

**Town of Ancram
Town Board
Regular Board Meeting
February 16, 2023**

Present: Supervisor Arthur Bassin Councilman Hugh Clark
Councilman David Boice Councilwoman Amy Gold (Via Zoom)
Councilwoman Bonnie Hundt Town Clerk Monica Cleveland
Highway Superintendent James Miller

Supervisor Arthur Bassin called the regular town board meeting to order at 7:00pm with a saluted to the flag.

Mr. Bassin asked if there were any items on the agenda that any member of the town board needed to recuse themselves from. Councilman Boice said that he needed to recuse himself from the Firefighter Exemption Law due to the fact that he is the Fire Chief.

A motion was made by Supervisor Bassin and seconded by Councilman Clark to change the numbering of the Fire Fighter Property Tax Exemption Law from Local Law #2 of 2023 to Local Law #1 of 2023. Motion carried.

A motion was made by Councilwoman Hundt and seconded by Councilman Clark to approve as written the January 2023 Regular minutes and the 2023 Organizational minutes as read and placed on the record.

Planning Process Review

Nan Stolzenburg gave a report on the planning process review. The following is the opening of the memo given to the town. The memo is 14 pages and is on file with the town clerk.

The Town Board tasked me to learn more about the planning process in Town, evaluate its strengths and weaknesses, and offer recommendations for improvement. I conducted this evaluation and reviewed the process that subdivision and zoning applications take from the time they are submitted through approval by the Planning Board or Zoning Board of Appeals, and issuance of a building permit. I conducted a series of interviews with members from the CAC, Planning Board, and ZBA, and staff from the Planning Department and Building Department. The interviews were conducted on 11/21/22 and 11/22/22. I met with the Planning Board to go over these recommendations and then received, and integrated further suggestions from them in this report.

The following offers my observations on the issues that were uncovered and a list of recommendations that could be put to work to improve efficiency and outcomes. I would be happy to talk to the Town Board further as needed.

Summary of Issues and Priority Recommendations

Because there were quite a lot of issues and many ideas to address those issues, I have summarized salient points below followed with details:

Overall, I feel that there is room for improvement to help the flow of a project and its application. While the zoning is clear that the CEO receives applications, it becomes less clear in practice how the application progresses from there. The roles of CEO/Planning Staff/PB and ZBA, along with where consultants are or may be interjected is not clear. Lack of understanding of who does a preliminary review and when an application is 'ripe' to be put on the ZBA or Planning Board agenda are also unclear. Inefficiencies and lack of communication further hamper the process. More attention needs to be placed on the process from Planning Board decision to issuance of a building permit which is also in need of addressing.

The following were some points which were addressed:

- Printouts to hand out the public with steps and timing for processes with the planning process.
- Stick to the ten day rule.
- Job descriptions need to be worked on.
- Forms done over as well as what each approval is and why they are needed.
- Looking at the Escrow law, possibly updating it.

Mr. Bassin asked Nan to give a proposal on how to follow through with the process, a scope and budget.

Revaluation 2023

Suzette Booy of Columbia County Real Property and Rene Deleeuw The Ancram Assessor joined the meeting to update on the 2023 Ancram Revaluation progress. Ms. Booy reported that they are nearing the end. Mr. Deleeuw has been reviewing the values and updating the exemptions. The assessment disclosure notices will be in the mail by the 1st of March. Councilwoman Gold expressed that the comps will not be available at the time of the mailing. She asked when this will be available. Ms. Booy said that the sales listings will be available on the town and county website. Devon Ruger, member of the audience, asked if these numbers are based on the

homes bought by the inflooding of people from the city during covid. Ms. Booy said that yes, that is the current market and the reval will be a reflection of that. Mr. Ruger asked what happens if the market drops. Ms. Booy said at that time the town can trend the values down. This will keep the equalization rate from going above 100%.

BAR member Matthew Bernstein said that people should be encouraged to see Rene, to understand that the assessment process is not a tax process and that when speaking to Rene and the BAR, they should understand that the assessment is not the taxes.

Councilman Boice asked if the prices are coming down on properties in Columbia County. Ms. Booy said that while the listing prices are not dropping but properties are not selling for the listing prices.

Court Report

Court Clerk Ruth Wittlinger gave a report on the 2022 Court Actions. 301 Cases closed out for the year at \$58,000, keeping 44% at the town level.

SIC

The committee will provide an update at the March Board meeting.

Housing

Councilwoman Hundt updated on affordable housing. The group discussed the Town of Salisbury CT approach with Salisbury Treasurer Joe Cleveland and will continue to discuss how Salisbury handles housing.

Supervisor Report

1) Public Hearings – We will hold a public hearing at 6:45 on Local Law #1 of 2023 – a temporary moratorium on hospitality related actions, and a public hearing at 6:55 on Local Law #2 of 2023 – a local law authorizing a 10% property tax exemption for qualifying volunteer firefighters. We will consider Local Law #2 of 2023 for adoption during the Town Board meeting, but will have to postpone consideration of approval for Local Law #1 of 2023 because we have not yet received the County Planning Board review of this proposed local law. Because of this, we will have to renumber these two local laws when they are adopted.

2) Financial Report –We have received our 2023 property tax money from the Tax Collector and as of mid-February have about \$300,000 in cash in the bank and

\$1,758,000 in T-Bills after distributing Fire District and Library taxes and depositing our \$110,000 4Q22 sales tax check. Major capital spending over the next year will include a new plow truck at about \$350,000 and a new bucket truck at about \$100,000. We continue to analyze opportunities to invest in solar, water, affordable housing, a pavilion and improvements to the Town pool and the playground at the Town pool. While we are looking into these investment opportunities we should be cautious and conservative in our financial management until we see how things evolve, and what happens with costs, sales tax and mortgage tax revenues over the next year.

3) Planning Process Review – We will discuss with Nan Stolzenburg her recommendations on how to streamline and simplify our Planning/Zoning/Building Permit application processes and what the next steps are in this effort. Her proposal has been reviewed by the Planning Board, ZBA and Building Department.

4) Revaluation Status – County Real Property Director Suzette Booy and Ancram Assessor Rene Deleeuw will update us on where we are with the revaluation process. The Town Assessor is in the process of reviewing the new property values determined by the County's consultants based on sales prices over the past few years. This review process will be completed before March 1 and we will all be notified of our new assessed values in early March.

5) Local Law #1 of 2023 – Temporary Moratorium on Hospitality Related Applications - This proposed local law places a temporary moratorium on review and approval of abbreviated site plans, site plans, special use permits, and building permits for all hospitality-related uses while the Town addresses long-range planning and zoning objectives to ensure consistency with the Comprehensive Plan. Affected are six (6) Residential-Commercial Uses, one (1) Agriculture-Related Commercial Use (not on farm), and fourteen (14) Business Uses—a total of twenty one (21) affected uses. No application for a cited hospitality-related use shall be accepted, reviewed, or decided during the moratorium, but this moratorium does not affect applications to renew valid, existing SUP for any hospitality-related use, nor does it apply to applications to amend site plans for any hospitality-related use if the site plan was complete, final and signed, and if the sought amendment does not expand, enlarge, or intensify the existing hospitality-related land use. The moratorium is in effect for nine (9) months and, if necessary, may be extended by two (2) additional periods of up to six (6) months each.

6) Local Law #2 of 2023 - Volunteer Firefighter Property Tax Exemption – NYS passed a law in December allowing towns, counties and school districts to adopt a local law reducing the assessed value of the home owned by a qualifying volunteer firefighter or qualifying un-remarried spouse of a deceased volunteer firefighter by up to 10%. In Ancram, with a current tax rate of \$2.277611 per \$1000 of assessed value, a 10% reduction in assessed value would result in a property tax reduction of about \$22.78 per \$100,000 of property value. County and school tax exemptions could be substantially higher. We will consider adopting a local law at our 2/16 meeting to allow Ancram to offer this tax exemption to qualifying volunteer firefighters and to un-remarried spouses of deceased volunteer firefighters. Applications for this exemption must be filed by March 1 and applicants must be certified by the Ancram Fire District as eligible for this exemption. It may not be possible to implement this program by March 1, but we will try.

7) Court Report – Court Clerk Ruth Wittlinger will present the 2022 Court Report.

8) Kids Camp and Town Pool – Planning has started for the 2023 Kids Camp and opening the Town Pool. Camp Director Ruth Van Wagner and Pool Director Jen Boice will provide updates on where we are.

The following resolution was offered by Councilwoman Hundt and seconded by Councilman Clark and moved for adoption. Roll call vote: Yes- Bassin, Clark, Hundt and Gold. Recusal: Boice. Resolution carried.

Resolution #11 of 2023

Local Law #1 of 2023 – Volunteer Firefighter Property Tax Exemption – Resolved, that the Ancram Town Board adopts Local Law #2 of 2023 granting a property tax exemption of 10% for qualifying volunteer firefighters and qualifying un-remarried spouses of deceased firefighters, and be it further Resolved, that qualifications of volunteer firefighters and un-remarried spouses of deceased firefighters eligible for this property tax exemption shall be certified by the Ancram Fire District Board of Commissioners.

Local Law #2 of 2023

Councilman Clark recommended that the STR's from Section #3 be removed. He recommended the text be refined in section 3 and exclude summer camps already in operation with the moratorium only including new camps. Nan Stolzenburg and John Lyons will work on refining the wording. J. Hoffman, Planning and Zoning Board Clerk, asked if the law can include clustered STR's. Mr. Clark noted he did not understand the definition of "clustered STR's"

A motion was made by Councilman Clark and second by Councilman Boice to approve the changes. Motion carried unanimously.

Highway Report

Diesel Fuel: 867 Gallons

Gasoline: 549

- Our quiet winter continues. We have conducted snow or ice operations on 7 separate days in January and only one so far in February.
- We have been hauling in sand as needed and stockpiling road materials for summer work projects.
- We continue to go over our trucks and equipment to be ready for the next winter event.
- Checked roads for down trees and limbs following numerous high wind events.
- With this recent mild stretch of weather we have been doing patching on dirt and paved roads where needed.
- We have been performing maintenance on equipment getting it ready for the upcoming summer season.
- I have received the quote to update the bodies for the 2 2016 Kenworth Trucks that I spoke of last month. The bodies presently on them have structural defects (cracking). The cost to do the upgrade is \$72,400 each. This would include new bodies, computer sander controls (which would cut the salt and sand use by up to 40%), new load tarp, relocating the fuel tanks and sandblasting and painting the truck frames. These upgrades could prolong the life of the truck by 15 years or more.
- We will be hosting a County DOH sponsored rabies clinic at the garage on Saturday 3/4/2023 from 10-12.

Councilman Boice stated that he would hate to spend the money on a used truck but that he has to agree that this will increase the sales price.

A motion was made by Councilman Boice and seconded by Councilwoman Hundt to approve the warrants and pay the bills. Motion carried.

The following resolution was offered by Councilwoman Hundt and seconded by Councilman Boice and moved for adoption. Resolution carried unanimously.

Resolution #12 of 2023

Revised 2023 Organizational Resolutions – Resolved, that the Ancram Town Board approves the revised 2023 Organizational Resolutions as presented.

The following resolution was offered by Councilman Boice and seconded by Councilman Clark and moved for adoption. Resolution carried.

Resolution #13 of 2023

Miller Health Insurance – Resolved, that the Ancram Town Board approves the request from Highway Superintendent James Miller for reimbursement for Medicare Advantage health insurance and prescription drug programs for himself and his wife at a current cost of \$575.80 per month and for as long as the cost of the Medicare Advantage programs do not exceed what Town provided health insurance and prescription drug programs would cost for a couple, which is currently \$1072.94.

A motion was made by Councilman Clark and seconded by Councilwoman Hundt to adjourn the meeting. Motion carried.