

# Town of Spafford Newsletter

**Mary Bean, Supervisor**

**October, 2014**

## HAPPENINGS IN SPAFFORD



Your Town Hall has a new roof and the color chosen by Lisa Valletta and Kim Read is lovely. No more pails on the floor to catch the leaks and a good start for other needed repairs and improvements in the coming year. The cost of the steel roof that is warranted for 40 years was less than a shingle roof.

There is more to do to improve the performance and efficiency of our Town buildings. The Town Hall has four steel exterior doors, three of which are rusted through at the bottom and the weather stripping on all no longer does its job. Last winter, little piles of snow accumulated inside the building in front of the doors on windy days. Each time the exterior door to the business office is opened during the winter, Lisa gets a blast of cold air. Two of the exterior doors in the business office section of the building are rusted beyond repair. The wall furnaces are now 16 years old and noisy leaving us to question their efficiency. The building has no air conditioning. Some ceiling tiles are stained and need to be replaced. The floor tile is badly scratched, cracked, stained and no longer cleanable. Five employees work in the business office almost daily and they deserve a comfortable work environment. Money for the repairs/upgrades has to come from a very tight budget however so I have formed a committee, Facilities and Energy, to assess the needs, establish priorities, explore options and make recommendations. We may have to continue heating the out of doors thru this winter but at least by spring we will have a plan for making your Town Hall more comfortable and energy efficient. The committee can use more members so if you are interested in serving, give me a call at Town Hall.

We now have 9 computer stations in the Town Hall and on a busy morning it is not unusual to have 6 or 7 of them in use at the same time. The bandwidth currently supplied by Windstream is insufficient to support that much internet traffic and access cuts off repeatedly while we are trying to do our work. Many reports and licenses are now required to be computer generated and when internet access is cut off, it makes our work and your wait frustrating. We asked Windstream for better service and they sent a proposal that would have increased our cost by \$200 per month. Lou Hanlon recruited his neighbor, Taih Taylor, and they worked with Time Warner Business Class coming up with a proposal that will give us the telephone and internet service we need at nearly the same amount we currently pay. Taih has even offered to help with the installation. The Board will vote on this proposal October 9<sup>th</sup>.

Counselor Lou Hanlon used to own his own business and believes any price can be negotiated. To prove his point, he went to several propane suppliers and negotiated a fixed rate contract for the propane to heat the Town Hall at more than 1/3 off the price we paid last heating season. Lou is now looking at other commodities the town uses such a gravel and asphalt to see if he can save our tax money.

The light fixtures in the Community Room have fluorescent tubes that are no longer available and consume high levels of electricity. The outside light fixtures on the Hall and Garage are also not energy efficient and nearing the end of their life span. NYSEG has proposed replacing all those fixtures for \$3367 resulting in an approximate energy cost savings of \$773 per year with a pay back of 4.4 years. The board will be considering this proposal soon. In considering all of these potential improvements, our goal is to minimize or reduce the cost, and obtain better services and performance for our Town.



## SUMMER CAMP



Mike Preston, Director of Lourdes Camp, has again committed to offer Spafford children between the ages of 7 and 11 a week at Lourdes Day Camp for \$25 next summer. Spafford campers must provide their own transportation. We will get the details out to parents in February so you will have plenty of time to plan. There are several residents who have such fond memories of their childhood experiences at camp that they have committed to assisting any family with the camp fee or transportation so no child who wants to attend Lourdes Day camp will be denied. The Recreation Committee is grateful to Mike for this gift to our children.

## TAXES

By Mary Bean, Supervisor

You hope that when you pay your taxes, your elected officials will make wise choices about how the money is spent. You want the money spent the same way you spend the rest of your pay check, carefully. You want the best deal for your dollar, you want the job done right and according to established priorities. Since I pay taxes as you do, I share those goals and I'm doing my best to assure that our tax money is spent wisely. The Spafford Town Board is engaged in the budget development process and this year is especially difficult. We are five individuals, some new to the budget development process, struggling to achieve consensus, with different priorities and ideas about how the business of the Town should be managed.

The Board's first budget meeting on Sept. 18<sup>th</sup> was lengthy, exhausting and resulted in agreement on one key issue: we agreed that we would bring in a budget that did not exceed the tax cap. On October 2<sup>nd</sup> at our second budget session, a revised budget was presented that incorporated members' opinions from the first session. This meeting went much better and we came to agreement on a preliminary budget. By the time you read this, the preliminary budget will be available on the Town web site or in hard copy from Town Hall. Highlights of the 2015 budget include the following:

- The Town budget comes in under the 1.56% tax cap for 2015.
- The budget will result in a tax increase of 5 cents per thousand or \$5.00 per \$100,000 of assessed value.
- The increase in taxes is largely the result of loss of assessed value of the old Mid Lakes golf course property whose owners won their appeal of the Town's assessment.

The budget was purposely created with a great deal of built in flexibility as the Board will be faced with making several major decisions and dealing with potential challenges in 2015 that will affect how the money is eventually spent. For example:

- The Highway Department is projecting the need for a new truck that should be ordered in 2015. Options to be weighed over the next 6 months include replacement in kind by purchase, purchase of a smaller truck, lease a truck of the size chosen, etc.
- We need to develop a long-term plan for the highway garage. Do we build a new larger, energy efficient garage, enlarge and insulate the current garage, buy smaller trucks that fit in the existing garage, etc.
- The Board needs information to facilitate long term planning for highway department costs so we can budget accordingly. The highway superintendent needs to develop and present a 5 year plan for road maintenance including the frequency of oil and stone

application, criteria for deciding which gravel roads get paved, revision of snow plowing routes in collaboration with Onondaga County and the Town of Scott to promote efficiency, projection of costs per project to comply with NYS Highway Law 284, etc.

- We need to create a plan for making the Town Hall more energy efficient and correcting long ignored maintenance needs that will result in long term savings on utility costs.
- We are aware of several Code Enforcement, Planning and Zoning issues that may require additional legal services.
- We are vulnerable to weather related catastrophes such as the Lanning Road wash out in September that cost over \$50,000 in repairs, an unplanned expense.

A public hearing for the budget is scheduled for Thursday, November 6<sup>th</sup> at 8 PM. The public is invited to comment and the Board welcomes that input. The budget will be brought to a vote by the Board on Nov. 6<sup>th</sup> at a special meeting as required by state law.



## School Taxes

I am continually told by citizens that taxes are too high. I agree, they are too high and the Spafford Town Board is doing its best to hold the line. However, the Town Board controls only a small portion of your total tax bills. To demonstrate that point, I asked Kathy Adams to produce a brief report showing the portion of your taxes that the town controls, who controls the rest of them, and where the increases are coming from. **Do you realize that if you live in the Town Skaneateles School District, the taxes imposed by the Spafford Town Board comprise only 11% of your total annual property tax bill? School taxes are 58% of your total tax bill. If you live in the Marcellus School District, school taxes are 70% of your total and taxes imposed by the Spafford Town Board are only 8%.**

If you are concerned about your school tax bill and are in the Marcellus School District, you will want to attend the public hearing on the proposed \$18.5 million capital improvement project. A public hearing on the proposal is scheduled for October 14, 7 PM in the high school auditorium. A public vote on the proposal will be held October 21, noon to 9 PM in the Marcellus High School.

### Benefit Jamboree for Kennard Brown, Sr.

Sunday, October 26, 1-6 PM at Spafford Fire House. Bands, Raffles, Door prizes, 50-50, Cake Wheel. \$5.00 per person, under 12 Free



## Fire Taxes

Taxes to support the Spafford Fire District are collected by the Town of Spafford but the Town is only a state designated collection agent. The Fire District is a separate governmental entity with its own publicly elected officials who are not accountable to the Spafford Town Board. The budget for the fire district supports both the Spafford and Borodino Fire Departments and is established by the five elected fire commissioners. Fire commissioners are elected for a five year term with one position up for election annually in December.

The Fire District has submitted a proposed budget of \$383,650 that is 1.12% increase over last year. A public hearing on the Fire District budget will be held on October 21<sup>st</sup>, 7 PM at the Borodino Fire Department.

### 2014 CNY Veteran's Parade and Expo

Parade, Noon, Sat., Nov. 8, New York State Fairgrounds. Expo, 10-3 at the Center of Progress Building is a family friendly exhibit with children's play area and job fair.

[www.CNYVeteransParade.org](http://www.CNYVeteransParade.org)



The following two articles appeared in the Skaneateles Press and are reprinted for those who do not receive that newspaper. Both articles are intended to describe challenges facing small town governments such as Spafford and offer ideas.

## **ELECTED VS APPOINTED, HARD DECISIONS FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENTS**

**BY KATHY ADAMS AND MARY BEAN**

New York State's long tradition of elected municipal officials such as Tax Collector, Highway Superintendent and Town Clerk, is now being challenged by increased legal and financial expectations. Local governments are being challenged to do more with less, operate efficiently and economically and operate according to currently accepted best business practices and laws. The education and experience required to meet those emerging expectations may not be available in the pool of willing electors (registered voters) in many small upstate NY townships.

Tax Collector, for instance, is a very difficult position to fill for many reasons. It is a part time job requiring special skills and intense attention for three months then periodic training and meetings thru the rest of the year. The

intensity of the three month tax collection period makes it stressful to maintain other employment during that period yet most qualified individuals can't support themselves on the part time salary the town pays. As an elected official, the candidate for Tax Collector also has to subject themselves to the vagaries of politics and the election process.

Highway Superintendent is not the job it used to be. The job now requires not only the ability to drive a big truck and heavy earth moving equipment but also accounting, managerial, and information management skills. Recognizing that some highway superintendents may need further education to meet emerging demands for efficiency, effectiveness and economy, NYS worked with Cornell University to create a highway school. Cornell has a whole department dedicated to educating and advising Highway Superintendents on NYS Highway laws, providing computer software for record keeping and decision making, testing road construction methods and materials, advising on best management practices, etc. The budgeting process now requires multiyear planning that is difficult without past performance data and long term plans for equipment replacement, road maintenance, personnel management and sharing of services. In most townships, the highway department demands the largest portion of the budget and the Highway Superintendent has to be able to justify the tax dollars needed with data. Justifying an itemized request for the money to fix a road to both citizens and the Town Board requires an entirely different skill set than driving a grader or bulldozer, but a good highway superintendent has both skill sets.

The position of Town Clerk also requires highly effective accounting, office management, information management skills, as well as legal knowledge of various aspects of laws pertaining to Towns. This position has a set of responsibilities defined by NYS and local laws, including Secretary to the Board, issuing conservation licenses, passports, etc. The position may be full or part time depending on the size of the town and citizen demand however law permits the Clerk to set his/her hours.

Partisan politics plays a real and significant role in the conduct of the Town's business. Having to make cold, hard decisions based on data, best business practices and the budget may not win elected officials the votes needed for reelection every two or four years. Working together with the Town Supervisor and Town Board may be challenging after a rancorous election campaign. Newly elected officials may challenge the way the business of the town has been conducted and demand change. Loyalty to the goals of the party that supported your election may trump the need for a team effort to get the job done.

With only 1260 electors (voters) in the Town of Spafford, where do we find persons interested in, available for, and most importantly, with the skills needed for these elected positions? In small towns like Spafford, persons already occupying these positions may not be challenged in an election for many years or the turnover could be continual. There may be little incentive to do the job well or little time to learn the job. Elected officials know that removal from office for failure to meet performance expectations or even breaking laws rarely occurs. If an elected official chooses not to buy into the Boards goals and objectives, the citizens suffer with little recourse until the next election.

There is a solution to this problem, however. NY State law allows towns to convert these three positions to appointed vs elected. Adoption of a local law subject to a mandatory referendum is all that is required. Appointment would allow the Board to establish qualifications needed to do the job, subject the official to the expectations of the Board, and relieve the individual of having to run for election/reelection. These positions require professional level skills. Why not treat the candidates as professionals and hire them based on their ability to deliver services rather than their ability to campaign for votes? Though there are pros and cons to every alternative, we believe that Town Boards and citizens would benefit from a balanced and thoughtful conversation about the alternatives, and which ones would best serve the interests of the community and its citizens.

## EVIDENCE BASED DECISION MAKING

By Mary Bean, Spafford Supervisor

Municipalities are under increasing pressure to do more with less of your tax money. The tax cap further forces us to operate with maximum efficiency and effectiveness. Every penny counts and every dollar saved is a dollar citizens can spend to meet their family's needs. The municipal budget development process can no longer be the simple process of "cutting the pie". Now each and every expenditure or budget line has to be justified and proven to be based on evidence of efficiency and effectiveness. Thanks to computer software, accounting programs and the internet, the data needed to build a case for evidence based budgetary decision making can be available. The medical field has increasingly insisted that decisions about your health care be based on tested and verified evidence that the proposed treatment is effective and the most economical option. Similarly, municipal budget development decisions have to be based on evidence of efficiency, economy and effectiveness.

As the newly elected Supervisor of the Town of Spafford, I realized in late January that the Town Board did not have the information needed to answer the question, "Why does Spafford have the highest cost per mile in Onondaga County for highway maintenance". I recommended to the other members of the Town Board that we should form a Highway Department Advisory Committee to make recommendations to improve the overall efficiency and effectiveness of the Town Highway department. Such a group could aid in Town Board and Town Highway Superintendent decision-making. The committee, comprised of 5 citizen volunteers, took their assignment seriously spending many hours reviewing state and local laws, existing records, visiting other highway departments, and inspecting our roads, highway garage and equipment. Their report was delivered at last week's Town Board meeting to a crowd of over 50 citizens. The 7 page report concluded that the Highway Department operates without clear data to support its requests or guide its decisions. They also found that the requirements of NYS Highway Law 284 that mandates an agreement between the Highway Superintendent and the Town Board limiting the power of the Superintendent of Highways to act and expend highway fund monies have apparently not been followed since 2000.

Two full pages of recommendations concluded the report. Addressing all the recommendations will be a multiyear task but Spafford has only 12 weeks left this year to create a highway budget for 2015 that complies with the tax cap, addresses citizen demand for tax relief and is based on data proving efficiency, effectiveness and economy. The Board and the Highway Superintendent will do their best given the limited data and time frame we have to work with. The Board may have to transfer reserved monies to the highway budget periodically throughout 2015 because of unanticipated weather events such as the recent downpour, an equipment failure or because we lacked data on past performance. I expect the Board will be able to hold the line on the budget in 2015 but will not be able to truly reduce the Highway Department budget until 2016.

## Progress Report: Spafford Town Highway Committee

In January of 2014, the Town Board asked 5 citizens to serve on a Highway Committee “to improve the overall efficiency and effectiveness of the Town Highway department so as to aid in Town Board and Town Highway Superintendent decision-making.” On August 14, the Committee submitted its report to the Town Board at its regularly scheduled meeting. The full report and accompanying presentation are available on the Town’s website (<http://www.townofspafford.com>) in the Town Council section. Below is a summary of the committee’s work.

The committee consisted of 5 citizens whose background and experience were useful to the work of the committee: Lou Hanlon (chair, and retired paving contractor), Lee Springstead (former Spafford Highway Superintendent), Luke DeWitt (staff at Lake Country Construction with expertise in architectural design software), Mark Delaney (retired superintendent of Buildings and Grounds at Fabius-Pompey School District) and Kathy Bragg-Adams (former manager of dealer and customer training at a forklift manufacturer). Several key issues were driving the need for the committee’s work:

- Five years ago, PESH (NY Public Employee Safety and Health Bureau) inspected our Town Highway building and found several life safety violations that needed to be corrected. Some of these issues had not yet been addressed.
- The current Town Highway facilities are below par, and in winter, the trucks (with plows attached) that are stored and serviced there are almost the same length as the building depth. There is little room to move from one side of a truck to the other, making it difficult to maintain the trucks during our critical winter season. Storage is also limited. We do not have a reserve fund to modify this building, or to build a new one.
- Additionally, we need a new truck soon and though we have been saving for this, the size and method of acquisition (lease vs. buy?) should be discussed.
- Finally, our costs for servicing and maintaining our roads appear to be higher than the surrounding communities, and while there may be justification for that, we can’t pinpoint what the specific cost drivers are.
- The Town Board is committed to using tax dollars effectively, and abiding by the tax cap guidelines

The committee followed a process of gathering data and information, getting educated on highway matters, analyzing the information that we found, and then prioritizing the findings in order to prepare the report. There is quite a lot of information available from the State of New York, the Association of Towns, as well as the nearby Cornell Local Roads program. We looked at the overall operations of the department, the budget process, the buildings, the equipment, shared services with other towns, and our crew. Our report contained findings and recommendations in each of the areas listed above.

Carl Wiers, our highway Superintendent, declared that the aging building was his most significant problem, and the committee quickly agreed that a new or expanded building would be needed fairly soon. In looking deeper, we had hoped to find opportunities for greater efficiency, and by doing so, reduce the expenditures so that funds for a new building could be set aside over the next few years. However, while we track some things, our records about how much time and money are spent on specific projects are less detailed than we expected. So, our recommendation to the Highway Department and to the Town Board was to begin immediately to track expenses in greater detail so that we know what a specific project costs, not just in services, but also in materials and labor. The second recommendation was a bit more technical: we recommended that the Superintendent and the Town Board follow a specific budget and expenditure oversight process that is described in both the Town and Highway laws of New York. Following this process should yield a clearer picture of our Highway Department expenditures over time, and as a result, put us in a better position to identify potential savings that could be used to improve our Highway facilities and equipment.

Below are some excerpts from the report. Remember, you can read the whole report and the accompanying presentation at <http://www.townofspafford.com>.

*From SUMMARY OF FINDINGS:*

*The combination of these two factors: the absence of data necessary for reasonable management decision-making, and the absence of associated controls exercised by the Town Board yield a budget that is not rooted in today's fiscal realities. With the tax cap and the resounding message that tax payers sent to the newly elected town officials restricting any contemplation of tax increases, we must find a way to fund new equipment and better facilities within the current budget.*

*Our theory is that finding funds within the current budget is feasible, but without the data to provide a clear picture of our current expenditures and internal costs, we cannot be sure. We offer the following recommendations to bring the fiscal picture into clearer focus, and to enable the Town Board and the Highway Superintendent to determine the best approach to fund the needed resources. We also believe that our recommendations to adopt "best practices" from other towns as well as to use methodologies recommended by the Highway School resources will help the Highway Superintendent to more cost-effectively manage the Highway Department on behalf of the citizens of Spafford.*

*From the RECOMMENDATIONS Section:*

General

1. Contact Cornell Local Roads Program to determine available assistance with selection of software and transition to a more comprehensive system of tracking costs and activities of the Highway Department.
2. Begin now to track costs and labor by project.

Budget Process

1. Follow the required Town budget system.
2. Once the budget for 2015 is established, enter into a Section 284 Agreement between Town Board and Highway Superintendent that describes each project and its budget.
3. Allocate savings to reserve fund for new/modified building and for new equipment.

Buildings

1. Although we acknowledge that the current Town Highway garage is inadequate over the long term, funding for a new building is not currently available. In the interim, Town Highway employees need to do planned/preventative maintenance on the Town Hall and Garage on a regular basis, including cleaning and organizing tools, equipment and supplies. Such work is consistent with expectations of other highway departments and is a reasonable expectation for the Town of Spafford employees. Additionally, the PESH report citations are primarily matters of housekeeping and proper storage of materials. A list of annual maintenance and emergency repairs should be completed and submitted to the Town Board and citizens.
2. Begin now to designate funds for a new building or an addition to and rehab of the existing building. Though further study is required to determine the best alternative, we believe the funding can be accumulated and a suitable building project can be accomplished cost effectively within the next five years. As a starting point, the Town Board may consider the building expansion approach as conceived the attached drawings.

## Equipment

1. Daily truck inspection should be performed and logged.
2. Analyze equipment use by project or task and devise a method by which each piece of necessary equipment is acquired, maintained and replaced on a schedule that optimizes the cost effectiveness of the fleet. Expand "own" and "rent" alternatives to include:
  - a. Own/replace on optimal schedule
  - b. Lease/replace on optimal schedule
  - c. Rent for occasional use
  - d. Share with 2-3 towns for intermittent but routine use
  - e. Other?

Note: Sharing equipment with other municipalities requires Town Board authorization.

*Additional recommendations are in the categories of Operations, Budgeting and Purchasing, and Human Resources.*

The committee would like to thank the Town Board and the Highway Department for the opportunity to contribute to our community. We have been asked to continue to support the Highway Department as they work to make the changes that were recommended.

## Thank You

Thank you to the following citizens who took it upon themselves to do good things for the Town and others. I know I will miss many who have contributed but feel I must try to give credit to those who do much for all of us. Let me know who I missed so I can include them next time.

**Lou Hanlon** who saved much tax money by negotiating an enviable rate for our winter propane.

**Taih Taylor and Lou Hanlon** who negotiated with Time Warner for internet and phone service at a rate that gives us what we need for the near future at significant savings over our current provider. **Taih Taylor** who has volunteered to help with installation for further savings.

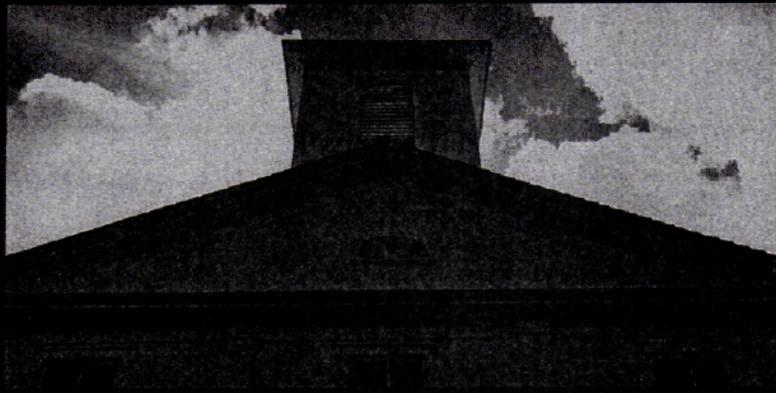
**Tina Castle and Kim Read** who put together the flower boxes on the Town Hall and kept them blooming all summer.

**Mary Becker and Gretchen Krantz** who used their powers of persuasion to get Onondaga County to clean up the Otisco Lake Fishing site and replace the sign.

**Ann Furze and Frank Moran** who initiated and promoted the agreement with Lourdes Camp to provide Spafford kids with a week at day camp.

**Johanna Frittelli, Lou Hanlon, The Spafford Area Historical Society, and all their helpers** who worked on the Veterans Memorial, the Gazebo and Borodino Hall to beautify the Borodino 4 corners this summer.

**Borodino Fire Department** Blood donation drives that help so many everywhere.



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## NEARBY SENIOR RECREATION OPPORTUNITIES

Otisco Lake Community Association Community Center Senior Luncheons are held at noon, the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Wednesday's of each month except July and August. Call Sue @ 636-7267 to register and for more information.

The Town of Marcellus has a helpful web site if you are a computer user. Information on the web site includes a weekly luncheon. Every Thursday PEACE, Inc. provides a luncheon program at the Marcellus Methodist Church. Arrive at 11AM, luncheon is at noon. Often speakers, bingo and entertainment are offered. The lunch includes entre, desert, beverages, all for \$2.25 per person. Call 673-2785 by Monday to reserve your place or for more information.

Skaneateles, NY 13152

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Town of Spafford

