

Town of Spafford Newsletter

Mary Bean, Supervisor

March, 2014

Fiscal Responsibility by Mary Bean



“Without town hall, Spafford takes care of public business in private homes”, reads the headline in the September 27, 1984 edition of the Post Standard, Neighbors West. After 175 years of incorporation, Spafford was being pressed to build a town hall to accommodate its growing population and the need for additional work, storage and meeting space. Bethel Schramm, the Town Clerk since 1967, has been using a back room in her home as her office and the official town meeting room. The Town Justice at the time, Webb Stevens was using his kitchen as the town court room.

By May 23, 1985, Town Supervisor, Donald Becker was bemoaning the loss of Spafford’s “down home” feeling as he anticipated the opening of bids for a 36 X 50 foot Town Hall building at a cost of \$48,000. The building was opened without ceremony in December, 1985 in order to accommodate growing attendance at meetings and the need for more workspace than town officials could accommodate in their homes. In 1999, the size of the Town Hall was doubled as more dedicated workspace was needed.

One of the first tasks of a newly elected Supervisor is to evaluate the assets of the Town to ensure that all our buildings and equipment are in good working order in order to provide the services that you need. Your elected officials also have a responsibility for providing town employees with a safe, clean work environment and preserving the town’s assets. Here is what we have found.

Today, the original Town Hall building is 29 years old and the addition is 15 years old and both are in need of repairs and maintenance. The entire building needs a new roof and the 2014 budget includes a line item with more than enough money to cover that expense. The roof over the newer section of the building is leaking, has many missing shingles, and some of the roof trusses were cut where the two building sections meet, creating a structural problem that must be repaired. Additionally, the 4 exterior metal doors have rusted through at the bottom and will need replacement. The floor in the newer portion of the building is badly damaged and should also be replaced. Each of these projects will be done carefully so as to maximize the expected life of the repair.

The citizens of Spafford have always valued frugality and cost effectiveness, and so do I, so we are also looking for ways to reduce our operating costs, particularly energy costs. We believe the addition of an internal vestibule in the NW corner of the meeting room would eliminate the need for one exterior door

and save fuel by containing cold air as folks enter. We could save up to 75% on electric costs if we replaced all the light fixtures in both the Hall and Garage. The Hall has flooded twice due to rapid snowmelt from the uphill fields and re-grading of the parking lot is needed to prevent another flood. We plan to look for "green energy" grants for as many projects as possible, and to that end, we are in the process of creating a "master" grant application with New York State. Not everything on this list has to be done immediately so we have time to prioritize, look at options and "save up".



Herald American photo by Michelle Frankfurter
Spafford Supervisor Donald Becker, Bethel Schramm, and board member Barbara Randall discuss building a town hall at their meeting last week in Schramm's home.

The newly formed and hardworking Highway Department Advisory Committee is working with Carl Wiers and his team, and has been charged with presenting us with a short- and long term recommendations for equipment, facilities and for more economical operation of that department. By the time you read this newsletter, I hope the Board will have approved correction of long ignored code violations and a structural hazard in the Garage. Before we can prepare the 2015 town budget we need the assessment and advice of architects and engineers so we can develop a cost effective long term plan for maintenance and repair of town buildings and property, and avoid any unnecessary expenses.

The Board takes its responsibility for fiscal management seriously and values the advice and opinions of citizens so let us know what you are thinking about this issue.

Summer Recreation

Spafford has partnered with the Town of Scott to our south for many years to provide a range of recreational opportunities. **Children** living in Spafford are invited to participate in the Scott summer recreation program that includes swimming lessons and day trips to other parks and activities. Children are picked up at and returned to the Spafford Fire Station via Homer School Bus. The program is based in the Town of Scott Park and managed by Tammy Congdon. For more information about the program go to www.townofscott.org/parksandrecreation.ht to find the schedule, program rules and registration forms. The program has been paid for by the Town of Spafford although modest additional fees are charged for some activities. If you need help accessing the web site for forms or information, stop by or call the town hall and someone will assist you. The Town of Scott also has **boat launch facilities, a picnic pavilion, and play areas** in their park that Spafford residents may use. Contact the Scott Town Hall for or go to their web site for more information. A \$5 boat launch fee is asked of all users.

2 Complaint – Assessments, By Mary Bean

The second most frequent complaint I heard last fall as I rang doorbells was that assessments are unfair. Let me try to explain the assessment process with the help of Kim Stone-Gridley, our assessor and tell you how you can get more information about how your assessment was arrived at and how you can ask for a review (grieve) your assessment.

In 2013 all properties in the Town of Spafford were reassessed and that procedure occurs every six years according to state law. During the interim years, only properties that have changed hands, are new or have been altered via a building permit are reassessed and a new value is assigned. The value of a piece of property is determined by comparing it to other similar properties that have sold recently at market value. Because Spafford has so few real estate sales in any year, the assessor must use multiple years of sales to find comparables. Kim is willing and able to meet with owners and show the comparables she used in arriving at a property's value. It is best to call ahead and make an appointment so she can be prepared for your meeting.

After meeting with Kim and discussing how she arrived at your properties value, if you continue to believe your assessment is unfair, you can file a "grievance" and appeal Kim's decision to the Board of Assessment Review (BAR). Every town has a BAR and it meets on the fourth Tuesday in May to hear the appeals of property owners who believe their assessments are unfair. Property owners must complete a form describing why they believe their assessment is unfair. That form along with supporting documentation that the property owner presents is what the BAR will base its decision on. To find the value of properties you believe may be comparable go to the Onondaga County Real Property web site www.ongov.net. That web site will provide you with property tax information for all of Onondaga County. Someone at the public library may be able to assist you with that search if you do not have computer access.

There is yet another mechanism for appealing your assessment if you fail at the BAR level and still believe your assessment is incorrect. You can petition for a Small Claims Assessment Review. You will have to fill out a form and pay a \$30 fee to request your claim be heard by an arbitrator. If your claim is upheld the \$30 fee is returned to you. Staff here at the town hall can give you the form and help you but you must go to the County Supreme Court Clerk in the County Court House to file that form.

In addition to assessment of properties, Kim is responsible for assisting property owners to obtain **tax exemptions** they are entitled to. Every owner of a primary residence is entitled to the STAR exemption and this year the process for obtaining that exemption was changed to prevent fraud.

Senior citizens who have income of less than \$81,900 in 2013 (the income level changes yearly) are entitled to the Enhanced STAR exemption on their primary residence. Veterans and their widows/widowers are entitled to an additional exemption, and there is an exemption for farmland. All of these exemptions have documentation requirements and very specific time requirements for filing so if you think you may qualify for an exemption, please call Kim for more information.

I hope you will take advantage of Kim's expertise and assistance in determining whether your assessment is fair and if you qualify for exemptions. The last few years since the full reassessment have been stressful for many Spafford residents but with Kim's help, we can at least assure that assessments are based on accurate information and they are fair and equitable for all.

Apologies from Mary Bean and Joe Genco, Skaneateles Press

I enclosed a coupon in the last edition inviting all Spafford residents to ask for their free copy of the Press. Joe and I both apologize for our misunderstanding. Because the Press is mailed by zip code, only the 13152 and 13110 zip codes are covered by the offer. I will continue to be sure our residents served by Post offices in Homer and Preble will be kept informed of Town events and issues thru this newsletter.

School Taxes

You will recall from the January newsletter that I suggested you look to School Taxes rather than the Town of Spafford as the cause of significant increases in your taxes and I also suggested you attend School Board meetings and budget hearings to express your concerns. By the time you read this newsletter it appears that school budget hearings will have been concluded for 2014-15 but you still have an opportunity to express your opinion via your vote for the budgets in May.

Summer Hours at Transfer Station

Carl Wier and Charles Lincoln who are responsible for operation of the Transfer Station have heard your request for Wednesday evening hours again this summer. The station will be open on Wednesday evenings, 4 PM to 8 PM, May 28 thru September 24, 2014. Special collection days scheduled for the following Saturday will be honored on Wednesday evening.

Happiness is a Borodino Pancake

And

Breakfast at the Spafford Fire Hall

While we wait for the first Borodino Pancake on June 22nd (the third Sunday of the month during the summer) you can enjoy breakfast at the Spafford Fire Hall on Saturday mornings during April and May, 8-10 AM. The Ladies Auxiliary will be cooking breakfast in the newly renovated Spafford Fire Hall. The menu will include ham, sausage, French toast, eggs and toast. Breakfast with the Easter Bunny is scheduled for April 19th 8-11 AM.

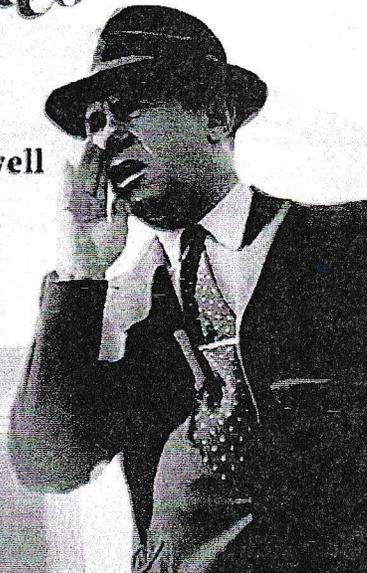
BORODINO

Grange
Presents

Songwriters;
Dusty Pas'cal & Mike Powell

Saturday
April 26
show time
8:00

tickets \$15 at the door



Introducing Howard Tanner, Code Enforcement Officer

Howard Tanner was hired as the temporary code enforcement officer for Spafford in November and appointed permanently by the Board in February. Howard is a Certified Code Enforcement Officer and also works for the Town of Sennett, villages of Cato and Union Springs and Cayuga County. He has many years of experience as a construction project manager and is an accomplished carpenter, welder, plumber, electrician and mechanic. Howard has worked with our newly appointed Lawyer, Scott Chatfield, in other towns and together they have devised a plan for clearing some longstanding code violations going back to 1997 without the town having to pay for the remediation. The derelict house on Spafford Landing Road that was first cited in 2005 will finally be demolished before Memorial Day by the owner at her expense or the town with the cost added to the tax bill.

Howard is in his office in the Town Hall Tues, Thurs and Saturday, 9-Noon, to answer your questions. Complaints regarding code violations no longer have to be filed in writing. Howard will accept a phone call, even an anonymous complaint, and he also will identify code violations as he observes them himself while driving throughout the town. Properties with code violations negatively affect the value of nearby properties and make all properties in our town less desirable. It is the responsibility of the Town Board to protect the value of all properties by assuring that town law is enforced.

Disabled or Low Income and in need of repairs to your home? Howard reports that grant money has again become available to build ramps and make other modifications to support those with disabilities. There is also money for home repairs based on income. If you need either of these services, please call Howard for more information and help with the application process.

Grant Received for Court Improvements

Town Justice, Kathleen Jacques, requested and received a grant from the New York State Unified Court System, Justice Court Assistance Program. JCAP was established by the NYS Legislature in 1999 at the request of the Unified Court System, to help provide our State's town and village courts with the resources and equipment necessary to fulfill their critical role in our Justice System. The money will be used to purchase desks and file cabinets to replace the folding plastic tables and cardboard boxes currently in use, and security cameras for the interior and exterior of the courtroom. Kate notes that Spafford Town Court, like many other local Courts, is now handling some criminal cases that once were sent to county level courts. This imposes additional responsibilities on the Town for provision of security and protection for the Justice and her clerk. Town of Spafford Court is held on the first and third Mondays of each month at 7:00 PM.

Advisory Committees

The more input, the better the decision and we have a lot of talented and experienced people in Spafford who are willing and able to help us make better decisions. Three committees have been authorized by the Town Board to provide information and advice to your Board. The Highway Department Advisory Committee, Lou Hanlon, Luke DeWitt, Mark Delaney, Leland Springsted and Kathy Adams, has already met several times and put in over 12 hours of work. They will be recommending ways in which the department can function more efficiently and economically.

The Public Properties, Parks and Recreation Committee was just announced at the March 13th Board meeting. Jeff Ireland, Frank Moran, Merrill Clark, Brad Wirth, Joe Vecchio, Pat Strodel and Ann Furze will be meeting soon to offer their recommendations. Due to numerous complaints about activities at the Borodino Landing, I have asked them to look at that situation first and recommend actions to the Board that will maximize the use of that property for recreation.

Membership of the Ethics Committee was announced in February and they will be meeting soon. An annual review of procurement policies and procedures, an annual training session on a relevant issue for all employees and creating a safe place for citizens to take concerns is my charge to this committee. I'm sure they will also have recommendations for the Board. Members include David Venezia, Will Heir, Deb Hole, Joyce Larrison, and Sandra Weigel.

Issues Before the Board

Thanks to everyone who attends Town Board meetings and shares their thoughts and ideas to help us make better decisions.

- With the help of our Town Lawyer, Scott Chatfield, we have devised a plan for demolishing unsafe buildings and attaching the cost to the tax bill. As a result, we are soliciting demolition bids on the building at 66 Spafford Landing (in violation of codes since 2005) and plan to have that project completed before Memorial Day. We now have a template for proceeding on other unsafe buildings and will concentrate on those that are abandoned, attractive nuisances where children could get hurt and those with long standing code violations.
- Town courts are now receiving criminal cases that used to be handled in county courts. Leaving our Justice and her clerk alone in the Town Hall with defendants who's behavior is unpredictable is dangerous and police response time may not be optimal so your Board passed a local law authorizing the hiring of a Constable, as needed, for the court or Town meetings.
- Repairs needed to address long standing code violations in the Town Garage were authorized. Repair of the steel beams on the North side of the building and rewiring of the electrical system in the building will be accomplished as soon as possible, hopefully before the April Board meeting.
- The Town Board supported the submission of a Community Development Grant that would provide handicapped access to the main floor of the Borodino Hall Community Center Building.
- The Board is gathering information from architects and engineers that will support the development of a long term plan for repair, maintenance and replacement of Town buildings and property. A copy of the Facilities Report prepared by Jill Fudo, Architect, is available at Town Hall. Once we have a plan, we will be exploring options for paying for what needs to be done.

Borodino Fire Department

PANCAKES



8 AM - 1 PM

June 22

July 27

Aug 24

Adults \$6

Seniors \$5

5-12 yrs \$4

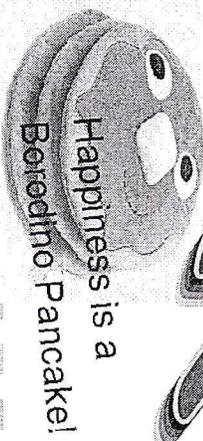
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2500 Nunnerly Rd, Borodino

BRREAKFAST



Join us and Support your Local Volunteer Fire Department

Dates to Remember

April 10th and every second Thursday of the month, Spafford Town Board meeting at 7 PM.

April 26th 8 PM Dusty Pas'cal and Mike Powell perform at the Borodino Hall. Tickets \$15 at the door. Proceeds benefit Spafford Area Historical Society restoration of the Hall.

May 25th 1 PM Veterans Day Memorial Parade and Ceremony followed by refreshments in the Borodino Hall compliments of the Spafford Area Historical Society. All veterans are invited to participate in the parade from the Borodino Fire Hall to the Veterans Memorial Park. Those wishing to walk in the parade should gather at the fire department at 12:30.

Skaneateles, NY 13152

1984 Rt. 174

Town of Spafford

