



TOWN OF HILLSDALE
TOWN BOARD MEETING
April 11, 2023

A regular meeting of the Hillsdale Town Board was held on Tuesday, April 11, 2023 at 7:00 pm in the Hillsdale Town Hall and via Zoom with the following members present:

PRESENT:	Supervisor	Chris Kersten
	Councilmember	Tom Carty
	Councilmember	Steve Tiger
	Councilmember	Joanna Virello
	Councilmember	Robina Ward

OTHERS PRESENT: Elizabeth Sheer, Town Clerk; Richard Briggs, Highway Superintendent; Joe Hanselman Jr., Tax Collector, Fire Deputy, Meg Wormley, Brandon Lentine, Augie Sena, David Ruede, Bud Atwood, and other members of the public.

The meeting began with the Pledge of Allegiance led by Supervisor Kersten.

Public Comment:

There were no public comments.

Resolution #35. Approval of the minutes of the Town Board of March 21, 2023

On a motion by Tom Carty, seconded by Robina Ward, the Board voted to accept the minutes of March 21, 2023.

Adopted Vote

Aye: 5 Nay: 0

Resolved to accept the Minutes of the March 21, 2023 Town Board Meeting

Supervisor's Report – In lieu of a usual Supervisor's Report, Supervisor Kersten read a statement, which is attached.

Highway Superintendent

In lieu of a usual Highway Superintendent's report, Richard Briggs responded to Supervisor Kersten's statement.

Town Clerk – Elizabeth Sheer. There were two marriages and one death this month.

The Dog Control Officer reported four entries for the last month; all were found or had no further reports..

Town Clerk Sheer asked for the appointment of Ramona Bellamy as Temporary Duty Town Clerk for the remainder of the year to fulfill the Town Board's desire to move Town records to eCode. The Board requested that the Clerk issue a plan for the Deputy Clerk's position including number of hours that the project would take. The Clerk agreed to this request and will present the plan at the May meeting.

Fire District - Joe Hanselman, Jr. said that there were 17 calls in March and 3 so far in April, including an alarm activation, a lift assist and an unattended burn. Hanselman reminded town citizens that there is a burn ban in effect in New York State until May 14, which means that nothing can be burned outside.

Tax Collector – Joe Hanselman, Jr. said that unpaid taxes can be collected until the end of May. Double the number of second notices have gone out over last year.

Sewer District – Supervisor Kersten reported for Mike Scheller. The sewer used 11,000 gallons in March, which is a bit more than prior months. Inventory is being completed, and the sewer district is working on a schedule for tank pumping and testing. The next Sewer Committee meeting will be on July 31.

Town Board Reports:

Human Resources – Steve Tiger. Sexual Harassment Training is almost complete, and has been sent to committee members.

Infrastructure – Robina Ward. The plan for an Emergency Management concept. is being worked on.

The concentration of Infrastructure at the moment is to change Internet and Phone service. If the Town chooses to go with Spectrum, the Avaya system may need to be upgraded to fiber optic.

Town Board member Ward said that she and Town Clerk Sheer have been discussing moving town emails away from an ISP. Joe Vining, the Town's IT consultant, suggests using Microsoft 365, Government Grade, which fits all of the town's requirements. It is more expensive than what the town has been using.

Quotes are being received for the big "Welcome to Hillsdale" sign, which will be printed on two sides. Expected cost would be approximately \$5000, most of which can be mitigated by insurance.

Roe Jan Park – Joanna Virello. There have been 17 applications received so far for the Summer Recreation program, which is a lot for registration only being open for a week.

The Hillsdale Copake is now a non-profit entity.

The gardeners will want soil for May.

Committee Reports

Climate Resiliency – Tom Carty – Town Board member Carty read a statement from Howard van Lenten. Mr. van Lenten puts forth the name of Paul Durenberger as the new coordinator of the Climate Smart Community Task Force to fill the vacancy created by the Mr. van Lenten’s resignation.

Town Board member Carty asked that the Board approve Mr. Durenberger’s appointment.

Motion: Appoint Paul Durenberger as the coordinator of the Climate Smart Community Task Force.

Steve Tiger made a motion to appoint Paul Durenberger, which was seconded by Robina Ward

Motion Vote

Aye: 5 Nay: 0

Motion Carried

Howard van Lenten, head of the Climate Smart initiative, received a letter from NYSERDA saying that the goal has been reached and that the Town now qualifies for a \$10,000 grant. All the people on the committee contributed to the Town receiving Bronze level certification.

Town Board member Carty suggested that the town use the \$10,000 to get a number of solar panels for the highway garage.

New Business

Engineering grants – Bridge NY grant to replace West End Bridge is pending. The town is awaiting notification.

Town Hall Repairs – the Committee is meeting with engineering firm CPL every two weeks. The roof does not need to be replaced. A bid document should be available to be submitted to the board before the May 9 meeting. The bid package will be submitted to the Board before any bidding is done. The document will include mold mitigation, a generator and a new alarm system, among other items.

Robina Ward said that the sample of flooring that was sent to Town Hall was horrible, was of poor quality, and that better choices were out there.

Salt Shed - Supervisor Kersten said that the proposal that the town received for the Salt Shed from CPL was set aside because the cost was too high. An engineer asked to meet with Superintendent Briggs. A lower cost solution would be appreciated, but first, a solid engineering proposal was necessary for getting a grant.

Supervisor Kersten asked the Board how it wanted to proceed.

Highway Superintendent Richard Briggs pointed out that CPL is too expensive, but that the Highway department has been extremely busy with clean up from the March 14 storm. He requested a few months to investigate other options.

Newsletter – Joanna Virello suggested that the newsletter be sent to her before it is printed, as was decided by the Board last year. The Board has the responsibility to OK the newsletter. Regulations state that the Board may appoint a manager, but the ultimate decision of content should be brought to the attention of the Board.

Town Board member Robina Ward pointed out the impracticality of the entire Board approving the newsletter before it is sent out; it was supposed to be sent to Town Board member Virello.

Meg Wormley said that she would start sending the newsletter to Joanna Virello before it gets sent to the public. Joanna added that the Board and the Newsletter editor need to be on the same page, and suggested that there be a meeting about this, perhaps to change the dates that the newsletter is sent out. There was some discussion about this, but ultimately it was decided to send the draft newsletter to Joanna 48 hours before it is due to be sent out. Steve Tiger asked whether the Board wanted to revise the guidelines. It was decided that this was not necessary, since the guidelines do not mention the date that it is sent.

Clean Up Day – Clean Up Day is May 13. Barbato is asking for \$1500 for a dumpster. The Town of Copake investigated using the County services. The County will give a dumpster for \$75 plus a \$110 tipping fee.

Motion. Clean up Day on May 13, using County services.

On a motion by Robina Ward and seconded by Steve Tiger, Clean Up Day will be held on May 13, from 8 AM to 12:00 PM, using County services

Motion Vote

Aye: 5 Nay: 0

Motion Carried

A request from Meg Wormley on behalf of the RoeJan library was made to borrow the tent for an August 13 event. There is no conflict of dates. Questions about payment ensued. Meg Wormley said that as treasurer of the library, she knows that a check has never been sent to Hillsdale to pay for the borrowing of the tent. Robina Ward agreed to look into how the cost of putting up the tent was paid in the past. Highway superintendent Briggs said that he had submitted a bill in the past (for highway employees to erect the tent) and that it had been paid by an individual.

Motion: Lend the tent to the Roe Jan Library

Steve Tiger made a motion to loan the tent to the RoeJan library on August 13, with the same conditions as previously, seconded by Joanna Virello.

Motion Vote

Aye: 5 Nay: 0

Motion Carried

Joanna Virello remarked that the Easter Egg hunt was very successful. Next year the committee will look for volunteers to help stuff the eggs, because it is a grueling task.

Public comment

Joe Hanselman, Jr. asked when the sewer district bills with the increased cost per EDU would go out. The response was that they would be sent later in the week.

Bud Atwood asked whether the Town Hall roof was still slate. When he was informed that it was, he suggested that it was a good idea to keep it maintained.

Resolution #36 – Abstract dated March 21, 2023. The Board has approved the abstracts of the following:

General	\$18,315.35
Highway	\$10,297.60
Sewer	\$4660.64
Parks	\$304.31
Lighting	\$0.0
Capital Fund	\$0.0

Resolution #37 – Abstract dated April 10, 2023. The Board has approved the abstracts of the following:

General	\$6,853.88
Highway	\$19,645.44
Sewer	\$1331.72
Parks	\$0.0
Lighting	\$0.0
Capital Fund	\$8100

Motion. Adjourn Meeting.

On a motion by Joanna Virello seconded by Steve Tiger to adjourn the Town Board meeting at 8:03 pm.

Motion Vote

Aye: 5 Nay: 0

Motion Carried

The next Town Board meeting will be Tuesday, May 9, 2023 at 7:00 PM

Addendum: Supervisor's report

My report to you this evening will deviate from the usual pattern in view of some emails among elected officials over the past week. I'm painfully aware that our national discourse has become shrill with name calling and a loose interpretation of the truth, but I don't think there is a place for this in our TOWN.

We are very fortunate to have an excellent Town Newsletter that, based on the many compliments received in and around the community, is the envy of the county – and we are also fortunate that Meg Wormley serves as our editor. It's important to note here that the editor, appointed by the Board at the Organizational Meeting, receives articles and notices from many sources each month, and her role is really to coordinate this information into a presentable form. So, there are many authors and not just one or two as suggested in one of the emails.

In an email last week, an elected official accused another elected official of being a liar based on a statement in an article in the April newsletter. That's quite a charge. Although it was clearly shown that the article in question was not written by that individual, the accusation was not retracted. This sort of name calling is inappropriate at all levels and must be called out. Words have meaning and consequences, and we need to do our best to ensure a respectful work environment.

And then another concern emerged – that the newsletter is somehow biased and lopsided, in this case referring to an article relating to the resolution of the sewer debt. The article, submitted by me in my capacity as Supervisor, summarized the fiscal condition of the Sewer District when I took office in late 2020 and steps taken over the next two years to resolve the debt and return to fiscal solvency. I did not go into historical details because they occurred prior to my term and are contained in the accountant's report that was commissioned and approved by the board. Make no mistake – the system was in dire fiscal straits when my term began.

The article was entirely based on previously disclosed and discussed information through minutes, emails, documents and resolutions and it was reviewed by our attorney and accountant prior to publication. There was no new information presented in this article. It was based entirely on facts known to the Board. No individuals were cited and no accusations were made.

In the end, I believe that the public has the right to know what actions were taken over the past two years to correct the situation. It has been a major effort, and the seminal documents relating to the debt and its resolution are available on the web. There are no secrets – and yes, I take satisfaction in finding an equitable solution to the sewer debt, and I am proud of what we have accomplished together.

All of this has led to a request by a Board member that the entire Town Board review and approve the entire Newsletter – including the Supervisor’s Report --before publication each month – a heavy lift to be sure. Our Town Attorney has advised that it is impractical for the entire Board to review and vote on the content of the newsletter each month. The Town has entrusted the Newsletter to our Editor under a set of guidelines approved by the Board. NONE OF THESE GUIDELINES HAVE BEEN VIOLATED and none have been violated during Meg’s and my tenure. Our procedures have worked well, and, with respect, I don’t believe a change is merited. The proposed solution is simply unworkable.

And I have to say this: The Supervisor is duly elected by the voters of the Town and is therefore responsible to the entire Town. While my term is limited at this point, my successors must be able to communicate directly with the public as well. Our citizens should expect no less.

Numerous members of the Hillsdale community have expressed their concerns in this matter. I am heartened by their interest, and some who

are with us tonight may wish to address the Board prior to a vote, if any, taken in this matter. I believe we should give them that opportunity when we discuss this issue later in the agenda.

I request that my entire statement be memorialized in the Minutes of this meeting.

Mr. Briggs – your report please.