



TOWN OF HILLSDALE
TOWN BOARD MEETING
August 8, 2023

PUBLIC HEARING

A public hearing opened at 6:47 PM to discuss proposed local Laws 1-3 of 2023
Town Board member Joanna Virello was absent for the hearing
Town Attorney Matt Cabral described the features of each law:

Local Law #1 – Amends the code for exemption for emergency workers (fire fighters and ambulance workers) It brings the town current with the county which has established 10% exemption on assessed property value, and lists qualifications for exemption.

Local Law #2 – Establishes tracks with revised property laws with respect to disabled persons of limited income, with graduated levels of exemption, from 5% to 50%..

Local Law #3 – Amending current law with respect to senior citizens of limited income seniors. It contains a sliding scale from 5% to 50% depending on income level and increases the exemption.

Comments from the public: Jamie Carano asked whether the numbers have been modeled.

Attorney Cabral responded that the town was proposing these laws based on what the county has already enacted, and that it keeps the income level in line with increases in social security benefits.

Motion to adjourn the Public Hearing.

A motion to adjourn was made by Steve Tiger, and seconded by Tom Carty

Adopted Vote

Aye: 4 Nay: 0

The Board moved to adjourn at 6:57

A regular meeting of the Hillsdale Town Board was held on August 8, 2023 at 7:00 pm in the Hillsdale Town Hall and via Zoom with the following members present:

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

OTHERS PRESENT: Elizabeth Sheer, Town Clerk, Matt Cabral, Town Attorney, Meg Wormley, Joe Hanselman, Jr., Kelly Sweet, Mike Dvorchak, Jamie Carano Brandon Lentine, Dan Levy and other members of the public.

Present via Zoom were: Jonathan DiRocco, Irwin Feld, Steve Bluestone, Barbara Olsen Pascale, and other members of the public

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

Public Comment:

Meg Wormley asked whether anything could be done about the dead trees at Roe Jan Park. Supervisor Kersten said that it would be looked into. Kelly Sweet asked about the mural on the supermarket, and when it was going to be completed. As was stated last month, the painting is delayed but will be completed by the end of the fall.

Resolution #46. Approval of the minutes of the Town Board of July 11, 2023

On a motion by Steve Tiger, seconded by Robina Ward, the Board voted to accept the minutes of July 11, 2023

Adopted Vote

Aye: 5 Nay: 0

Resolved to accept the Minutes of the JULY 11, 2023 Town Board Meeting

Supervisor Kersten opted to move the Town Hall repair section of the meeting forward in deference to Jonathan DiRocco's schedule. He said that there was a proposal from CPL to engage them for additional services. Fees were forthcoming for re-bid of renovation and roof repair.

Town Hall Renovation

CPL is making a proposal to engage them for additional service. There are fees for a re-bid of the entire town hall renovation, mold remediation, and roof repair. This falls into three segments:

1a. Town Hall renovation - getting the town up to speed on additional services - This includes CPL putting the project out for bid - \$6600

1b. Re-bid the entire project with hopes for a better outcome - \$2500

1c. Bid package for the roof. The roofer came back with a new bid at double the price, which necessitates a public bid. Town Attorney Matt Cabral added that it does not qualify for an emergency exception. Therefore, Paragon needs to re-bid. - \$4500

After some discussion,

Motion to approve funds for CPL to continue service

A motion was made by Tom Carty, and seconded by Joanna Virello to approve the necessary funds to continue CPL's service for additional bidding and oversight on the Town Hall renovation project

Adopted Vote

Aye: 5 Nay: 0

The Board moved to approve the funds to continue service with CPL

At this point Brandon Lentine asked whether the Town was considering his bid for either mold or Town Hall repairs. The response was that he would need to re-bid, as the entire project is going out for re-bid, and the mold remediation is part of it.

Supervisor's Report

Supervisor Kersten reported that two significant checks had come to the town – one for \$134,706.34 for second quarter sales tax, up 3% over this time last year, and \$16,662.85, the town's share of tobacco settlement funds.

The BridgeNY grant was declined. There will be a debrief with the DOT on 8/10. The town's options are to re-apply or consider an interim solution, and study the impact on the town's budget.

CMH RapidCare is still closed They are still searching for a Physician's Assistant.

At the county level, the County Board urged Governor Hochul to veto a law to hold local elections only in even years. Supervisor Kersten voted against a statement, but the Board prevailed and a letter was submitted to the Governor

The board of Supervisors approved the Columbia-Greene Community College budget.

The purchase of the COARC building at 11 Warren Street is going forward for county offices.

Highway Report – Superintendent Richard Briggs said that there were many trees down in recent weeks, which necessitated major work from the highway department.

Whippoorwill Road has been paved.

The Highway Department is waiting for word from the DEC on Tribrook Road issues.

The loader will be delivered at the end of August.

Salt Shed: Highway Superintendent Briggs sent around an email containing information on how Austerlitz built their salt shed. Supervisor Kersten said that the town needed engineering plans and guidance from the Board on how to pay for it. He suggested the resurrection of old plans and do a public bid or get a grant, both of which would require plans and a cost estimate. Highway Superintendent Briggs said that money had been set aside for this project. Councilmember Ward said that the money needed to be moved, to show the town's commitment.

Town Clerk's report

There was one marriage in the past month, and one death.

Town Clerk Sheer said that it had come to the Town's attention that the minimum wage was raised at the end of December 2022 to \$14.20. The counselors are currently making \$14. To be in compliance, counselors should be raised to \$14.20 and senior counselors (currently making \$14.17) to \$14.35 (retroactive to the beginning of the camp term)

Motion to accept the proposal for raising counselors' salaries to minimum wage

A motion was made by Steve Tiger, and seconded by Robina Ward to raise counselor salaries

Adopted Vote

Aye: 5 Nay: 0

The Board moved to approve the proposal to raise counselors' salaries to \$14.20 and senior counselors to \$14.35

Fire District Report – Joe Hanselman, Jr. reported that there were 21 calls in July

Tax Collector's Report – Joe Hanselman, Jr. said that as the tax books are closed, there is nothing to report.

Lighting District Report – Councilmember Ward said that no lighting district taxes were moved. It is being looked into.

Sewer Report – 11,000 gallons were used per day, due to excess rainfall. Inventory is almost complete The proposed tank cleanout, at a cost of \$10,000 is being put on hold, and taken up with the budget in September.

Third quarter bills have gone out, and check are coming in.

Human Resources – Steve Tiger said there was nothing to report

Infrastructure – Robina Ward said that regarding the streetlight, the people who put them in can move them.

Emergency Response – This still needs some coordination, and will be taken up in September.

The Arts Walk people have been told by the county that they can close the road

Roe Jan Park Report –Joanna Virello reported that the town is still searching for sand for the volleyball court.

New park rules were sent to county Parks & Rec and they have some minor changes.

Committee Reports – Councilmember Tom Carty said that there were no committee reports

NEW BUSINESS

Supervisor Kersten had a statement concerning the town buying property for affordable housing. It is attached.

Councilmember Tiger asked whether the Board agreed that the best use of this land for the town is for workforce housing. The Board agreed,

Councilmember Virello made a motion that the Town is interested in affordable housing and should empower Supervisor Kersten and Councilmember Ward to have discussions with the sellers of the property.

Motion to state that the Town is interested in affordable housing and that Supervisor Kersten and Councilmember Ward can hold discussions with property owners

Joanna Virello made a motion that the Town is interested in affordable housing and should empower Supervisor Kersten and Councilmember Ward to have discussions with the sellers of the property. This was seconded by Robina Ward.

Adopted Vote

Aye: 5 Nay: 0

The Board moved that the town is interested in affordable housing, and that Supervisor Kersten and Councilmember Ward may enter into discussions with property owners.

Log Cabin

Attorney Matt Cabral has found the surviving spouse of the deceased owner of the property. Probate is proceeding in Suffolk County. The estate proffered a desire to resolve the issue, and it will be discussed.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Steve Bluestone said that as a member of the housing committee he has been pointing out the property on Route 23 for some time. The land is not currently for sale. There are probate issues. From his perspective, government entities work more slowly than private entities. It would be wise for the town to work alongside a nonprofit or private developer.

Resolution #47 – Abstract dated July 12, 2023. The Board has approved the abstracts of the following:

General	\$6690.33
Highway	\$8672.23
Sewer	\$32,384.88
Parks	\$926
Lighting	\$0.0
Capital Fund	\$0.0

Resolution #48 – Abstract dated July 25, 2023. The Board has approved the abstracts of the following:

General	\$13,586
Highway	\$224127.82
Sewer	\$58.78
Parks	\$88.81
Lighting	\$0.0
Capital Fund	\$2725.33

Motion to adjourn.

A motion to adjourn was made by Steve Tiger, and seconded by Tom Carty

Adopted Vote

Aye: 5 Nay: 0

The Board moved to adjourn at 8:22

The next town Board meeting will take place at 7 PM on September 12, 2023.

Land Purchase – 8/8/23 Board Meeting

I wish to make an opening statement and ask that it be reflected in the Minutes in its entirety.

As all of you know, I have a deep commitment to affordable housing through my board responsibilities at Columbia Habitat over the past 8 years and my efforts, with Matt White to establish the Roe Jan Housing Task Force that has been meeting regularly over the past two and a half years, joined by the CEO of CEDC and more recently Columbia County's newly appointed Affordable Housing Coordinator.

I do believe that we have a unique opportunity to move our affordable and workforce agenda forward in Hillsdale and commend the community's energetic efforts to acquire the 14 acre parcel on Route 23. I think we all have the same goal, so the question is how we do it in the best way.

I share the enthusiasm regarding this property, but need to balance this enthusiasm as Hillsdale's Town Supervisor and, by virtue of office, as the Town's chief fiscal officer, a role I have taken seriously throughout my term.

Two weeks ago today, our Board held an attorney/client conference with our attorney, Matt Cabral. Following a discussion about the property in question, the board agreed, for various reasons, that it was not appropriate for the town to acquire the property directly, but to support the project through zoning, planning, and other initiatives that would facilitate bringing affordable housing to Hillsdale, whether by rental, ownership or both.

At this meeting, we discussed the range of other urgent town priorities including:

- West End bridge repair or replacement in light of our unsuccessful grant request. This is a major public safety issue with a price tag of \$1 million.
- Town Hall Repairs including urgent roof repair and mold mitigation at over \$300,000.
- Salt Shed for the Highway Department at \$600,000 plus.
- Streetscape project at \$800,000+. There may be a grant opportunity for which we can apply this fall but, as we have learned, these grants are highly competitive.
- Hamlet Park – in light of two grant rejections, we need to consider how to move forward. We have a strong feasibility study and need to think – as a community—how to begin to tackle some of the needed repairs and enhancements. That project was in the \$1 million range.
- Ongoing sewer investments, and others

These are among our major priorities, and so the question is how does a land purchase fit in? The Town is holding just over \$1 million in unallocated assets, so this purchase alone would commit about 25% of our reserve.

I also have a number of other questions we need to ask ourselves:

- Are we prepared to commit to a purchase knowing that we cannot offer more than the appraised value that we know is substantially below the owner's expectations?
- Are we prepared to commit to closing costs, including those at the time of sale, insurance and other expenses until a sale is arranged, however long that will take, AND under what terms would the Town sell the land to achieve our affordable housing goal?
- And very importantly, what is our specific plan for this land? All of the material I have reviewed strongly suggests that a municipality considering the purchase of land for affordable housing, including those provided by the Association of Towns, state in no uncertain terms that we must know precisely how we plan to sell, develop or otherwise manage the property. To my knowledge, we do not have such a plan.
- So, should the Town purchase this land, what criteria or vetting process would be used to determine the sale, and would they be realistic and consistent with the Town's expectations for affordable housing?
- Would it focus on home ownership , rental or both?
- Are we as a Town prepared to extend the sewer lines to this property vis a vis local laws, costs of expansion, etc? I think this is a reasonable expectation, but these issues must be scoped out carefully, especially in view of the Sewer District's serious financial challenges just recently addressed.
- Given the high water table, would we want a qualified engineering report to be sure that houses can be built on this property?
- A purchase of the property by the Town would be subject to a Permissive Referendum that has a 30-45 day window that may, in turn, require a Referendum should there be objections. I believe the acquisition of Town Hall and consideration of purchasing the Toll House went through a similar process, with the Toll House purchased through the creation of a separate not for profit entity and Town Hall through a referendum. Are we prepared for a process that may become lengthy and complex?
- If the Referendum passes and the Town purchases the property, would it consider establishing a land trust that can receive tax credits? And how long would that take?

And so, again, what is the plan and how do we wish to order our priorities with the very limited resources we have?

Would it be more expeditious to have an individual, group of individuals or a not for profit dedicated to affordable housing purchase the land directly, perhaps more efficiently and rapidly than the Town could? There appears to be a lot of interest.

Finally, since I became aware of this land possibility, I have consulted with Mike Tucker, CEO of the Columbia Economic Development Corporation and Chris Brown, the County's Affordable Housing Coordinator to seek guidance on the best ways to acquire this property. As a result of these interactions, they are in the midst of preparing an analysis of the property and recommended ways to proceed. I have also invited them to attend tomorrow's meeting organized by Steve Bluestone, and one or both of them will attend. I can report that they are receptive to exploring ways for CEDC to become involved, but I have to say this – there can be only one elected Supervisor at a time. Otherwise they, and we, cannot function.

Perhaps Matt would like to share a few thoughts regarding the Association of Towns material shared by Robina before opening this for discussion.