

**Town of Ancram  
Town Board  
Regular Meeting  
July 20, 2023**

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

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

Mr. Bassin asked if there were any items on the agenda any member of the town board needed to recuse themselves from. There were none.

A motion was made by Councilman Boice and seconded by Councilwoman Gold to accept the minutes of the previous meeting as read and placed on the record. Motion carried.

**Reval and BAR**

Mr. Bassin reported that he has spoken to town assessor Rene DeLeeuw. Mr. DeLeeuw said that there have been two article 7's filed and one SCAR filed against the town. The town has formally retained one lawyer and have two more lawyers available to be retained as well. Councilwoman Hundt asked the difference is between the article 7 and an article 78. Mr. Bassin replied that the article 7 filing is a judicial case in response to a property tax. An article 78 has to do with zoning.

**Planning Processing Review**

Nan is making the final finishing touches on the review process. She will be sending out for reviews in the next few weeks.

**Fee Schedule**

Planning Board Clerk J Hoffman addressed the board in regards to special use permit fees. J noted that some of the uses that require a special use permit being referred to the Planning Board do not justify the \$500 fee and recommended that the fee be reduced to \$150 from \$500 for accessory residential uses. Councilwoman Gold asked if there was something is written up that can be reviewed. Mr. Bassin said that he has an email that he received that he will send around to the board. The board members were not comfortable with making any changes without seeing something in writing. Mr. Bassin said that the board can table the decision for a month.

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

**Resolution #34 of 2023: Planning Board Alternate:**

**Resolved:** that the Ancram Town Board Appoints Donald Tasch to serve as an alternate member of the Ancram Planning Board for a term of five years.

The following resolution was offered by Councilwoman Gold and seconded by Councilman Clark and moved for adoption. Resolution carried by unanimous roll call vote.

**Resolution #35 of 2023: Local Law #3 of 2023**

**Resolved:** that the Ancram Town Board adopts Local Law #3 of 2023 which establishes income levels for senior citizen real property tax exemptions.

The following resolution was offered by Councilwoman Hundt and seconded by Councilman Clark and moved for adoption. Resolution carried by unanimous roll call vote.

**Resolution #36 of 2023: Local Law #4 of 2023**

**Resolved:** that the Ancram Town Board adopts Local Law #4 of 2023 which establishes income levels for disabled and low income real property tax exemptions.

The following resolution was offered by Councilman Clark and seconded by Councilwoman Gold and moved for adoption. Resolution carried by a unanimous roll call vote.

**Resolution #37 of 2023: Local Law #5 of 2023**

**Resolved:** that the Ancram Town Board adopts Local Law #5 of 2023 which provides real property tax exemptions for volunteer firefighters and ambulance workers pursuant to section 466-A of the Real Property Tax Law.

**Strategic Investment Committee**

SIC member Will Weiss gave an update on the committee. The committee is waiting still for feedback from Steve Winky. They are also looking for more options for solar panels as well as options for Blass Field. Mr. Tom Dias asked if there is a document that explains what the committee is considering. Mr. Weiss said that a proposal is not put together until it is ready to present to the board. Councilman Boice noted that the Town Board Members do not get documentation either. He reported that he has heard a lot of unhappy comments about the money being given to the Opera House and the Housing Committee. Mr. Weiss responded that he understands that there are two points of view most times when it comes to public moneys and he respects David asking questions. Mr. Boice expressed that he has been involved with a 501C-3 for many years through the fire department. They present fire safety to elementary students and have seen around 21,000 students over the years. Mr. Boice said that this is all paid with fundraisers and through the fire districts.

Mrs. Donna Hoyt Said that the business owners in the hamlet were never asked their opinion in regards to this decision or any decisions in the hamlet. She noted that she was forced to mortgage her home to raise the funds to demolish one of her buildings during the covid pandemic when everything was closed down.

Councilwoman Hundt said that the SIC and the Opera House had made a presentation at a board meeting. She noted that the proposal had been before the town board several times. Mr. Weiss said that information has been sent to the board throughout the process.

Mr. Terry Boyles agreed that while Donna Hoyt had been forced to pay to take down a building in the center of town, another building on the corner is allowed to remain in a dilapidated state, ready to fall down. Why has the town not forced this building to be demolished he asked. He also asked why the town isn't honoring the veterans like other towns. He stressed that there were two monuments full of names of veterans to put on flags. Mr. Boyles noted that if there was an excess of funds, why was this not a valuable project?

Councilwoman Hundt said that the SIC was formed two years ago. The committee and the town residents came up with ideas worthy of investing in. She said that the Town Board is not just handing out money. The Opera House came to the town board with plans and that it was a long process.

Mrs. Donna Hoyt felt that the town is investing tax payer money in a non for profit after putting the town through a revaluation and increasing the taxes. She was angry that the town is giving out grants with tax payer funded money. Councilwoman Hundt said that there is no way to know what the taxes are going to be.

Suzan Flamm, a member of the SIC, spoke. She felt that there was a misunderstanding of what the SIC process is. She said that anyone can put in a proposal. She felt that the town had been very public with the process and very thoughtful. She also noted that the re-assessments had been done to make properties equal and fair.

Mr. Tom Dias asked that the town do a better job of reaching out to the community in regards to projects and decisions like these. Mr. Will Weiss said that the town is still looking for more ideas and would welcome them from the residents.

Mr. Jim Stickle said that he has nothing against the Opera House and he has donated to them personally. But that was his choice. He felt that there was a lot that happens at the town that people don't hear about. He asked if one of the owners of the Opera House was on the Democratic Party Committee for Ancram and is another member was a board member of the Opera House? He was told that the board was not going to involve politics. Mr. Stickle said regardless, that this did not look ethically correct.

Councilman Boice said that the board voted on this at the May 18<sup>th</sup> board meeting and that the paper handed to him by Councilwoman Gold (outlining the Opera House project) was dated June. Mr. Boice said that the proposal was talked about in April and voted on in June. Mr. Boice said he felt the board was pushed into making a decision.

Councilwoman Hundt said that she never felt pushed to vote for anything. She said that the public would get a lot of information if they attended the town board meetings, and would know what is going on.

Mr. Fred Schneeburger said that if the town has such an excess of funds, why not give it back to the tax payers?

Mr. Devon Ruger wondered why the town isn't helping all small businesses. Many businesses owners need help right now he felt. He said that he does attend the meetings and he doesn't feel all of the information is given.

Mr. Tom Dias said that the methods the committee is using to reach out is not successful and that they need to do better.

Ms. Cathy Redlich said that she is the president of the Board of Directors for the Opera House. She said that the founders are not owners and that there are bi-laws and a board. When the Opera House sought the grant they made two presentations. She did not want the Opera house cast in a bad light. She felt there was confusion as to what the money is for. The money will go partially to constructing a community room which will be free to any town group to use. She said that they respect the process

and the Opera house went through the correct steps. Mrs. Donna Hoyt noted that the disagreement is not towards the Opera house but to the Town Board. The Town, she felt, shouldn't be in the grant giving business.

Ms. Carol Falcetti noted that the Comp Plan asked to have hamlet planning groups. She said that the Boston Corners Planning group will meet on Sat the 29<sup>th</sup>.

Mr. Fred Schneegburger asked why not put the money into the Highway fund? He said that the highway budget is always running over. He asked that it be put to good use.

Mr. Rick Dubrey asked why, if the Opera House received a \$702,000 federal grant, why was there the need for the town to give money. Mr. Paul Riccardi, of the Opera House, said that the group has been raising funding for the project from many grant programs, in the amount of \$750,000. But those have to be used for specific things.

Mr. Terry Boyles spoke about affordable housing. He said that it would be near impossible to find a 100 acre plot of land because most large lots are either Ag or conservancy land. Councilman Hundt invited Mr. Boyles to come to the next Housing Committee meeting. Mrs. Donna Hoyt said that she is not interested in committees. She noted that she spent three years on a town committee and everything she voiced was ignored. Councilwoman Hundt said that she is pursuing the affordable housing, not for herself, but for the "kids and firemen" of the community. Mrs. Hoyt asked what kids, they cannot afford to stay here?

Mr. Rob Horowitz spoke from Zoom. He spoke on behalf of the Opera House grant. He said that the Opera house had gone through the correct process and that this will be an investment to have an art center for the long term.

Mr. Jim Stickle asked Councilman Clark why he voted no to giving the grant to the Opera House. Mr. Clark said for him it was a 51-49% decision. He questioned why those people at the meeting are not here every month. He noted that Art puts out a monthly report and then there are the official minutes. Councilwoman Gold also praised Mr. Bassin for his communication and felt it was a model for other towns.

Mr. Bassin said that maybe there are people who are not on the email list. He said there are also people who choose not to read the emails.

### **Camp and Pool**

Jen Boice gave a report on the pool and the camp. Ruth has said the camp is going well. On Saturday, the pool will be closed because too many of the lifeguards had pre planned obligations. The inspections of the pool and camp went well. Ruth VanWagner had asked the board to consider the town to sponsor a trip to the Zoom Flume after camp is done in August. She said that the BOH was too strict on the buddy checks for the Zoom Flume to be an option for the camp. The Youth Commission used to sponsor this trip each year. Mr. Bassin said that he is reluctant to allow this because of the BOH does not sanction it. Councilwoman Hundt asked about the theft of tables and chairs prior to camp. Mrs. Boice said that was a camp question, not pool.

### **Supervisors Report**

1) Financial Report – A normal financial month. Cash and T Bills at the end of June totaled about \$1,523,000. Our T-Bill portfolio is at \$1,427,000, and will be dropping over the rest of the year as we start paying for planned major projects. We are in a period of heavy spending which includes highway department road work (about \$180,000), the sand/salt shed (about \$185,000), the grant for the AOH (\$67,500) and the final payment on the Town Hall ASHP HVAC system (about \$38,000). Excluding T Bills, cash on hand at the end of June was about \$97,000. We have a treasury bill for \$200,000 maturing on 7/18 which will fund us for the next month or two, and we have \$1,250,000 of T Bills maturing in August. I anticipate we will be able to continue to invest \$1 million in short term (1, 2, 3 month) T Bills over the rest of the year. Yields on the 1, 2 and 3 month T Bills are all currently around 5.3%, so if yields stay steady, we could earn another \$25,000 in interest by the end of the year.

2) 2024 Budget Process – It's time to start the 2024 Budget Process. I plan to circulate 2024 budget requests to all department heads next week and hope to have a first draft of our 2024 budget by the August Town Board meeting. We will schedule public hearings on the Tentative Budget in September, on the Preliminary Budget in October and on the Final Budget in November. The major uncertainty related to the 2024 budget is the economic environment and impact of an uncertain economic environment on the likely levels of sales and mortgage taxes next year. We will have a better sense of sales and mortgage taxes before we have to finalize the budget, but current indications are that both sales and mortgage tax revenues could be significantly (\$50,000 to \$100,000) under 2022 and 2023 levels. While we can keep town taxes flat again in 2024 by using fund balance to compensate for this drop in revenues, we will have to factor a weaker sales and mortgage tax environment into our capital spending plans and consider postponing some major strategic investments, or getting grants to help fund projects.

3) O&G Industries – At the request of the Planning Board, ZEO Ed Ferratto had requested that O&G Industries provide information by July 1 regarding their mining activities over the past 5 years to determine if O&G discontinued operations for more than two years, which would terminate their non-conforming, pre-existing use mining status and require that they discontinue all mining activities. We have not yet heard back from O&G on this matter.

4) Property Tax Exemptions - The County has adopted laws establishing revised income levels for senior and low income/disabled property tax exemptions and providing property tax exemptions for volunteer firefighters and ambulance workers. While the Town has already passed a local law providing property tax exemptions for volunteer firefighters and ambulance workers, I recommend we adopt the County version of the firefighter/ambulance worker property tax exemption local law so there is no difference between our law and the County law. We will conduct public hearings on these three local laws prior to our July 20 Town Board meeting and consider them for adoption at our July meeting.

### **Town Board Member Comments**

Councilman Boice said that he had been asked by an engineering firm to look at a roadway off of Carson Road and to sign off on it having to be up to NYS fire code. Mr. Boice said that he would not sign off as a volunteer firefighter. He said that this is something the town ZEO needs to enforce.

Councilman Boice said that after the June Town Board meeting there was a fire call at the intersection in the middle of Ancram. At that call, the department had a line of duty death, Stewart Guy Hunt. He thanked the town board for attending the services. He said that he thinks that there needs to be a specific policy for which the town board would adhere to show respect. He noted that there have been several times where the town should have turned up but didn't. The board should be attending these events as a group.

Councilman Clark reported that the ZRC felt that there are many STR's that are not documented. He stressed, if someone see's something, say something.

Councilwoman Gold reported that the NYS DOT is going to meet with the town on the 27<sup>th</sup> to look at the traffic pattern in the center of the Ancram Hamlet to try and make it better. Didi Barrett and Michele Hinchey has been assisting with this project. Mrs. Donna Hoyt said that in the past she has offered land to fix this intersection. Mr. Tom Dias said that when he was Town Supervisor he had worked on fixing the intersection and that he was told that the only way it would be fixed was if there was a fatality.

Councilwoman Hundt and Councilwoman Gold are continuing to work on the Rapid Care situation in Copake. Five towns are now involved with the project. The group is trying to work out a way to get the rapid care reopened. There is a staffing issue and part of this has to do with the rapid care being affiliated with Albany Med. Mrs. Jen Boice asked how much it costs to run the office. Mrs. Gold said that she has the numbers but not with her. The office is also looking to staff a doctor.

Councilwoman Hundt said that the Affordable Housing Committee is moving forward. They are seeking an attorney to set up a 501c3.

Councilman Boice said that the AED's for the Town Hall, Garage and Pool have arrived. There is training the town can schedule. The town hall employees and the highway employees will figure out an acceptable time for training.

Councilman Boice said that the Fire Company has set up a trust account for Zackary Hunt. Anyone who wishes to donate can send a check made out to the Ancram Fire Department with Zack Hunt in the memo.

### **Highway Department**

Diesel Fuel Used: 584 Gallons

Gasoline used: 424 Gallons

- Weather has delayed our chip sealing projects until next week.
- I will be submitting CHIPS reimbursement requests for approximately \$189,000 for our Hall Hill and Cottontail Rd paving due 8/9 for the September payment. We have about \$133,000 of our 2023 allocation remaining for additional work yet to be completed.
- We assisted the Fire Co in preparation for Stuart Hunt's funeral.
- We repaired a section of fence that had collapsed near the pool.
- Cleaned up trees that had

### **Town Clerk**

Town Clerk Cleveland said that she is waiting for one check to clear before she turns over the interest in the tax collector account to the Town Supervisor. She told the board members and those gathered that she and Mr. James MacArthur, were in the beginning stages of bringing the Hometown Heroes Banner program to the Town of Ancram. It being summer, many people are out of town on vacations. They plan on meeting with other towns who have participated to ask questions. The town clerk also noted that she is contacting other towns in the state to see how they scanned and placed in digital form on their websites, archived minutes.

A motion was made by Councilwoman Gold and seconded by Councilwoman Hundt to make the following budget adjustments: From Fund Balance- \$21,200.00 to 1620.42 \$1,000; 1620.41 \$2,500; 1355.1 \$10,000; 1355.12 \$6,000; 7110.4 \$500; 9050.8 \$700; 7620.4 \$500. Motion carried unanimously.

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

**Resolution #38 of 2023: Legal Support:** RESOLVED: that the Ancram Town Board authorizes the Town Supervisor to retain attorney Jonathon Tingley of the law firm Gilchrist Tingley to provide legal support for the Town of Ancram to deal with any issues that arise from the 2023 revaluation and decisions made at the 2023 Grievance Day.

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

**Resolution #39 of 2023: Legal Support:** RESOLVED: that the Ancram Town Board authorizes the Town Supervisor to retain attorney Paul Goldman of the law firm of Goldman Attorneys PLLC to provide legal support for the Town of Ancram to deal with any legal issues that arise from the 2023 revaluation and decisions made at the 2023 Grievance Day.

#### **Public Comments**

Mrs. Donna Hoyt asked if it was true that the State is taking away Medicaid funding from the County. Mr. Bassin said that the State is no longer going to be paying the county for Medicaid. Mrs. Hoyt noted that this will then be passed on to the residents through property taxes, making the taxes increase.

Mr. Jim Stickle asked if it was true that the county is looking to put up tents to house migrants in. Mr. Stickle asked Mr. Bassin if he had heard about this at the county level. Mr. Bassin said he has not heard specifics but that he has heard that the county is working on plans to deal with the migrant situation. Mr. Bassin said that this was being handled at the County by the Public Safety Committee and the Emergency Management Director. Mrs. Donna Hoyt questioned if there was a contingency plan. Mrs. Anne Rader noted that the City of Hudson was a sanctuary city. Mr. Jim MacArthur said that the bussing company that he drives for have been put at the ready to take migrants back to the city.

Mr. Bassin noted that Colleen Lutz has found a grant that may help fund the construction of the new salt shed.

Mr. Terry Boyles asked if the town was planning to do anything with the house in the intersection that is falling down. He feels it is a liability to the town if a child was to get hurt. Mrs. Hoyt asked what happened to the other buildings that had been condemned in the town, noting a number of about 10. She felt that the town should buy the property and knock the house down to fix the intersection.

There being no more business before the board, a motion was made by Councilwoman Hoyt and seconded by Councilwoman Gold to adjourn the meeting. Motion carried.

Respectfully submitted by,

Monica R. Cleveland, RMC

