

Town of Spafford Newsletter

Mary Bean, Supervisor

February 4, 2014

As I write this article, we are being warned of an approaching snow storm that could dump a foot of snow on our roads overnight. Carl Weir, Highway Superintendent, will be out of bed at 1:30 AM watching the weather reports and planning his snow removal strategy for tomorrow. By 3 AM he will be driving the roads of Spafford deciding if the plows should start earlier than their usual 6AM. Each of our three trucks and drivers has an assigned route that they know like the back of their hand. The routes require about 3 ½ hours to cover on an average day and on a day like tomorrow, the routes may be covered twice or even three times. Blowing and drifting snow is a daily maintenance challenge even when no snow is falling.

The diligence of Carl and our highway crew is what allows many of us to enjoy country living while driving into the city to work every day. The photos below were cut from a Syracuse newspaper published in the early 1940's and come from the towns historical archives. Commuting to a job in the

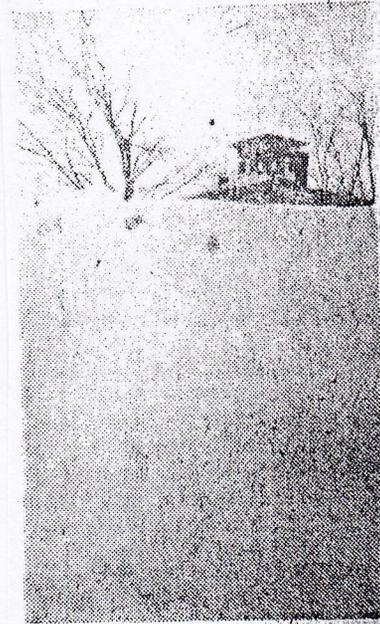


County plow bucking snow on Spafford-Cold Brook road.

This picture was taken by Chester N. Hahn two weeks ago yesterday in front of the old Olmstead place on the Borodino-Spafford highway about half a mile south of Borodino. Mr. Hahn was standing in the highway when he took the picture. It is likely because of the additional fall of snow, that the small portion of the cupola showing then would not be seen at all today had the picture been taken yesterday.

city would have been impossible during the winter before we had heavy duty snow plows and the highly accurate weather forecasting that Carl will depend on tonight as he plans his strategy for clearing the roads for our commute tomorrow.

Snow at Borodino



Cupola on 1820 House

1 Complaint – Taxes

By Mary Bean

As I rang door bells campaigning last fall, the complaint I heard most often was that taxes are too high. I agree, and like many of you, I live on a fixed income so the rate of tax increase in Spafford over the past 10 years has been stressful. I invite you to examine your property tax bills with me to see what is driving the increase.

Look at your property tax bill due 1/31/14. In the middle of the page you should see columns labeled “% change from prior year levy”. The next column is “Rate”. This year Onondaga County did not raise the tax rate for services Spafford received from the county shown by the “.0” in the “% change” column. The cost of Spafford government services is budgeted to increase by 13.1% this year but that was offset by the 13.3% decrease in the budget for highway services. Fire services increased by 1.8% (and note that the fire tax is based on the full value before exemptions) so only the cost of fire protection increased the town tax total.

I pay 3 times more in school taxes than in town taxes. My school taxes increased by 2.9% in 2013. Your rate may be different since Spafford is served by 4 school districts. The state imposed a 2% tax cap but my school district got around that cap by asking the voters to approve a proposition overriding the cap. Did you know this proposition was on the ballot? Did you know that the school budget exceeded the 2% tax cap? Did you attend school budget hearings and express your opinion? Did you vote to approve or reject the school budget and proposition overriding the tax cap?

No one wants their taxes to go up but there are consequences for not increasing taxes **modestly** every year to keep pace with inflation. As I plan ahead for preparation of the Spafford budget for 2015, I find that we will not have enough money in reserve to replace one of our aging trucks projected to cost \$250,000. Over the past few years, the highway equipment replacement reserves were depleted to cover the cost of town

government services increases thereby avoiding a tax increase. Now we have insufficient reserves to cover the cost of the needed truck. Additionally, Governor Cuomo now threatens to impose penalties on local government and school districts for exceeding the 2% tax cap. Failure to raise taxes even modestly has left us facing a possible substantial tax increase. It will take some creative financial planning, exploration of options for delivery of services, and more belt tightening for Spafford to remain debt free.

Spafford’s highway department has the highest cost per mile in Onondaga County. I have speculated that because we are also the smallest township, we do not benefit from economy of scale. Additionally, there has not been a comprehensive review of how the highway department operates with an eye to reducing costs. I have confidence in our Highway Superintendent, Carl Weir, and we work well together. We have agreed that we all can benefit from a fresh look at what we do and how we do it. To that end, a committee of citizens will be appointed to assist Carl in reviewing his program, doing some long term planning so we can budget effectively and explore some creative options like shared services and contracting.

There has been a lot in the news lately about the success of the County Executive and Mayor of Syracuse working together to keep taxes in check. The County Executive is now encouraging local governments to work together to reduce costs of services. At my first meeting of Town Supervisors in January we planned that several of us small township Supervisors will soon meet to work on initiatives that could result in savings.

The bottom line here is that just as with our personal budgets, the town budget is being squeezed and we have to find ways to save more, spend less and plan better. I hope you will help us with this challenge. I am always open to ideas and suggestions.

Next Board Meeting

Feb. 13, 7:00

Agenda Items

The next Town Board meeting is scheduled for February 13th at 7 PM. The agenda will again be lengthy but the issues are important and we look for support and feedback from attendees. Citizens are invited to chat informally with Board members before and after meetings and there will be time allotted for formal citizen input at the end of the Board meetings. The agenda for the 2/13/14 meeting will include (subject to change):

- Appointment of a Town Lawyer who will attend meetings and council the Board
- Appointment of Town Code Enforcement Officer
- Contract for architect and engineering services for repairs to highway garage and new roof and repairs to Town Hall
- Formation of advisory committees: Ethics, Highway and Town property, parks and recreation.
- Presentation of a local law for Constable Services
- Changes to cemetery rules
- Mowing contract
- Town Clerk to sign designated checks
- ZBA and Planning Board Code revision plans and Comprehensive Plan development plan.
- Scheduling of a Workshop Town Board Meeting with Architect and Engineer to review condition of Town Buildings and development of a list of priorities and a plan for maintenance.

Zoning Matters by Kathy Adams

Unless you have built a house in Spafford, or made a change to your property, you might not think much about zoning. Or maybe you think there should be more—or less—development in our town, or maybe you wonder why code enforcement can seem inconsistent.

In 2010, the Town Board passed the first major change to Spafford zoning since 1973. The entire law was rewritten to respond to the challenges that come with growth, changes to state and county regulations, and our community's desire to protect our natural and built resources. You can find a copy of the Zoning Law on the Building Department section of the town web site www.TownofSpafford.com or you can purchase a paper copy from the Building Department. If you are planning a building project of any kind, you should consult the law and our Codes Enforcement Officer to determine what your best course of action should be.

After four years of applying the law, both the Building Department and the Zoning Board of Appeals have found that some elements of the law are less clear than they could be, and a technical update is in order. At the January meeting of the Town Board, I submitted a recommendation for how to approach updating our local zoning law. On behalf of the ZBA, I also recommended that we prepare a modest, perhaps 10 pages, comprehensive plan for our community. In New York State, a comprehensive plan is a statement of the overall vision of the community, and helps to communicate the intent of the Zoning Law. A comprehensive plan helps those who have to interpret the law—the CEO, the ZBA and the court system—to understand what the community wants.

The Board accepted the general recommendation, and invited me to submit a more specific proposal at the March Town Board meeting. If the proposal is approved, then ways for community members to provide input will be scheduled.

Spafford Food Pantry By Lisa Valetta, Town Clerk

The Spafford Food Pantry is located in one of the most rural areas in Central New York. Clients in our area often have difficulty because of their geographic location – the Town of Spafford is in the southwest corner of Onondaga County, and the Town of Scott is in the northwest corner of Cortland County. The City of Cortland is closer, yet Town of Spafford residents are eligible for service through Onondaga County which is primarily based in Syracuse.

This pantry was founded in 2001 to help the residents of the Towns of Spafford and Scott, (population 1,686 and 1,176 respectively). Twelve families were served by the Spafford Food Pantry in 2001; at Christmas 2013, we served 62 families or 208 people.

The Spafford Food Pantry was formed with assistance from the Spafford Fireman's Auxiliary and the Borodino United Methodist Church. These Organizations volunteer time and energy in support of the Spafford Food Pantry.

The Spafford Food Pantry is open one day each month to offer families in need a balanced five day supply of the basic food groups. We also provide holiday meals for the families and children's gifts at Christmastime. Clothing is also available.

If you have food stuffs and warm clothing to donate to the Food Pantry, they can be dropped off at Town Hall and Lisa will take them to the pantry.

For more information about the Pantry call:

Debbie Brown (607) 749-7780

Lisa Valetta (315) 636-9542

Gift from Skaneateles Press

Joe Genco, Editor of the Skaneateles Press, has made it possible for every household in in Spafford to receive the Press free of charge for the next three years. This is a tremendous help to all of us in getting out the news of upcoming social, political, and governmental functions in the town as there is no other newspaper that reaches all households. The Press will be mailed to any address in Onondaga County and all you have to do to receive the press is cut out and fill in the coupon below and mail it to the following address:

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Questions? Call 434-8889 ext. 342

Welcome to my office

Spafford may be the smallest township in Onondaga County but we get the same amount of mail that needs to be responded to and have the same issues and needs as our larger neighbors. I'm finding that the role of town supervisor is almost a full time job and I continually need the help of Lisa Valletta, Town Clerk and Kim Reed, Deputy Town Clerk. In order to function efficiently, I have established an office in the Town Hall and we have equipped it with office furniture, a lap top computer and a printer. I plan to work in the town hall during the hours when it is open and many hours more when it is not open to the public. I welcome visitors and hope you will feel free to stop by and have a cup of coffee.

Some of the issues that called for my attention during these first few weeks included:

- Interviewing lawyers for the town who would be available to attend meetings and advise the Board as needed at an affordable rate.
- Interviewing Codes Enforcement Officer candidates
- Attending to structural and safety problems in the highway garage and arranging for repairs.
- Engaging architects and engineers to prepare the specifications for the new roof and other repairs on the Town Hall.
- Preparing to negotiate the Teamsters Union contract with our highway department workers.
- Planning for the establishment of advisory committees: Ethics, Highway Department and Town property, parks and recreation so we are prepared for preparation of next year's budget.
- Working with the ZBA and Planning Boards to establish priorities and direction including the development of a Comprehensive Plan that will guide decision making by those two bodies.
- Assessing the functioning of the Transfer Station and ultimately assigning Carl Weir as Supervisor of the

Transfer Station. Working with OCRRA to plan for the future of our waste management operation.

- Initiating a plan for Community Development so the town can apply for grants that will benefit the low income, elderly and handicapped residents of our town.

January 15 to 17, David Venezia and I attended "Newly Elected Town Officials School" in Albany. We had three grueling days of lectures on how to run a township in NYS. In February, I will attend more training at the NYS Association of Towns meeting in NY City. Spafford has not taken advantage of grants and partnership opportunities that could benefit the town. I hope to learn more about these opportunities at this meeting. I will also be meeting with other Onondaga County Supervisors to see how we can cooperate to the advantage of all.

We will be posting the preliminary agenda for Town Board meetings on the town web site in the week before the scheduled meeting. Minutes of Board meetings will also be posted on the web site after they are approved. Check out the web site for other information about town services and personnel.

Thank you Barbara Shoemaker

Barbara Shoemaker has retired as the Town Historian and we thank her for her 22 years of service. The town is now looking for a Historian who will work with the Historical Society to meet the needs of persons seeking information, most often of a genealogical nature. If interested, call Lisa at 673-4144.

Planning Ahead

As I drive in to the Town Hall daily the first thing I see is the dead stalks in the flower boxes and that prompts me to ask if there is someone who would volunteer to make the flower boxes beautiful again this summer? The Town will pay for the flowers if someone will create a beautiful display. Just give me or Lisa a call to volunteer.

Would like to receive this Town of Spafford newsletter and other town news electronically? We have set up a g-mail account to accept your electronic address so we can send you the newsletter and other town news via e-mail if you choose. Simply send a message to spaffordnews@gmail.com and you will be registered for our electronic mail system. Receiving your newsletter electronically will save money and trees and we will also be able to send you news as it occurs.

Skaneateles, NY 13152

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Town of Spafford

