

Town Of Austerlitz  
Regular Town Board Meeting  
December 17, 2020

The December 17, 2020 regular Town Board Meeting was held via Zoom in accordance with the Governor's Executive Order 202.1. Meeting instructions were on the Town website.

Present via Zoom: Robert Lagonia, Supervisor, Greg Vogler, Maureen Wilson, Jere Wrightsman, Chris Schober, Town Board Members and Susan Haag, Town Clerk.

Highway Superintendent Robert Meehan absent due to snow storm.

Town Board Meeting called to order at 7:00 p.m.

Moment of Silence, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

**Minutes**

A motion to accept the November 19, 2020 Town Board Meeting minutes was made by J. Wrightsman and seconded by G. Vogler.

R. Lagonia: yes

G. Vogler: yes

C. Schober: yes

M. Wilson: yes

J. Wrightsman: yes

Motion carried 5:0.

**Auditing of Accounts and Claims**

Supervisor Lagonia noted that the December abstracts were sent to the Town Board Members for review. If any of the Town Board Members would like to see and sign the actual vouchers, please make arrangements with Town Clerk Haag.

A motion to authorize payment of the December General Fund, #323-351, in the amount of \$20278.43 and Highway Fund, #245-272, in the amount of \$31942.29 was made by M. Wilson and seconded by J. Wrightsman.

R. Lagonia: yes

G. Vogler: yes

C. Schober: yes

M. Wilson: yes

J. Wrightsman: yes

Motion carried 5:0.

A motion to add General Fund voucher #352 in the amount of \$39816.00 payable to PlugPV LLC pending NYSERDA approval and NYSEG activating the account was made by G. Vogler and seconded by C. Schober.

R. Lagonia: yes

G. Vogler: yes

C. Schober: yes  
M. Wilson: yes  
J. Wrightsman: yes  
Motion carried 5:0.

## **Reports**

### **Monthly Cash Disbursement and Supervisor Report**

Monthly Cash Disbursement Report for the Month of November 2020 submitted. Supervisor Lagonia advised there are no red flags and the Town currently has roughly \$1.369 million in the bank. Building permits fees are down as are fines and forfeitures. Fines and forfeitures might still pan out. Only 60% of the 2020 budget was spent this year and Supervisor Lagonia thanks individual departments in being diligent to watch spending due to COVID. R. Lagonia feels the Town will be headed into 2021 in a solid position. All of the Highway budget should be spent by the end of the year. C.H.I.P.s reimbursement is not in yet. Supervisor Lagonia would like to get the Highway Form 284 in place very early this year, February at the latest. There will be some leftover C.H.I.P.s money that will need to be spent next year. Supervisor Lagonia still has not heard from Engineer Ray Jurkowski and if he cannot make contact soon the Town may have to go with a different Engineer for the projects he is working on. These projects need to get going.

Unfortunately, the State has yet to pay out the millions it owes to Counties. The Federal Government needs to help out the States. Let's hope this money comes soon.

Supervisor Lagonia has been swamped with COVID issues on a County level. The numbers are high in the County and even some County workers have tested positive. There is a lot of noncompliance that is leading to the spread of this virus. Contact Tracing involves so much work. The decision was made not to name individual businesses that have had instances of COVID. Most of the spread is coming from home events and this is the biggest challenge in the County. Shut downs will probably be coming at some point.

Supervisor Lagonia has been sitting on a Police Reform Panel and this has been taking up time although it is very interesting. Town Board Member Maureen Wilson had seen something that said hard data will be released and she wondered when this will happen. R. Lagonia advised that once the data is finished and compiled, something should go out. Columbia County has had a very strong record of not using choke holds and the like so there has been very few complaints that have come in over the last few years. Member Wilson believes that any report that comes out should just contain facts.

Supervisor Lagonia received a call about the entrance to a private road off of Beale Road. Highway Superintendent Meehan looked at the situation and felt that all was in order.

### **Highway Report**

Highway Superintendent Meehan was not in attendance due to the snow storm. Supervisor Lagonia advised that he does not connect that often with R. Meehan.

Supervisor Lagonia advised that Town Historian Tom Moreland is moving ahead with the museum in the old Town Hall. There is a desk in the building that needs to go so if anyone wants this let R. Lagonia know. The Town is not going to store.

Town Clerk Report for the month of November 2020 submitted.

No Planning Board Report for the month of November 2020 submitted.

Comprehensive Plan Oversight Committee Report for the month of December 2020 submitted.

Building Inspector/Code Enforcement Report for the month of November 2020 submitted.

Justice Cassuto Justice Court Report for the month of November 2020 submitted.

No Dog Control Report for the month of November submitted.

#### Climate Smart Report

Town Board Member Vogler submitted the following report:

- The garage solar array has been fully installed, although we are waiting on NYSEG to activate the feed from the array through a new solar enabled meter into the NYSEG grid. We will not pay the vendor until the system is fully operational.
- Two designated members of the committee selected a town resident to participate in a grant opportunity by Lifeboat who will provide the funding for this individual. If the grant application is successful, the applicant will sign a contract with the town and the town board will need to approve. The decision by Life boats due on or around January 12, 2021. Attached is a draft of the contract that has been vetted by Joe Catalano, the town attorney.
- Paige reported that progress continues to be made towards the development of the town's climate website.
- Next meeting is Wednesday, January 20, 2021

The Town Board discussed the hiring of a Climate Smart Community Coordinator. There were several interested parties, but the recommendation of the Committee is DeeAnn Veeder. This appointment will be made at the Organizational Meeting in January.

A motion to accept the monthly reports was made by G. Vogler and seconded by C. Schober.

R. Lagonia: yes

G. Vogler: yes

C. Schober: yes

M. Wilson: yes

J. Wrightsman: yes

Motion carried 5:0.

#### Correspondence

NYS Dept of Ag and Markets: 12/3/20 Dog Control Officer Inspection Report rated satisfactory.

## **Unfinished Business**

None

## **New Business**

### **Audit: Town Supervisor for 2019**

Conducted by Accountant Nelson Furlano, November 24, 2020 Report: No findings or instances of noncompliance with record keeping requirements.

### **Audit: Town Clerk/Tax Collector for 2019**

Conducted by Accountant Nelson Furlano November 24, 2020 Report: No findings or instances of noncompliance with record keeping requirements.

### **Audit: Justice Court for 2019**

Conducted by Accountant Nelson Furlano, December 8, 2020 Report: For both Justice Cassuto and Justice Grubin no instances of late filing of reports to the Justice Court System and all bank balances matched the monthly reconciliations of the balance of 2019.

A motion to accept the 2019 Audits of the Town Supervisor, Town Clerk/Tax Collector and Justice Court was made by J. Wrightsman and seconded by G. Vogler.

R. Lagonia: yes

G. Vogler: yes

C. Schober: yes

M. Wilson: yes

J. Wrightsman: yes

Motion carried 5:0.

## **Office of the Aging Report**

Town of Austerlitz Representative on the Columbia County Office of the Aging Advisory Council, Barbara Smith, submitted the following report to the Town Board and was available to answer any questions:

As the Town's representative to the Advisory Council for the Columbia County Office for Aging, I have attended the two zoom conference calls held in the last two months. (Earlier Spring/Summer planned Council meetings were cancelled during the early days of the pandemic). The next Advisory Council meeting will take place in March 2021. This report summarizes the Council's discussion and requests your guidance regarding action items.

During the calls, OFA staff provided updates on various benefits utilized by senior residents throughout the county, for example, the Home Energy Assistance Program and the health insurance counseling program related to the enrollment period.

The following topics were highlighted as ones where the Council members could have input and encourage results.

(1) There is a "**Senior Stars**" program for gift baskets and food items to be given to Meals on Wheels recipients in an effort to diminish their isolation and/or need during the holiday season. The program is strictly funded by personal donations -- no government funding is used. It was reported that "case managers" may ask seniors for a "wish list" (e.g., coats, boots, hats, towels). The question was raised as to how the recipients were identified (about 25 people were recipients last year). Sometimes, the OFA van drivers who take seniors to appointments have provided names of needy persons. OFA anticipates a similar number of people who will receive items during this holiday season. The staff did not have information at hand about where the recipients of the program were living (which towns).

Possible Town of Austerlitz Action Item:

Perhaps in late summer of 2021, the Town could provide information to residents about the Senior Stars program and indicate that Town residents could contribute funding for the purpose of providing items to needy seniors. Further, if residents are aware of a senior/s who might benefit from participation in the program, that information could be provided to OFA.

(2) Should there be a more formalized "**call program**" to reach out to seniors? (One drawback - there aren't many volunteers to help). Joyce Thompson, Council chair, said she would like to learn which towns have such a program; who makes the calls; and how are the people identified. The Group thought OFA staff might be better placed to make the calls, in light of privacy concerns. The Board of Elections has information regarding dates of birth of residents registered to vote, so it could be determined who would fit the "senior" definition -- over 70? over 60? The Town of Gallatin was discussed as an example of a town with such a program underway. It was noted that the Hudson police have an elder calling program; and the sheriff's office does such calls throughout the county, upon request.

Town Action item:

Each Advisory Council member was asked to check and report back to Joyce Thompson on whether there is a senior "call program" in their Town, or other organized Town outreach to senior residents.

(3) **Meals on Wheels.** Staff reported that the number of people receiving frozen meals has more than doubled since July -- now at 102, up from 45. They attributed this rise to the closing of senior centers during the pandemic; awareness of the service, and more "boomer" generation living here.

Town Action Item:

Consider ways to encourage more seniors to utilize the Meals on Wheels program. (Currently there are 3 people participating in Town.) Of course, the town website is a resource, as is the OFA website, but it may happen that the needy seniors do not spend much time on the Internet. Perhaps the various not-for-profit associations in town (Historical Society; Academy, fire companies, e.g.,) and St. Peter's Church could include Meals on Wheels information in one/more of their newsletters? If you think that is a good idea, I could prepare samples of text to be included.

(4) **COVID vaccine** distribution for seniors. The County has a plan, although as of the time of the meeting, it was not yet made public. While the Town will likely not be the primary way that residents will learn about the availability of the vaccines, there may be ways to support participation by resident seniors. The OFA website has more information about this topic.

Town Action Item:

Is there any interest in "mapping" the town to identify where our older population lives and to gather contact information for use during the pandemic, or other difficulty, as when the power might be out because of storms. In what ways can we assist senior residents on this matter?

(5) Updating the **Town's Comprehensive Plan** to reflect goals and recommendations regarding senior residents. While this was not a topic at the Council meetings, as a member of the Town's Comprehensive Plan Oversight Committee, I can report that we are discussing how best to proceed with an amendment to the Plan, along with appropriate recommendations to be implemented. (That will be the subject of the CPOC's December report, submitted separately.)

In discussing action items in this report, Town Board Member Vogler mentioned the group, Northern Neighbors of Columbia County, and noted that this group might be something worth promoting with our aging population. Representative Barbara Smith advised that some towns in the County are very active participants in this. The Town of Austerlitz does not have an organized, active group to take on some of these items, but B. Smith will reach out to them. Town Board Member Wilson is a member of the Northern Neighbors of Columbia County and she believes she can solicit some others to help out in some way.

Representative Smith would like to increase the participation for the Meals-on-Wheels program in our Town. B. Smith was hoping that a blurb in both the Spencertown Academy and Austerlitz Historical Society newsletters was a possibility. Supervisor Lagonia believes that people in Town are already reaching out to others and some just do not think they want to be identified as someone in need. R. Lagonia suggested that Representative Smith reach out to St. Peters Presbyterian Church, the Spencertown Fire Company, the Austerlitz Fire Company, the Spencertown Academy and the Austerlitz Historical Society and ask if a blurb can be put in their publications.

There is also the question of mapping of seniors so the Town knows where they are located. Representative Smith noted that some believe that if the government is involved there is an infringement on their privacy. This causes pushback. Supervisor Lagonia advised that the Town does not want to make people uncomfortable so there will be no mapping. There are many services offered on a County level that so many do not know about.

Town Board Member Schober asked if the Town had any figures on the number of seniors in our area. None were available at this time, but a suggestion was made to check the census data.

Supervisor Lagonia advised that COVID vaccines will be available on a County level in January. First line workers, nursing homes occupants and compromised individuals will be vaccinated first. Plans change quickly though. Hopefully by June things will be turning around if a large portion of the Country takes the vaccine. There will be other vaccines given by hospitals, etc.

### **2021 Partners In Safety Drug and Alcohol Testing Agreement**

A motion to authorize Supervisor Lagonia to sign the 2021 Partners In Safety Drug and Alcohol Testing Agreement was made by G. Vogler and seconded by M. Wilson.

R. Lagonia: yes

G. Vogler: yes

C. Schober: yes

M. Wilson: yes

J. Wrightsman: yes

Motion carried 5:0.

### **Proposed Letter to the Governor: Senior and Disability Exemption Requirements**

A motion to authorize Supervisor Lagonia to send a letter to Governor Cuomo asking that he issue an Executive Order suspending the requirement to renew the senior citizens and disability exemption for one year by local option was made by C. Schober and seconded by J. Wrightsman.

R. Lagonia: yes

G. Vogler: yes

C. Schober: yes

M. Wilson: yes

J. Wrightsman: yes

Motion carried 5:0.

### **2021 Organizational Meeting**

The Town Board discussed dates and times to have the 2021 Organizational Meeting. Meeting set for January 4, 2021 at 10:00 a.m.

### **Executive Session**

A motion to enter Executive Session for a personnel matter was made by C. Schober and seconded by G. Vogler.

R. Lagonia: yes

G. Vogler: yes

C. Schober: yes

M. Wilson: yes

J. Wrightsman: yes

Motion carried 5:0. Executive Session entered at 7:43 p.m.

A motion to exit Executive Session was made by J. Wrightsman and seconded by M. Wilson.

R. Lagonia: yes

G. Vogler: yes

C. Schober: yes

M. Wilson: yes

J. Wrightsman: yes

Motion carried 5:0. Executive Session exited at 7:50 p.m.

### **IIMC Director Support Letter**

Town Clerk Susan Haag asked the Town Board for a support letter for her application to be an IIMC Region One Director. The Town Board felt this was a great opportunity and would be happy to support it.

**Public Comments**

None

**Adjournment**

A motion to adjourn was made by M. Wilson and seconded by C. Schober.

R. Lagonia: yes

G. Vogler: yes

C. Schober: yes

M. Wilson: yes

J. Wrightsman: yes

Motion carried 5:0.

Meeting adjourned at 7:55 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,  
Susan A. Haag, Town Clerk