

Town Board Minutes
April 13, 2009

At Regular Meeting of the Town Board of the Town of Cambridge, duly called and held the 13th day of April 2009 at the Town Hall, the following were present:

Supervisor JoAnn Trinkle
Councilwoman Carol Imhof
Councilman Joel Nichols
Councilman Ted Berndt
Councilman Frank Ziehm

Others present: Town Clerk Sally Eddy, Highway Supt. Eric Shaw, Assessor Mary Ellen Hill-Pierce, Lou Imhof, Dan Schmitt, William Watkins, Cassie Fedler, Richard & Marge Sutherland, Dick Battistoni, Bob Hamilton, Carl Trinkle, Ashleigh Farrell, Jim Buckley, Jim Buckley, Jr. and son, Tony Millington, Bonnie Farrell, Earl Horton, Randy Hamilton, Rani & Alex Bass, Gerald Skiff, Henry Peabody, Howard Brown, Dan Thomas

Supervisor Trinkle called the meeting to order and immediately led in the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

Minutes

Councilwoman Carol Imhof motioned, seconded by Councilman Frank Ziehm, to dispense with the reading of the minutes of the March 9, 2009 meeting and approve them as mailed by the Town Clerk with no additions or corrections.

Vote: 5 – Ayes 0 – Noes

Supervisor's Report

1. The monthly financial reports as well as a quarterly budget report were reviewed and commented upon.
Councilman Joel Nichols motioned, seconded by Councilwoman Imhof, to accept all budget reports that were submitted.

Vote: 5 – Ayes 0 – Noes

2. Received the first sales tax check for the year in the amount of \$7927.21. It's down \$340 from last year.
3. Read a letter from Washington County District Attorney Kevin Kortright regarding the DA's findings after a NYS Police investigation into the Town Board's actions regarding the Brownell Road Property. Four citizens from the town requested the investigation. Mr. Kortright concluded the Town Board committed no criminal actions in the way they handled the Brownell Road Property and considers the file closed. The letter was also sent to the four residents: Dan Thomas, William Watkins, Earl Horton and Henry Peabody.
4. Reminded everyone of the Tour of the Battenkill Pro/Am bicycle race that's taking place April 18 & 19 and urged everyone to use caution on the roads. Extra Sheriff patrols will be on duty.
5. On April 7, Supervisor Trinkle attended a tourism meeting in Greenwich. Discussed ways to bring more tourism to Washington County and how to better publicize the events that are taking place county wide

Town Board

Councilman Ted Berndt reported on the following:

1. He has received no new update from Senator Little's Office or Verizon in connection with the high speed internet initiative.
2. He stated the town's website, www.townofcambridge.org, is up and running. Information on Town Board members and officials is posted. He hopes to have more information available soon including the minutes of Town Board meetings.
3. In conjunction with Earth Day on April 25, Mr. Berndt plans to have delivered to every resident in the town a reusable grocery bag donated from Hannaford, an energy efficient incandescent fluorescent light bulb and recycling literature printed by the Greenwich Citizens Committee. All items were either donated outright or purchased from monetary donations. The Cambridge Central School Honor Society will deliver the bags containing the two items to residents in the Village. Mr. Berndt is looking for volunteers to help deliver in the town.

Town Clerk/Tax Collector

Tax Collector Sally Eddy stated she returned 98 unpaid 2009 tax bills totaling \$243,472.70 to the County Treasurer on April 3. In 2008, 100 unpaid bills were returned totaling \$260,671.53.

Planning Board

Secretary Sally Eddy reported the Planning Board met April 2 and addressed the following matters:

1. Granted Preliminary Approval to Sam & Polly Scully for a 2.78 acre subdivision on Belle Rd. to convey to their son Jonathan. A public hearing is scheduled for the May 7 meeting.
2. Peter & Pauline Grimes own 43.8 acres on Cobble Road. Pauline presented a sketch to create 2 lots. One lot is about 10 acres and the other about 5 acres. The board did not grant approval to the sketch plan pending an on site visit to the property. The Board has a concern about access from Cobble Road to the larger lot due to the steep terrain of the land and wanted to be sure it is feasible to put in a driveway.
3. Helen Jepson owns 59.5 acres on Stump Church Road which contains both her house and her son Don Jepson's house. Don Jepson submitted a sketch plan to subdivide out his house with approximately 20 acres. Mr. Jepson was directed by the Board to proceed with the survey.

Highway Superintendent's Report

1. In the past four weeks we graded all the dirt roads.
2. The sweeping of the paved roads was completed.
3. I met with FEMA several times trying to finalize all the paperwork involving the ice storm damage.
4. The majority of the month has been spent cleaning debris from the ice storm.

Superintendent Shaw asked the Board for approval to attend Highway School.

Councilwoman Imhof motioned, seconded by Councilman Ziehm, to grant approval to Superintendent Eric Shaw's request to attend the Annual Highway Training School from June 1- 3, 2009 in Ithaca, NY.

Vote: 5 – Ayes 0 - Noes

Assessor's Report

Assessor Mary Ellen Hill-Pierce's report stated to date she has accomplished the following:

1. Reviewed all the exemptions including agricultural, veterans, forest, STAR, Low Income Senior Citizens and silos.
2. I found a few parcels with STAR exemptions that had to be removed and have added a few Cold War Veterans exemptions to the file.

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3. In reviewing the silo exemptions, I found that there were 19 of them that equated to \$453,300 in assessed value, yet there was no assessment on the file for them. In finding these, I could have done one of two things: either remove the exemption or increase the assessments on each parcel by the current exempt amount. I chose to remove the exemptions. It appears as if the reval company did not collect silos in their data collection process and did not value them, yet the exemptions that have been on the roll for years were left on. Those property owners will be notified of the removal of the exemption.
4. When I reviewed the 180 agricultural assessments I found many inconsistencies in the calculation of the agricultural assessments. The law states that any land rented to an operating farm *MAY NOT* receive the exemption on any woodlands. Therefore, I removed the exempt amount on the woods on several of these parcels. I reviewed all the soil worksheets and reentered the soil breakdowns if they were not accurate. This recalculation amounted to a reduction in agricultural assessments of \$685,341.
5. I have field reviewed and valued in excess of 40 parcels for new construction, and have taken new photos of the construction.
6. The uniform percentage of value to be put on the 2009 tentative assessment roll will be 91%. This is due to the fact that sales prices are higher than the current assessment by 9%. The assessment roll and tax bills will have the market value printed on them using the 91%. Sometimes taxpayers think that this means their assessed value has been changed and leads to many questions. The only assessments that were changed for this year were for new construction or people who came into my office and asked me to review their assessments. The equalization rate for this year will most likely be 91%. This will negatively impact exemption amounts as they will be equalized.

Things continue to get organized in my office. Once that part is complete I will begin driving the town and reviewing the property record cards for accuracy.

The one thing my office is going to need is a new computer. The one I currently use is more than 6 years old and fading. It frequently shuts down on its own and does not have enough memory to run multiple programs. I suggest the town invest in a new laptop computer for my office especially if I am going to update assessments for 2010.

My office has been open for four Saturdays since I began work here. I will continue having Saturday office hours until June. After that I will not be in the office on Saturdays until December or January. This does not mean I won't be working, just not sitting in the office. I am always available if someone wants to make an appointment for a day other than Thursday.

With new construction and exemption corrections the Town's tentative increase in **taxable** assessed value for the 2009 assessment roll will be approximately \$1,605,848.

Communications

Supervisor Tinkle received a letter from the Census Bureau informing her that during April – July census workers will be canvassing the town visiting every housing unit to verify addresses and GPS coordinates.

Unfinished Business

Supervisor Trinkle reminded everyone that town wide spring clean up will be from April 11 – 25. Garbage bags for gathering debris will be available at the highway garage and Town Hall. Filled bags will be picked

up by the highway department. Citizens are asked to call Superintendent Shaw to let him know the location of the bags. On Saturday, April 25, coffee, juice and donuts will be served at the Town Hall between 9 – 10 AM

New Business

BOE Elections Facilitation Agreement

Resolution by Councilman Nichols

Seconded by Councilwoman Imhof

Be It Resolved, that the Town Board of the Town of Cambridge does hereby enter into an Elections Facilitation Agreement with the Washington County Board of Elections to provide various assistance in the conduct of its elections; and the Town Clerk agrees to provide certain services, as outlined in the agreement, to the Board of Elections for elections conducted during the calendar year 2009.

Vote: 5 – Ayes 0 – Noes

Grievance Day Change

Assessor Mary Ellen Hill-Pierce has requested that Grievance Day for the town be changed from the first Tuesday in June to the first Thursday in June. She has a conflict since she is employed by three other towns. She will not be able to attend the meeting of the Cambridge Board of Review if the date is not changed. The change will be accomplished through Local Law #2 of the Year 2009.

Councilman Ted Berndt motioned, seconded by Councilman Frank Ziehm to hold a public hearing on Local Law #2 of the Year 2009 on May 11, 2009, 7:30 PM at the Town Hall.

Vote: 5 – Ayes 0 – Noes

Reduce Mileage Rate

Supervisor Trinkle stated the County rolled back the mileage reimbursement rate from \$.50 per mile to \$.45 per mile. She suggested the Town do the same.

Motion by Councilman Frank Ziehm, Seconded by Councilman Joel Nichols

Be It Resolved, that the Town Board of the Town of Cambridge does hereby set the rate for mileage reimbursement for town officials using their own vehicles for official town business at \$.45 per mile.

Vote: 5 – Ayes 0 – Noes

County Report

Supervisor Trinkle stated that Washington County has been approved by New York State to implement a so called bed tax by lodging establishments. The funds generated by the tax will be used to promote tourism throughout the county.

Privilege of the Floor

William Watkins brought up again the Brownell Road Property. He stated the DA did not answer his question of how could the Town have a private sale for publicly owned property without notifying adjacent land owners or taxpayer?" He commented that the matter has been sent onto the NYS Attorney General's Office for further investigation.

Mr. Watkins stated that the records he asked for from the town had no documentation of any payments made to Ray Schraver for the rent of the loader. He asked if anyone could explain it?

Town Clerk Sally Eddy stated that the information provided to him was exactly what he asked for in a FOIL request. The information he was looking for is found in the date forward from the last date in the request.

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Dan Schmitt commented about whether or not NYS is getting all the sales tax due them? He has a Buskirk address and often it is assumed that people with a Buskirk postal address are automatically residents of Rensselaer County. He received a jury summons from Rensselaer County even though he lives in Washington County. Supervisor Trinkle stated they have tried to correct it as best they can.

Jim Buckley expressed his dissatisfaction about having two uniformed sheriff deputies attend last month's board meeting. He thought it was a waste of tax payers' money and wanted to know who made the decision to have them come? Supervisor Trinkle stated she did. Councilman Ziehm stated he was aware of the decision and supported it. Both Supervisor Trinkle and Councilman Ziehm were told there were threats against the Town Board.

Carl Trinkle, Supervisor Trinkle's husband, spoke to the issue and stated any threat made against his wife was made against him, too. He said a resident told him what was going to happen at the meeting.

An issue between Henry Peabody and Councilman Ted Berndt concerning the grant application available from Cornell Cooperative Extension for products for Earth Day was addressed and settled. Councilman Berndt did not, in the end, apply for the grant. Businesses and private individuals either donated the products or funds to purchase items. The printing of the recycling flyer was done by a group free of charge.

Cassie Buckley asked Supt. Shaw how the highway equipment was running. Mr. Shaw responded "good".

There was brief discussion about the FEMA money the town is anticipating to receive to cover the expenses associated with the winter ice storm. Supt. Eric Shaw has had several meetings with FEMA representatives.

Earl Horton asked if there has been any information from the study the County did concerning turning roads back to the towns? Supervisor Trinkle stated she has not heard anything.

Mr. Horton commented there has to be something done about cleaning up the railroad bed (County Rt 74) from the broken trees and brush as a result of the ice storm. He commented that Supt. Shaw goes out with 4 or 5 men and gets the town cleaned up. What's the matter with the County? Dan Thomas interjected it a dangerous situation.

Councilman Ziehm referred to an article about shared services in the Association of Towns magazine. Supervisor Trinkle stated there has been a lot of emphasis put on it recently. Howard Brown stated that in Canada the towns contract with local farmers and towns people to clean up the snow. He said it's working well.

Councilman Ted Berndt referred people to a web site, seethroughny.com, which has a searchable data base of local governments comparing expenditures between towns.

The following bills were presented for audit and approved for payment:

General #53 – 71 \$ 9,506.44

Highway #36 – 47 \$12, 850.18

There being no further business before the Board, the meeting was moved and carried to adjournment at 9:20 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Sally B. Eddy
Town Clerk