

TOWN BOARD PUBLIC WORKSHOP
August 12, 2015

The August 12, 2015 Public Workshop was held at 7:00 pm by Supervisor Tollisen in the A. James Bold Meeting Room at the New Town Hall with the following members present:

Kevin J. Tollisen, Supervisor
Paul L. Hotaling, Councilman
Jeremy W. Connors, Councilman
Lyn A. Murphy, Town Attorney
Cathy L. Drobny, Deputy Town Attorney
Lynda A. Bryan, Town Clerk

Daphne V. Jordan, Councilwoman - Excused
John P. Wasielewski, Councilman - Excused
John Pingelski, Highway Superintendent - Excused

Supervisor Tollisen: Good evening. It is 7:00 so I am going to start. At the last Town Board meeting, I called for some public workshops. We are starting to discuss the Town budget and one of the things that continues to weigh on my mind in my second year here doing the budget is the actual Highway budget. To give you a little background:

2013 – The State Comptroller came in and made some suggestions and recommendations to the town as far as developing a plan for going forward for the town specifically, regarding developing a plan for the Highway Department and improvements being made. One of the things I believe is out there from the State Comptroller in weekly news reports and things is a continued pressure on towns to balance their budgets. The first thing that seems to happen is when we are crunching numbers, the infrastructure improvements that need to be made seem to get less and less. The Town of Halfmoon is no different. In the past there have been some good years for the town and there have been some years that have not been so good resulting in decreases in fund balances and things of that nature. In 2013 the Highway Superintendent was required to prepare a five (5) year plan in response to the State Comptroller's audit. Currently, we have about 115 miles of roads in the Town of Halfmoon. If you look at a twenty (20) year life expectancy for a town road, which is the average life expectancy, and that's not my expertise but that is what I have been advised, you need to do about 5.75 miles of pavement per year at a cost of what has been advised to me at about \$125,000 per mile results in a required type of budgetary expenditure of \$718,750 a year on average. That number would include CHIPS, the state money that we get and things like that. If you look at the

town budget over the past years the \$718,750 that would be required for the twenty (20) year plan is not being met. I think that is why it was important to hold a public workshop to first explain this to the board, and I know that the Board is fully aware of this because of our discussions in the past year, but also to get it out to the public. This is an ongoing concern that I believe as Town Supervisor I need to make everyone aware of and try to work on a solution to this.

In last year's budget it was budgeted that we spent about \$300,000 on road improvements last year along with CHIPS monies of \$155,000. Now that CHIPS money is a little bit higher because of the unusual weather and we got maybe \$20,000 more that.

2014 - In last year's budget only \$300,000 was budgeted above CHIPS resulting again in not putting in the number of miles per road that really need to be paved. Because of the budget shortfall last year, which we all know that our mortgage tax was actually \$480,000 less than budgeted the year before, we did have to make cuts to certain areas of the budget. Even though there was \$300,000 budgeted for paving that did not occur. We did do Woodin Road last year for instance and took care of some other areas with the CHIPS money.

2015 - In my 2015 budget, which is what we have this year, besides the CHIPS money, we only budgeted \$100,000. Again, lower than the \$718,750 that we really need to do on this twenty (20) year plan. Part of that was the expectation that we would be able to utilize the grant for Sitterly Road and pave that road with grant money except for the 20% match. What we've done is to put that on hold because we are looking to try to do that paving project along with some bigger improvements on Sitterly Road which will probably take us into next year.

Looking at this budget for the Highway specifically, what the Town Board needs to look at is long term. The budget is balanced; the Town is in good financial shape, we have rebounded our General Fund Balance from the \$28,000 when I started and we are now at \$1.2 million; so we've got some very good significant factors that are going in our favor. As far as our mortgage tax this year, it is on budget from what I budgeted for the \$780,000 and assuming that all goes well we will match or exceed that. Similarly, our sales tax number that we put in the budget was extremely conservative and I only budgeted \$10,000 above the previous year where the estimated figures were showing from the county that we could actually budget 1% above what we actually received which is about \$110,000 difference. Right now mortgage tax is on budget. Our sales tax is on budget and actually a little better. This is all good but the issue that we continue to have to address is the highway improvements that need to be made. So the Town Board is going to need to be looking at long term what is the general effect if we don't make these improvements. Right now with what we are doing, we are on a much higher life expectancy than we should be with respect to these roads. Our Highway

Superintendent first of all wanted to be here tonight but he is on a well-deserved couple days off so he couldn't be here. In any event, this is a public workshop and I am sorry that the public is not here, but I think it is important that we start laying the ground work to figure out long term for this town, what needs to be done to work on these infrastructure improvements. We are not talking about the newer developments here. We are not talking about the new developments coming into the town because as part of any project that comes in we require the builder, the developer to install these roads to town standards and install them to such a degree that they last long term. What we are looking at is the older developments that have been in town for a number of years. We're looking at older roads that have been in existence for years. We are not talking about County roads or State roads; we are talking specifically about town roads and how do we long term make sure that we address the issue of improvements aka paving these roads on a continual basis. If you look at the highway budget, one of the things that every town has the same issue, that you always shake your head at is that we budgeted \$240,000 in our budget this past year for salt and for protecting our residents during these storms and different things like that. I will tell you in my meeting with the Highway Superintendent yesterday as we were going through the budget figures, there is \$205 left in that budget. That is after moving \$10,000 into that budget to pay the last bill. We have spent \$250,000, (a quarter of a million dollars) on salt just for the beginning part of this year. That is a factor that is completely in our face. It is another issue that we critically need to put an eye on. We need to make sure that our roads are safe, but we need to find money for the end of this year for our Highway Department so that we can purchase salt. Additionally, the projection that we got for our salt quote from the county is up \$5.27 per ton from last year. You think that it is not much per ton but when you factor in how many hundred ton you buy at a time, it is a considerable amount of money that we have to take into account this year. So without even considering the bad winter that we had and the expectation that it is not going to change this year, we already have to face the reality that that may require a budget increase next year and the question obviously again, where are you going to take that money from when you already have a budget that is pretty tight and a budget that we purposely made tight because we want to make sure that we only spend those tax dollars of our town residents that we have to spend and nothing more.

Enough of my 12 – 15 minute soliloquy, but I think it's important that we need to look at the highway improvements for the town on a long term basis and also making sure that with these added miles/roads that the highway department is properly equipped with the equipment that they need. I will tell you that as the Supervisor, I have looked at everything that I can look at to try to help the Highway Department with that situation. We've suggested on PDD projects that are starting to come in under my two (2) years of being here, some of the things that we've suggested is that they make some sort of either monetary improvement to the highway department fund such as the Flex Park PDD put in \$30,000 towards

highway. That was just an amendment to the PDD. I have suggested on some other projects that in lieu of something else, they could put money toward a new truck or plows. We also are working on and the Board has just been made aware of this, we are also working on a project to get some grants to pay for some highway equipment. We are doing everything we can logically do and now the reality is how do we move forward and make the necessary improvements that we need to make.

I will open up the workshop for discussion

Councilman Connors: Good evening Mr. Supervisor. How are you sir? I agree with you whole heartily that we need to look at this holistically from a 10,000 foot view. I know that you have done due diligence in trying to crunch the numbers for us to be able to provide safe and passable highways to our residents, so I thank you for that. I do think that it is time that we look at this in order to provide a safe and manageable Highway Department and not only for the equipment to do the job but the roads to be passible to the residents as well. It is time that this comes to fruition.

Supervisor Tollisen: Just to follow up, this particular year with the way the weather was, the roads just took an unbelievable beating from the harsh winter. It was an extremely cold winter. The frost line was a lot deeper than it usually is. There were a lot more storms and things like that. I mean there were roads in the town that had some issues with heaving during the winter that we had to address. The roads on a regular basis take a beating in the winter but I think that this year was a unique year, it took an exceptional beating. So again, the reason why I want to have these workshops is what is the Board looking at and what is the public looking at (I know that there is not a lot of residents here but hopefully with future meetings there will be more) the way to address the issue.

Councilman Hotaling: Working with the Highway Department as liaison, I have noticed a lot of things in the past couple of years that have come up that you really can't brace yourself for such as usage of salt, failing culvert pipes, blacktop. This year the frost was over five (5) feet in the ground which it never is. It showed up in the water main breaks in Schenectady, Rotterdam, Glenville, we had a couple. I think that it is a very smart move for us to be proactive and looking towards keeping the rehabbing and rebuilding of our roads going forward in the future. I am in support of moving forward.

Supervisor Tollisen: I will certainly open it up to any other comments, but I think that for this meeting; me setting forth why we are having the public workshops and I think it is important for the Board to think of some ideas and take some considerations at our next public workshop next week. I believe it is before our Town Board Meeting that we try to come up with some creative ideas of what we are thinking to do and how we are thinking of addressing this. I know that

Councilwoman Jordan has the Business and Economic Development Meeting going on now but she has been briefed on this as well as Mr. Wasielewski. For the next meeting, perhaps we can come up with some ideas about how to best address this. Do we want to continue to move forward the best that we can and do what we can within our means or do we have to look at it further? Any questions?

Attorney Murphy: The only comment that I will make to the Board and obviously Cathy and I are constantly looking at surrounding communities to see what local laws they passed, what actions that their Boards have taken in an effort to make sure that you all have all of the knowledge and can see through the prism of the entire State of New York as to how other communities are dealing with similar problems. You are one of I think of only two (2) towns that do not have a Highway tax. When we call around and talk to the Comptroller, the Association of Towns where the real property where the other Town Attorney's they are shocked that you are operating without one. So I think that is something that although it is not something that has been talked about in the past, you should realize that relative to all of the surrounding communities, you are unique in that feature.

Councilman Hotaling: I have one other comment. We have been proactive already this year. The Road Dedication Committee has a deadline of November 1st to accept roads. So hopefully the infrastructure will be in a lot better shape and a finished product before the winter comes and have to endure the weather.

Supervisor Tollisen: I think that in the almost two (2) years that I have been here, the Board has been extremely diligent in absolutely trying to find in every way that we can maneuver and be stronger but leaner and meaner at the same time. We have gone from every facet that we can and we have cut. When our grants person decided to retire instead of replacing him with a full time person with benefits, we went out and said that we can do the same job through a professional company with a reduced cost. Instead of replacing one of our Animal Control Officers (part time), we partnered with the Town of Clifton Park in an effort to save money. We have done the same thing with other positions at the Town. That is the General Fund part of it. We have tried to do everything that we can to keep the budget as lean as possible. What I'm concerned about is that I can continue the way the budget goes and we do the best that we can, but I think that for the long term benefits for the town, well beyond my being here, well into the next Supervisor or successive Supervisor's or Town Board's that are here, I don't want to be criticized in the future by not looking forward. I think that we need to look forward and we need the best plan that we can come up with and moving forward on how we are going to address these concerns. These concerns are smaller now, but if you continue to let infrastructure only develop at a smaller rate than what you should, those things are only going to quadruple in size and those issues are only going to become larger and larger. So that is where we need to really develop that issue. Ms. Murphy's

comments that we are only one (1) of two (2) towns without a Highway Tax, like I'm saying, that certainly is a question that the Town Board needs to look at whether or not that is something realistic that we really need to do or not, but with these numbers again we have an obligation to our residents, we're the elected officials, we have an obligation to make sure that we are making the best decisions that we can, not only now, but in the future when we're gone and there are other people sitting here.

Councilman Connors: I agree with you 100% and I think that putting a band aid on something now is going to lead to greater consequences in the future especially with infrastructure.

Supervisor Tollisen: Let's push forward and think about ideas for our next public workshop and then we will meet again next week just before our Board meeting. Thank you very much.

Workshop ended at 7:23pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

Lynda A. Bryan,
Town Clerk, Town of Halfmoon