

THE PORT HENRY FACT FINDER

Reporting the News and Needs of Port Henry and Surrounding Area
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TOWN OF MORIAH BOARD MEETING NOTES

The January 14th meeting began with Moriah's Chamber of Commerce President Cathy Sprague giving The Chamber's annual report to the Board. She thanked the Board for its financial aid and support. She was happy to announce that Chamber membership had risen and businesses and individuals were continuing to join. She pointed out that the office on Main Street has had a promising success in just two years of its opening. Its permanent historical photo display as well as its being a welcoming agency, with brochures and memorabilia, for tourists is a positive addition to Main Street. She completed her report with a list of planned events and a reminder that the very successful 2015 Labor Day had stayed in budget. After her report there was a discussion of charging or not charging for Chamber banners and where the banners would be located, as it takes a while to "clear" with such as National Grid where banners can be hung. Small decals are to be given for door and window display. The Chamber was informed that a plan needs to be made of where the banners should be located, particularly for those businesses outside the village, as these proprietors want the banners to be located near their businesses. Trustee Luci Carpenter asked if the paddle boats and such were included in the hand-out brochures. Cathy was not sure, but said she would try to find out.

Ed Roberts has been busy working with Moriah Shock inmates, enforcing the "dog" law. It was noted that since the village has adopted the same law, the enforcing is easier.

Rich LaPier reported there had been seven new homes built in Moriah in 2015. Supervisor Scozzafava said there seems always a focus on the negative, so to counter that he would like to know just how many new and returnee residents to Moriah there have been in the past five years. The discussion returned to the negative – "junk" yards around homes and unlicensed junkyard businesses. The Supervisor said this cleanup would make some people angry, but for neighbors of the junk-ridden, he plans to come down hard on these offenders and will use New York State Maintenance Laws if local laws do not suffice. Linda Smyth asked "What is the difference between a junk yard and a hoarder?" Tom asked if she had seen the TV show and everyone laughed, but he simplified it by saying junk is outside the house, possibly encroaching on others' properties and hoarding is inside the house. It was noted that if you wanted to have a junkyard business you had to play by the rules, put a fence around it and get a junkyard license.

Jaime Wilson reported that the transfer station's metal pile will be put in a container from now on. The reason is the Town's new insurance carrier says public prowling of the pile is potentially unsafe and dangerous. Also, it could be costly to the insurance company. It was asked "What about refrigerators?" referring to the fact that the Freon must be drained out before they can be accepted into the transfer station and the only way this happens is for the refrigerator to have an official tag saying it is free of Freon. Howie Sprague is the only person in this area who is licensed to do this.

Tom Anderson reported that the push for the Youth Program would begin in February. The Program must advertise for a new director. Tom Anderson said that it is not easy to fill this position as it requires a bachelor's degree and it is a tough job with a lot of responsibility. The director is in charge of three administrators, 13 – 15 councilors. There should be a councilor for every 12 campers and usually there around a 100 campers. The Supervisor noted that Town residents should be receiving rebate checks because of both Town and School staying within their cap.

The next subject under discussion was the village dissolution process which is and has been underway. Supervisor Scozzafava reported that he and Matt Brassard are on a committee which has

held many hours of meetings, including meetings with the department heads of both Town and Village and a plan, overseen by the Laberge Group which was hired by the Village, has been developed to be presented to the Village Board. He emphasized that although he was on the committee because of his position, the Town really has no say in the dissolution process or its outcome. The Village Board will either accept the plan or not, but the Supervisor felt sure they would accept the plan. Then a public hearing must be held to present the plan to the village residents, where the public may ask questions and suggest changes. If a petition is presented from 25% of the registered village voters to take a vote on the plan, then a vote will be taken and at that time it could be voted down. The Supervisor said he had not heard of this ever happening, that even the courts are not sure what would happen. The Supervisor said that the bottom line was that a vote had been taken and the vote was for dissolution. Next there was assurance that the Port Henry Fire Department would remain basically as it is, serving the town areas north and south, as it does now, but being a part of the Town. The Supervisor said that there were no self-serving interests involved, but only trying to do what was best for the community as a whole. He did say that at some point there will not be a village.

The Supervisor had attended the Governor's State of the State address and was particularly pleased about the monies being allocated for Upstate infrastructure needs, as Moriah's last infrastructure redo was in the '60s when the present central school was built. He also mentioned Chip Perry's excellent management of the combined Village/Town wastewater facility.

The following resolutions were approved: 1) Authorization for Supervisor to sign modified consent order for Waste Water Distribution System as per NYS DEC letter. 2) Authorization to pay Manfred Construction \$101,095.14 for completion of Mountain Spring Road Water Project. 3) Approval for Change Order #2 Mountain Spring Project #GC-CO.02, in the amount of \$57,605.61. 4) Approval for Change Order – Titus Road Pump Station for alternates #1 and #2 Reale Construction, time & materials #3 by pass pumping, electrical, approximately \$15,000.00. There were several "house keeping" resolutions and at the conclusion of the Board meeting, concern for the continued existence of Moriah Shock was expressed, but Supervisor Scozzafava said that everything he had heard at the State of the State address gathering was more interest in expanding programs of education and preparing offenders to reenter society more equipped to remain out of the penal system and Moriah Shock is doing just that.

POTSDAM — At least one member of the Village Board says he will support dissolution should the issue come up again for the municipality.

Trustee Stephen J. Warr said following a meeting Monday night that he would support dissolving the village because, due to rising taxes and shrinking taxable property, the municipality is no longer sustainable. Mr. Warr said he has supported dissolution as "the best idea" since he was first elected, arguing that the municipality is not financially sustainable, given the amount of service it provides, and due to the fact that 72 percent of the property in it is tax-exempt.

"As our position has worsened over the last five years, I still believe the same thing," he said, pointing to a higher-than-average property tax increase last year, and more increases on the way. "Financially, we're really in tough straits right now. We are going to be raising the taxes this year and next year again. If that's not to the liking of the people who are paying the taxes, then they need to voice their opinion on what direction we should go."

According to final budget figures for 2015-16, village residents saw an 8.39 percent increase in their property tax rate, which was set at \$16.32 per \$1,000 of assessed property value.

Mr. Warr further suggested that St. Lawrence County should take over services the municipality currently provides for residents in Potsdam, an arrangement which he said has been successful in states like New Hampshire, Georgia and Virginia.

"It's a better system," he said, arguing that the reduction in government structure would eliminate added expenses like town taxes that village residents currently pay. "We just have too many

local levels of government.”

Elected officials responding to Mr. Warr’s position felt that instead of saving money, dissolution would instead cost more, and residents would get less for their money.

Mayor Reinhold J. Tischler, who indicated that dissolution was voted down by a 2-to-1 margin in 2011, said he doesn’t believe town wide services for things like fire, police and public works would be economically feasible, given the enlarged area that would have to be covered.

“I don’t think the town is really willing to absorb all those entities; the water, the sewer, the police, the fire. It just doesn’t make a lot of sense,” he said, also wondering if village dissolution would force similar action in Norwood, part of which is inside the town of Potsdam.

“Does the majority of the public want it? I don’t personally think so,” he said, arguing that without the village, the town and county would not be able to provide the services and identity that the village does. “Can we plow the sidewalks, can we give them fire and police protection, or do we just get rid of them? Then what? Who’s going to protect the village with all those issues? The town? I doubt it. The county? They can’t absorb it. If they did, we’d have to pay the price.”

Trustee Eleanor F. Hopke said dissolution would not save Potsdam much money on services, arguing that special districts would have to be set up to cover what the village takes care of now, such as streetlights, sidewalks and brush removal. She predicted that were this to happen, the result would be additional charges for Potsdam residents.

“Once it’s done, it’s done,” she said of dissolution. “If that’s what people want to do, they need to think very carefully.”

Ms. Hopke also said the change in political representation could also pose a problem, as town leaders would be representing larger geographic areas and wouldn’t necessarily make the needs of village residents a priority.

“People (village residents) have to look at: Do they trust the people on the town board to represent their interests as they want them to be represented?” said Ms. Hopke.

She said in her ideal New York State, there would be village governments to provide added services to residents who want them, and county governments to handle the rest.

“If people are really serious about consolidating government, it seems to me that the level that should be eliminated should be the towns,” she said.”

AN EVENT OF GENEROUSITY

Port Henry’s Saint Patrick’s Catholic Church has opened its Annual Community Mardi Gras Celebration to the public. It will be held at the Knights of Columbus Hall in Port Henry, Tuesday, February 9th from 5:30 – 7:30 PM. It is a celebration for all comers, but particularly for families. There will be supplies for do-it-yourself arts and crafts and family photos. Penelope the Clown will be there, encouraging people to dance to the music. Oh yes, there will be food. What is the charge? Nothing! Yes, this wonderful evening out is - free!

EDITORIAL STATEMENT

This little paper was begun over five years ago, because the village had recently gone through the divisive process of dissolution and then, the cherry-on-the-top, our hardware store was unceremoniously closed one Wednesday morning. We had a hardware store at nine am, at eleven am we had no hardware store. The whole village became depressed, myself included. But I kept seeing our mountains, our lake, all the natural wonders with which we had been gifted and, as one villager to another, I just had to say that though I missed our hardware store very much, the truly important facts of living here were still with us, our mountains, our lake and - our neighbors. Fact Finder’s first, one page, issue came into being and was distributed. Fact Finder wanted neighbors to join together in knowing the same facts from which to derive their own opinions. To this continuing end, this editor has tried to stick to objective facts. Do I have my own opinions? I most certainly do, as those who

know me, well know, and they also know how hard I try to be objective. I am not an “author,” I am an editor. I welcome reports from others and have tried very hard to encourage my neighbors to offer their thoughts to the paper. Unfortunately, most of Port Henry seems to be infected with a virus called “shyness.” Again I will urge, “Step out of your comfort zone! It can be surprisingly rewarding.” Just put your thoughts in a letter and drop it into the Chamber of Commerce mailbox at 4317 Main Street, Port Henry, and you and others may have the pleasure of reading *your* words in the Fact Finder.