancram Town Board declares itself to be lead agency in the matter of the SEQRA review of two proposed zoning amendments presented to the Town Board by the Zoning Revisions Committee at the July 21, 2011 Town Board meeting, specifically Section XIII dealing with Site Plan Review and Section V (I) dealing with Open Space Conservation subdivisions, pursuant to the following detailed resolution:

Intent to be Lead Agency and Identification as a Type I Action

Action: Zoning Ordinance Amendments

WHEREAS, the Town of Ancram adopted a Comprehensive Plan in 2010 pursuant to Town Law 272-a; and

WHEREAS, the Town Board appointed a Zoning Review Committee and tasked them to draft amendments to the Town of Ancram Zoning Ordinance consistent with the adopted Comprehensive Plan, and

WHEREAS, the Zoning Review Committee developed such language with the aid of consultants and legal counsel, and subsequently submitted such language to the Town Board for review and adoption; and

WHEREAS, the Town Board has reviewed the New York State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQR) 6 NYCRR Part 617 and has determined that the action is subject to SEQRA; and

WHEREAS, the proposed action will not require permits and approvals from any other local, regional and State agencies prior to adoption of the plan; and

WHEREAS, the Town Board has determined that proposed action is a Type I Action, pursuant to the New York State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQR) 6 NYCRR Part 617.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, pursuant to the applicable standards of SEQRA 6 NYCRR Part 617, the Town of Ancram Town Board concludes that it is the appropriate agency to serve as, and declares itself lead agency for the environmental review of the proposed Type I Action; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Town of Ancram Town Board hereby authorizes development and circulation of a copy of the Full Environmental Assessment Form pursuant to the requirements set forth in SEQR 6 NYCRR Part 617 to evaluation the environmental impacts of the Sections XIII and V (I) two of the proposed zoning revisions.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Town Supervisor is authorized to sign the Full Environmental Assessment Form.

WHEREUPON, this Resolution was declared adopted by the Town Board of the Town of Ancram.

The Following resolution was offered by Councilman MacArthur and seconded by Councilman Miller and moved for adoption. Motion carried by unanimous roll call vote.

Resolution #35 of 2011: Zoning Revisions Public Hearing for Second Package:

RESOLVED: that the Ancram Town Board will hold a public hearing to review the two proposed zoning amendments presented to the Town Board by the Zoning Revisions Committee at the July 21, 2011 Town Board meeting, specifically Section XIII dealing with Site Plan Review and

Section V (I) dealing with Open Space Conservation subdivisions, on Monday, September 12, 2011 at 7 pm at the Ancram Town Hall.

EMPLOYEE HANDBOOK

Mr. Bassin stated that the town board needs to go through the job descriptions and employee evaluation forms. It will be put into place what is expected from both the highway department employees and will outline the town's responsibility for their employees. Mr. Bassin said he would have the proposed highway department manual reviewed by a legal or personnel professionals to make sure the manual covers the ground it needs to cover before it is considered for adoption by the Board.

FINANCIAL CONTROL POLICY MANUAL

The Policy Manual will describe policies and procedures for financial management, bill paying, financial reporting etc..

CELL TOWER

Mr. Roth stated that the committee is very close. There will be a pre-application public meeting on August 23, 2011 with Mariner Tower to hear about plans for a Tower on 82 by the Gallatin border.

YOUTH COMMISSION

The Youth Commission will hold a pool party on August 22, 2011 at 5pm. There were 98 people who attended the zoom flume trip.

COMMUNICATIONS COMMITTEE

There will be a newsletter in July/August.

ZONING REVISIONS

The committee will continue to work on the Ag district and land uses.

COMMUNITY DAY

Mr. Miller stated that the community day has been canceled and will not happen this year. He stated that it is best to put the effort into next year.

ANIMAL CONTROL

There were two lost dogs, one whom the owner was found.

BUDGET AMMENDMENT

\$25,000.00 from the capital funds into the General fund to purchase the plow truck.

Councilman MacArthur stated that he made a point last year that the last truck that was bought was less than three years ago and was also a used truck. Now, he stated, we are purchasing another used truck. He stressed that the town board needs to look at budgeting enough to purchase new equipment.

Highway Super MacArthur stated that the Oshkosh the town owns is a 1978 and that these two trucks are a 1993 and 1995. He stated that the the problem with the Oshkosh is that the dealer stopped supporting the OshKosh.

A motion was made by Councilman MacArthur and seconded by Councilwoman Israel to make the budget adjustment. Motion carried.

A motion was made by Councilman Miller and seconded by Councilwoman Israel to pay the bills. Motion carried.

The next meeting will be September 15, 2011 at 7:00pm.

Nancy Bryant questioned if the Highway Superintendent was covered under the highway handbook. Mr. Bassin stated no, that he is an elected official and does not report to the Town Board, but is covered by NYS laws governing the Highway Superintendent. If the position became appointed in the future, then the person would be overseen by the Town Board.

A motion was made by Councilman Miller and seconded by Councilwoman Israel to adjourn the meeting at 8:15pm. Motion carried.

Respectfully submitted by,

Ruth Wittlinger
Deputy Town Clerk