

SE Town Board Work Session Recap 6/4/09

Hi All,

I haven't done a recap in about six months because, quite frankly, the meetings had become so predictable, tedious and depressing there was little to say. Besides, you can catch them in all their Technicolor glory on Channel 8 so who needs my snarkiness to tell you what's going on.

But there was a lot in this meeting that's just a little too good to resist. Some background...

Wow. What a little polling will do...

As I hear it (although no one called my house...) a survey was done this past spring asking how Supervisor Rights and Company are doing. Apparently the results were less than stellar- thus Matt Neuringer and Joe DiPaola distancing themselves from the powers that be. Hey, where are those guys anyway???

The result has been an entire Town Board make-over and almost love-fest between the formerly warring factions.

Gone is the gavel, gone the 'I didn't interrupt you please don't interrupt me', the Yee 'Man up!' advisory, the gratuitous \$9.23 battery mention, the 'married to the mob' comments re. five year old garbage contracts, even the great, although obviously imagined, 'Joe Vera Swindle'.

That's right, almost everything has become a 'Pollyanna' moment... except for that infamous smirk. Because no matter what the polling data indicated apparently it's impossible for our almost always condescending and somewhat nutty Supervisor to hide his contempt for the public. Of course, that's if a constituent has the unmitigated gall to disagree with him. If he thinks you're on his team or he thinks he can 'win you over' then it's 'Let the pandering begin'.

I'm not going to encapsulate the entire meeting as it went on until around 10:30. Besides there was a lot of optional employee benefits discussed and since these won't cost us any money and are tiresome if you're not involved I'll spare you.

So, I'm going to unfairly pick and choose what I found remarkably inane, in some cases beyond outrageous but almost always amusing. Proceed at your own risk.

My usual disclaimer stands. The following is simply my own jaded, unfair and childishly sarcastic take on how we're governed in Southeast. My remarks are my own and are not reflective of any committee or board on which I sit.

Town Board Work Session:

2) Best Western:

This was a perfect example of Supervisor Rights pandering to the crowd. Of course no one wants an unattractive Best Western on the old Fox Run Motel site (Question: Is there an attractive Best Western somewhere that I might have missed?). And of course no one speaking at the meeting seemed to trust John Gillen (although I believe that John's son is the franchise holder here) due to the fact that the old Fox Run Motel became a 'Welfare Motel'. But this is a fairly complicated legal issue and I'm not sure whether, Supervisor Rights (despite his legal background) entirely grasped the situation- or willingly ignored it.

The long and short of it is that to get Mr. Gillen to finally tear down the half demolished/blown-up Fox Run Motel there was a stipulation signed by the town giving Gillen the right to build another motel. I'm not sure how many times our Town Attorney, Willis Stephens, has had to explain this but apparently it's not an explanation our Town Supervisor cares to hear.

Look, you can't rewrite history. And, like it or not, a building permit was issued for a 56 room Microtel. This plan has since been changed to a 48 room Best Western. We were assured that the Best Western will only contain single bedrooms- not suites or efficiencies that would be easier to change into apartments. Best Western is also strict on it's franchisees doing 6 month inspections- although I can assure you there's one up in the Albany area they seem to have missed...

Basically, I'd like to think that Best Western wants to be a good neighbor and will abide by architectural changes suggested by the ARB- but unfortunately I'm not positive that they have to. And it seemed to me that there was an awful lot of legal posturing going on with litigation implied on both sides. All in all not a good scene. Of course I've always thought that the corner lot in question is simply a hotbed of bad, bad karma. But then what do I know.

Hopefully cooler heads will prevail and we won't have to spend a dime on litigation. Errrr, sorry Will...

3) Library Districts:

Hold on to your wallets folks! Our Supervisor is insistent that the Brewster Library form its own district. This means that the Library will become a separate taxing entity like the Fire Department etc. and your apportionment will be itemized separately on your tax bill. As Councilman Honeck pointed out this does lend transparency... but it will probably result in higher taxes.

Right now the town funds the Library to the tune of about \$200,000 but from what I hear the Library will be going after funding of around \$400,000. The good news is that you get to vote on it (and for the record I think more money for the library would be worth the added tax expense). Still the bad news is that when your taxes go up Rights and Co. can conveniently blame the library. Thus the resulting tax increase is 'not their fault'. Clever, n'est pas?

And, let's face it, funding the best of Brewster (the Library and Museum) has never been Rights and Yee's strong suit so perhaps this will work out for the best. I just think it's important for the public to understand what's really going on.

11) Mulch Collection:

I *really* loved this one. It started out on the right foot. How can we find a spot where people with smaller properties can recycle their leaves, lawn clipping etc. ? Well, (drum roll please) we can open a composting facility. So I'm thinking- this would be terrific and then (cue standard disaster movie score) it turns out that we may be going into the *business* of composting.

It seems that New Castle has its own facility and that the composting center there generates \$110,000 in profit every year. At this point you could literally see Rights and Yee salivating. Still, I'm thinking this sounds pretty good until I hear you need two full time employees, a large truck, and other assorted machinery. But then (and by now I'm hearing loud cymbals, fake thunder and cheesy 'it-was-a-dark-and-stormy-night' sound effects) it appears that the 8 to 10 acre site needed will be located on our very own 'open space' property located off Pugsley Road. Huh???

Scheesh... I mean, I never liked this property and I've always thought it was a wasteful use of our Open Space funding but, that said, it is supposed to be '**Open Space**'. Now, we'll have a dog pound and possibly a Composting/Mulching concern. How enticing. "Come on kids, grab your hard hats! Let's head out to our open space to listen to ear-shattering machinery grind logs and branches to a pulp! We can also watch heavy equipment push around yard detritus while listening to that melodious beep, beep, beep every time some one has to back up."

And, in case you're thinking that this doesn't sound too bad consider that another site (the old land fill off Reservoir Road) is probably NOT usable because of it's proximity to a water source. Kinda makes you wonder how environmentally friendly the facility will be anywhere.

On top of this we have a local business that does much the same thing- right off Route 6 East sits Tremson. Tremson charges you to drop off logs, branches, trees etc and then they'll sell it as mulch. In any case, I doubt they'll be real happy with a government run facility competing with them.

Fortunately Councilman Yee stated that a business plan would be needed before proceeding (gee, ya think- I mean the difference between a facility in Brewster and New Castle is rather dramatic). But mainly I have no idea how anyone could advocate for anything like this situated on open space for which we paid dearly.

If this seriously proceeds I'm thinking we really need to come up with other profit centers that might also be located on this dedicated open space. My thoughts (although not in order of preference) are: Garbage Transfer Station, chemical plant, thermometer factory, auto parts store(s), delis, strip mines (creates even more open space!), drive-in movies and nail

salon(s). Oh, and if we can get us some of that Federal stimulus money (to make sure it's really, really safe) how's about a nuclear waste disposal site? Money, money money!!!

13) Lake Tonetta Update:

Hilarious! Don Cuomo gave a concise overview on the health of Lake Tonetta. And while I don't expect Board members to be limnologists I do expect them to have a modest grasp of simple things such as algae, carp, herbicides and egg addling.

No such luck- although I thought that Councilman Gross' observations were dead-on and he was definitely engaged and listening. Councilman Honeck was the other wise one who said little but at least paid attention.

As for Yee and Rights... Oy vey! They went into concern overdrive. Dwight actually asked if you could pull algae out 'by the roots' and if it's edible (yum!) while our esteemed Supervisor asked if anything 'other than whales eats algae." Errrrr, that would be plankton, krill, squid or seals depending on the whale. By the way, plankton is one of the few things that Lake Tonetta doesn't harbor.

Both Dave and Dwight were suddenly falling all over each other to maintain the Lake's water quality. Would an aerator help? How about herbicides? Underwater plant harvesters? Would 'Geese Peace' be worth it? And the list of sudden 'caring' went on and on.

Obviously it's past Memorial Day so now they know that a big block of voters want the lake clean for the swimming season. Presto-chango the lake becomes a completely transparent cause celebre!

To their credit, and as per instruction, the Tonetta Lake Advisory Board tried to save money for all SE taxpayers (as I presume they were told to) so this disingenuous 'the sky's the limit when it comes to the health of our lake' BS came out of left field. Don Cuomo handled the situation well, stating that for every action taken at the lake there would be a reaction. Thus it isn't necessarily good to treat any lake until you really understand what the problems are. Thus while Don was concerned with the lack of clarity and the high oxygen levels he did not advocate for anything more than careful monitoring at this point.

In my mind those are the meeting highlights (or lowlights, depending on your take) so that's it from my desk for now. As always if you have any questions please feel free to e-mail me.

With Best Regards,
Lynne Eckardt