

**Town of Westerlo Town Board
Workshop Meeting
of
Tuesday, April 6, 2021**

The Town of Westerlo Town Board held a workshop meeting on Tuesday, April 6, 2021 via Zoom ID # 91571318179. Supervisor Bichteman opened the meeting with the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag at 7:00 PM.

Attending were: Supervisor William Bichteman Jr.
Councilman Joseph J. Boone
Councilwoman Amie L. Burnside
Councilman Matthew Kryzak
Councilman Richard Filkins

Absent were: None

Also attending via zoom: Highway Superintendent Jody Ostrander and employee Justin Case, Planning Board Chairperson Dorothy Verch and members Edwin Stevens & Beau Loendorf, BRC members Bob Wilcox and Leonard Laub, Town Clerk Karla Weaver and three interested residents.

OLD BUSINESS

APPOINTMENTS NEEDING TO BE MADE FOR ZONING BOARD OF APPEALS (ZBA) AND MUSEUM TRUSTEES

Supervisor Bichteman indicated the Town is looking to appoint two ZBA members and three Museum Trustees. So far one application has been received for the ZBA position. Anyone interested in applying for the Museum should have an interest in history.

REVITALIZING THE HERITAGE MUSEUM

Supervisor Bichteman advised that the Town Clerk's office searched records for the origin of the Museum. Nothing was found to substantiate when they actually came into existence but it was verified when the Town Board appointed the first people to be the Museum Trustees and at the same time, the first Library Trustees were appointed. A few years later, Dennis Fancher who was part of the Historical Society, recommended that because the Museum was an offshoot of the Historical Society, that the Trustees be appointed from the Historical Society and that the Town Board initially accept them and just replace as needed moving forward; the Town Board agreed. Mr. Bichteman has reached out to the Town Attorney to see where the Town goes from here. A set of by-laws was done by the previous Town Attorney but they were never accepted by the Town. He also indicated the Town could file for a charter at the same time allowing them to become a 501-3c nonprofit which would also allow them to apply for grants. The money that is in the Museum's account should be used for improvements.

Supervisor Bichteman indicated that both the Library and Museum buildings are owned by the Town of Westerlo and if they were to be sold it would be subject to permissive referendum. Mr. Bichteman believed there needs to be a memorandum of understanding or a lease agreement for the Museum and Library with terms and conditions to include what is their responsibility and what is the Towns. He also mentioned that in the event the Fire Co. no longer has a use or wants Modern Woodman Hall, it reverts back to the Town. It was also mentioned that the Rescue Squad is privately owned by the Rescue Squad.

PARK/TOWN HALL SURVEILLANCE & SECURITY UPDATE

Supervisor Bichteman indicated that two cameras have been installed at the park and three have been installed at the Town Hall. There is a monitor in the Supervisor's office however the installers are coming

back tomorrow to program the computers in the Town Clerk's office, Assessor's office and Supervisor's office so each office has access to the cameras. Supervisor Bichteman advised that the cameras are live all the time and are not motion activated. There's a camera on the front door, back door and on the exterior entrance to the Town Clerk's office; the north entrance is the only one that doesn't have a camera and there are no plans to put one there. The Supervisor also mentioned the plans for this year are to replace the steps on the north entrance first, add a ramp at the main entrance in the front and replace the ramp in the rear with just stairs. All doors will be locked except the main entrance in the front of the building. He mentioned that the camera on the front door captures the mail box, sidewalk and entrance.

A resident asked where the recordings are backed up. Mr. Bichteman advised the system is located at the Town Hall and run on a loop; the Town is not required to keep a record unless there is an incident. The resident also asked if the cameras record audio, the Supervisor indicated yes. She advised audio recording is illegal; he will double check.

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN PROGRESS

The Comprehensive Plan Committee is meeting every other week to finish up details on the plan. They expect to present the draft plan at the next Town Board meeting.

The Zoning Committee is meeting weekly and the crafting of the new revised renewable energy codes is underway. It will be brought to the Town Board for review and the hope is to have it completed by the end of May.

NEW BUSINESS

SUMMER RECREATION PROGRAM

Councilman Boone mentioned the uncertainty for the summer recreation program due to COVID restrictions. He mentioned the possibility of doing a few gatherings/events such as movie and campfire nights where they can spread it out over the season instead of a week. Supervisor Bichteman advised that the Governor has cleared the Town for outside gatherings at the park for up to 200 people. Councilman Kryzak liked the idea of movie and campfire nights; any family activities would be excellent. Mr. Bichteman suggested coordinating with the library for movies as they have a projector and movies. Councilman Kryzak offered to assist Councilman Boone and they hope to have more information by the next Town Board or workshop meeting.

COMMUNITY BLOCK GRANT & COMMUNITY FUNDING GRANT

Broadband Research Committee (BRC) member Leonard Laub explained that the Federal Covid Relief Act has available money and amongst other things, some of that money will go toward improving internet service. A Community Block Grant which is being administered through Paul Tonko's office is very lucrative, with the average grant being around \$5.5 million. A Community Funding Grant which is administered through the state has a much lower limit of \$500,000 max but it is more flexible for what it will and will not cover. The Town can apply for the state grant if interested in cellular coverage for the entire town. Mr. Laub believes the Town could potentially receive \$2 million from the Tonko grant which should support Mid-Tel and Mid-Hudson for extending their cable plans to pretty much the entire town but it is a matching grant. The Town would need to come up with \$500,000 for the Tonko grant and the state grant can be applied toward this. He indicated that the Town will apply for both the Tonko and state grants. If the Town doesn't get the Tonko grant, the town can use the state grant to roll out cellular. If the Town gets the Tonko grant but not the state, there are other available grant options. Councilman Boone thanked all the BRC members for their work in hopefully securing these grants.

AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN ACT

Supervisor Bichteman mentioned that the Town will be receiving an estimated \$360,000 from the Federal government through the state for the American Rescue Plan Act which has several use options.

ASSESSOR POSITION

Supervisor Bichteman advised that the Assessor position has been filled on a temporary basis by Melanie Bunzey. She will have office hours from 4:30pm-7pm on Thursdays or by appointment.

TOWN PARK RENOVATIONS

As part of the Town Park renovations, Mr. Bichteman believed the Board was in agreement to put in a walking trail with benches and lighting and if that is still the case, he will have the engineer draw up the plans. He also advised that bathrooms will be constructed at the South Westerlo Park this year as well.

HIGHWAY DEPARTMENT

Councilman Filkins expressed concern that the Highway Department was now down to four guys and wanted to know what the Town would be doing about it with summer approaching and the need for flagmen, etc; there is currently not enough staff. Supervisor Bichteman spoke with the Highway Superintendent and at the time there wasn't yet a determination on the employee's long-term prognosis. He indicated that Mr. Ostrander is aware that if he needs to replace the employee, he can. Discussion ensued regarding the possibility of hiring back previously laid off employees, retired employees possibly coming off retirement and going on Medicare and potentially using some of the American Rescue Plan Act money for this purpose. Mr. Ostrander advised there is a lot to do this year; chipper work, sweeper rental in May which will take two guys two weeks, culvert pipes need to be put in, and he also plans to resurface Flood road.

Resident Barbara Russell commented in support of more help for the Highway Department. Councilwoman Burnside expressed concern for someone getting hurt. Councilman Filkins believed it's time to bring some people back, he needs the staff. Mr. Bichteman advised that the money from the American Rescue Plan cannot be used to make payroll, for funds to cover pension costs or for building renovations, with the exception of making space to comply with COVID social distancing.

PUBLIC COMMENT

It was suggested that putting in benches or planting trees/flowers at the Town park would be a way to honor residents that were lost to COVID. Benches could be sponsored.

ADJOURNMENT OF MEETING

With there being no further discussion, Councilman Filkins made a motion to close the workshop meeting. Councilman Kryzak seconded; all in favor motion carried. Meeting adjourned at 8:26pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Karla J. Weaver
Town Clerk