

Caroline Town Board Meeting - Minutes October 1, 2013

The Town Board Agenda meeting held on October 1, 2013 at the Caroline Town Hall was called to order at 7:00 p.m. by Supervisor Don Barber.

Attendance:

Don Barber, Supervisor
Linda Adams, Councilmember
Aaron Snow, Councilmember
Irene Weiser, Councilmember
Tim Seely, Councilmember

Recording

Secretary: Christine Wilbur, Deputy Town Clerk

Also present: Mark Witmer, Greg Harrington

Supervisor Barber led the Pledge Allegiance to the Flag.

Privilege of the Floor - no one spoke.

Reports:

Don Barber, Supervisor:

Agenda items for next week's business meeting and announcements:

- Mr. Barber will provide a resolution for consideration to appoint Caroline resident Steve Nicholson to the Tompkins County Environmental Management Council – an advisory group that watches over environmental issues – i.e. banning plastic bags, outside burning, etc. They provide input FROM the Town, but not TO the town. Mr. Weiser would like a report from the representative on some regular basis – in writing or in person.

- Mr. Barber will provide a resolution for consideration that would appoint him as the Alternate Representative to the TCOG group for the remainder of 2013 (Mr. Frongillo had been the Alternate).

- Petitions – A resolution will be presented to lower the speed limit on 76 Rd. and Boiceville Rd.

Other items discussed:

- From the Correspondence File – an item of note: A request from the Liddington's to move their property from one fire district to another fire district – would require a public hearing – no one else affected by that – do with Brooktondale Fire Commissioners – will start to work through the process. Section 1722-C of local town law describes the process – would happen in the future. Greg Harrington described the history of how properties got into particular fire districts.

- The first negotiation session with the Teamsters will be held on October 21st.

- Mr. Barber (and Board members) spent several minutes discussing the budget development process as well as developing information to answer questions about the budget and how to proceed from here.

Caroline town boards, over time, have always been mindful of keeping property taxes low and that

expenses out of ordinary were always a one-time thing and staff levels have remained the same with a few exceptions. As time goes on, there has been less money coming from the State (revenue sharing), inflation, reaching some unintended consequences of providing health insurance for life for highway employees, stock market fluctuations, baby boomers retiring, cost of retirement and health insurance rises – have all contributed to budget increases. We would be under tax cap if they were the only items, and we have not been building our fund balance. Mr. Barber described how the fund balance is used and subscribes to the philosophy to keep necessary funds to pay bills at the end of the year and for emergencies (prior to beginning-of-the-year tax collection). Not having a sufficient fund balance will make this difficult particularly for the highway department.

The Property Tax Cap only addresses increases in health insurance and retirement only; the budget only includes one raise – for the Deputy Clerk - as the Clerk's office workload continues to expand. No increases are included in the Highway budget with the exception of increases for retirement and health insurance. Even with retirements anticipated in the Highway Dept., new employees will require health insurance, and retirees continue to get health insurance for life, and there will be retirement costs for new employees as well.

Ms. Adams praised Supervisor Barber for always doing a good job in putting together the proposed budgets.

The proposed budget includes a 25% reduction across board except where there are contracts.

Mr. Seely asked for clarification of fund balance – 20% of budget reserved – use for early bills, before tax collection and for any emergencies;

Mr. Barber described the need to keep the fund balance at 20% of the budget. He also reported that the recent audit by the State Comptroller's office was prompted by a perceived deficit in the Highway fund (due to delayed FEMA reimbursements). They determined there was no financial distress there, but that situation reinforces the importance of a 20% fund balance.

Ms. Weiser inquired that with the items we have no control over, what else whittles the budget down. Mr. Barber explained previous town boards try to keep the property tax under control, less revenue and higher spending.

Mr. Barber explained how the highway department accumulated a fund balance in the past. The balance in highway accounts at the end of the year had been directed to their fund balance – which eventually gets used to buy a piece of equipment. Their account balances now go back into the general fund – so therefore, they will likely spend all monies available.

Discussion followed regarding mandated and discretionary items in the budget and the affect of staying under the tax cap, or the possibility of proposing an override. Mr. Barber provided a list of items and reported that if all the discretionary items were cut, the budget would be under the tax cap; however, there would be no wiggle room next year – a huge impact.

Ambulance – service is limited due to a small number of volunteers. The proposed budget includes \$4,500 put in reserve to hire personnel if it becomes necessary. Community members are encouraged to volunteer! There is also money included in the budget for broadband service (\$175,000) which might not be needed, as there are donations that are committed for this purpose, and then will go to the Park Foundation for the balance. It could end up being a net \$10,000 expense.

2014 is the last year of debt service for town hall, and we know that the highway barns made of steel are failing structurally because of salt. They will need a new barn. Mr. Barber recommends building up a reserve to not have to bond for the entire amount. In addition, the Town Hall needs a new roof – he recommends putting \$5-6,000 in the reserve fund that has \$10,000 in 2013.

Mr. Barber recommends adding \$55,000 in the Highway reserve, as there will not be anything left in the regular budget this year to add – Cindy is doing as much roadwork as she can – utilizing part time

workers – which likely will not be available in 2014. He also indicated that department heads, the ambulance, Brooktondale and Speedsville Fire – all are keeping flat budgets.

Supervisor Barber's letter to the Board asks them to consider a tax cap override local law and encourages a discussion with the Town's citizens asking them for direction in this matter. He would like to have a work session with the public prior to a public hearing to consider an override.

A lengthy discussion followed regarding timing of work sessions, public forums, timing of proposing a local law for a tax cap override and public hearing for it – all needed to be done by the final budget presentation and vote.

Each Board member voiced their opinions and concerns about the possibility of a tax cap override, but acknowledge they need much input from the public before making a final determination.

At this time, Supervisor Barber resolved to adopt the following schedule of meetings and public hearings that will take into consideration a property tax cap override. Seconded by Mr. Seely. It was noted that even if an override is adopted, it does not mean we have to use it in the end. Carried unanimously.

Tuesday, October 8 – 7:00 PM – regular Business Meeting (at the Town Hall) with more discussion of budget items;

Wednesday, October 9 – 7:00 PM – meeting - with an invitation for the public to join in the discussion – to be held at the Brooktondale Community Center;

Monday, October 14 – 7:00 PM (at the Town Hall) - public hearing to share thoughts as to the direction the public wants the board to take and advise the board on which budget scenario is in the town's best interest;

Tuesday, October 29 – 7:00 PM (at the Town Hall) – after hearing comments from the public and taking into consider the various points of view, the board will discuss and vote on a Local Law to Override the Tax Cap;

Thursday, November 7th – 7:00 PM (at the Town Hall) – the Board will hold a public hearing and vote on the 2014 budget;

Tuesday, November 12th – 7:00 PM (at the Town Hall) – the regular Business Meeting will be held.

Aaron Snow, Town Board:

- Youth Commission – did not meet – will meet on October 4th. Mr. Barber reported he met with representatives from the Village of Lansing, Village of Cayuga Heights and the Town of Ithaca to further discuss a proposed joint agreement between the entities. Tompkins County has proposed a one-time expense for 2014 to expand services to the Town of Caroline – they support two full time staff – for youth development and youth employment. Private funding for 2015 to support the youth employment piece is being sought and the youth development program will be the same as in the past.
- Recreation Partnership – no report
- Watershed Committee– Mr. Barber and Highway Superintendent Whittaker met with TG Miller to look at Buffalo Creek project for a possible grant proposal for work to reinforce the creek walls so it doesn't get any closer to the road. They will meet again on October 7th with a FEMA representative. Mr. Barber described two other projects on Six Mile Creek. The Town of Caroline has filed notice to FEMA for three projects, but will apply for two. He will also have a

contract with TG Miller, for engineering consultation, for the board to consider next week.

Bid Opening for the 600 Rd. project – there were 3 bids and the lowest bidder was JB Construction. A permit from DEC is pending. A discussion followed regarding problems with the permitting process – between Soil & Water, NRCS (the funder) and DEC. Lack of staff is part of the problem.

Irene Weiser, Town Board:

- Ms. Weiser report on 2 upcoming events:

Broadband (CIT Committee) is sponsoring a fundraising event at the Oasis Dance Club on October 5th – the Purple Valley Band will perform - \$5.00 per person, 50/50 raffle, donations, etc.;

The Emergency Preparedness Committee will have a public forum on Oct. 10th at the Brooktondale Fire Hall – a presentation to the community on what it is all about, and introduce committee members. There will be a discussion on how to prepare for flooding and flood insurance

Linda Adams, Town Board:

- Ms. Adams spoke about the lack of personnel at Soil & Water and inquired if there could be an appeal made to the Board of Directors (relating to the delay in obtaining permits). They are under severe financial stress and part of the issue is not filling vacant positions. Frank Proto, our local County Legislator, is on the Board of Directors there and is very aware of our concerns. In addition, apparently FEMA is changing their rules and now are requiring a contract with Soil and Water.

Tim Seely, Town Board: No report.

Approval of Minutes:

Resolution 143 of 2013 – Minutes of Agenda Meeting held on September 4, 2013:

A motion was made by Mr. Barber and seconded by Ms. Adams to approve the minutes as submitted by the Deputy Town Clerk.

Adopted: Barber: Aye; Adams: Aye; Snow: Aye; Weiser: Aye Seely: Aye

Adjourn:

Hearing no further business, Mr. Barber made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Seconded by Ms. Weiser. The meeting adjourned at 9:15 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,

Christine Wilbur, Deputy Town Clerk

