

Town Board Recap 1/18/08

Hi All,

Move over writer's strike- there's a reality show in town that can't be beat. Ta Da... Welcome to the all new Southeast Town Board meetings. Thrill to the petty bickering, chill to the Supervisor's squinty-eyed look of utter disdain, laugh aloud at the complete hypocrisy of the status quo, sob over the squandering of town funds spent on the oversized, grandiose room with less square footage for all other departments. Of course that's only if you've been able to negotiate Route 22 and get to the John J. Dunford Civic Center, then settle into unattractive and uncomfortable mustard colored chairs and enjoy the show.

Of course if you're prone to ulcers, headaches, depression or restless leg syndrome this may not be the diversion for you. Side effects include, but aren't limited to: irritability, dizziness, nausea, constipation, vomiting, more vomiting, and even more vomiting.

Okay, you've been warned.

Here's the deal. I can't possibly continue to cover all items on the agenda at TB meetings. They last at least three hours. I have at least 5 to 6 pages of notes per meeting and there isn't enough time in the week to really do them justice (or, in many cases, 'injustice').

I've been doing this for the last five years- and although I'll admit it's unfair I'm gonna pick whatever topics I want to cover. Self-indulgent, you bet. But you'll have an agenda to cross check and if you have questions on uncovered items I'll be happy to fill you in. I don't want to get too bogged down in the craziness but it is worth noting when it occurs.

As a new feature I've added a scorecard. I couldn't do this with the old Town Board simply because they so rarely disagreed- but, of course, the complete opposite is true now. Naturally the scorecard is based solely on my opinion so it's doubtful many will agree but 'my recap- my rules'. So for my first-ever scorecard of 13 items I bothered to comment on: Rights and Yee: 5 Honeck, Johnson and mostly Gross: 4 There were two items where both 'sides' were absolutely ridiculous and thus were a draw. And two items where the entire Board agreed and I believe they were entirely wrong.

So, let's hear the satisfying click of your seatbelt. I'm going to tackle the first irRegular Meeting of the year.

As always the opinions expressed are my own incredulous, jaundiced and already fed-up-in-'08 musings on the state of the town. Fortunately they reflect no groups to which I belong. And remember, for God's sake lighten up, they're only opinions.

AGENDA:

After the Pledge and a rousing rendition of 'God Bless America' the meeting was opened.

1. Peach Lake Project:

North Salem Supervisor Paul Greenwood spoke re the sewerage of Peach Lake. North Salem will retain Lead Agency status. Southeast will not.

7. Motion for Planning and Zoning Board of Appeals- Meeting Venue:

Councilman Yee and Supervisor Rights expressed concern over security and felt that until the new building is secure Planning and Zoning should meet at 67 Main Street. Councilman Honeck said that this was a 'slap in the face' to Planning and Zoning Board members and pointed out that when court is in session there are no security concerns.

By a vote of 3 to 2 Planning and Zoning will now meet in the new court room. Yee and Rights voted no.

8. Motion- Web Site Co-ordinator:

Councilman Yee offered to update the out of date town website gratis. Councilmen Honeck and Johnson were not comfortable with this arrangement. Yee and Rights argued that former Councilwoman Mitts had the same job and the entire Board had been comfortable with that arrangement. Yee mentioned that he was unable to get code access from Tax Assessor, Bill Ford.

Motion to make Yee the webmaster. Defeated 3-2 (Rights and Yee voting Yes)

11. Authorizing Supervisor to seek Proposals for Legal Services:

This pertains to retention of counsel for 'Quality of Life' issues. Former Councilman Pat Bonanno had given a presentation seeking this position in a preceding Work Session. This would also include looking into enacting a forfeiture law. It was mentioned that Judge Borkowski is comfortable adding this position.

Authorization of an RFP issued by the Supervisor. Passed 5-0.

14 and 15: Resolutions regarding contract renewal with the Putnam Humane Society. Tabled until after a meeting with the Humane Society on January 22nd. 5-0

New Business:

Sheriff's Contract:

Rights is looking into the possibility of reallocating part of the \$60,000 into traffic control. Rights proposed having a police officer direct traffic at the 312 Route 22 junction during rush hour. It was mentioned that the patrol of town facilities may still be needed as vandalism had occurred at Lakeview Manor and Scolpino Park. On the January 24th Work Session Agenda.

Assessment Panel:

Rights would like to assemble a 'Blue Ribbon Panel' to look at assessments in SE. Councilman Johnson asked if this was to become a 'witch hunt'. An assessment freeze was mentioned later in the evening by the Supervisor.

Zimmer Park Ball Fields:

Bids came in far higher than expected. The Town Engineer had anticipated a cost of \$103,000 but bids came in at: \$148,000, \$158,000 and \$240,000. The Board agreed to put this out for another round of bidding. 5-0

Sale/Leaseback:

As he had mentioned in a Work Session the Supervisor would like to sell the new Town Hall facility and lease it back. This would help lower taxes. Willis Stephens reminded Rights that a referendum would be needed to accomplish this.

Route 22:

The Supervisor asked for authorization to write a letter to the DOT to widen Route 22. All agreed that this was long overdue. Rights would like a forum to discuss the widening. Authorization passed 5-0.

Audit of Vouchers:

Yee and Rights want an audit as there have been budget over runs. Johnson said that this was not necessary as we already have a CPA who signs off on a yearly independent audit. Yee mentioned that cell phone bills and heating oil prices were all over the map. This item will be on the January 24th Work Session.

SE/Brewster Revitalization Committee: This committee will be made up of both the Town Board and the Village Board and will explore ways of intermunicipal cooperation. Passed 5-0

Selling Fleet of Town Cars: Rights would like to eliminate all non-emergency town cars. When asked an example of Recreation Director and Tax Assessor vehicles were mentioned. Johnson would like to evaluate depending on cost-per-mile vs. cost-per-vehicle. This will be discussed at the January 24th meeting.

Old Town Hall (67 Main): The \$1.4 million bond expired after 10 years. Another bond will be needed for any major improvements. Two Architectural firms have been contacted.

Gold Lot Block Building: The village has asked that this be used for the village Police Force. Roger Gross mentioned that it may be beneficial to use this for the SE Museum when the Old Town Hall is under renovation. Sewer hook-ups were approved 5-0.

Records Access Officer: Councilman Johnson made a motion to appoint the Town Clerk as Records Access Officer. Passed 5-0

Receiver of Mail: Councilman Johnson made a motion that the Town Clerk be appointed Receiver of Mail. Rights wanted all mail addressed to the Supervisor to go directly to him. Town Clerk Mazzei said that the Post Office could not do this. The Town Clerk was appointed 3-2 (Rights and Yee voted no)

Website Update: Councilman Johnson wanted to appoint Joe Mirra (sp?) as webmaster. The fee is \$85 an hour. Councilman Yee said he would update the site and maintain it gratis. There was a long discussion re. trust but it was decided that they would appoint Joe Mirra webmaster on a month to month basis. Passed 4-1 (Rights voting no).

Special Districts/Facilities Manager: There is an advertisement in the works for this position. Supervisor Rights had not yet submitted it and said that the Journal News was very expensive but he had no alternative. Town Attorney, Willis Stephens explained that The Putnam Press was also an official newspaper and could be used. For advertising positions any paper can be used. The Poughkeepsie Journal was mentioned. An ad will be placed.

Comments and questions from the audience will be addressed below.

COMMENTS/OPINIONS: Now you can see what I mean by the never-ending meeting. And I really can't decide whether my favorite part was the hilarious and pointed town vehicle discussion or the fact that 'in the spirit of domestic tranquility' none of the TB members wanted to meet on Valentine's Day- you're kidding, right? I mean, talk about a totally bogus Hallmark holiday you should have outgrown by 8th grade... Scheesh... Although always looking for that silver lining I was pleased to see that all the Board wives appear to run the show at home. Score one for the ladies.

7. Motion on Planning and ZBA Meeting Venue: Okay, I give up. Why is the John J. Dunford Court Room (for brevity's sake to be referred to the JD building in future) secure enough for the Town Board to meet but not Planning and Zoning? Give up? Me too. Nothing about this bickering made sense or was remotely productive. A complete, illogical time-waster. Yee and Rights were way out of line on this one. Score 1 for Honeck and Johnson.

8. Website Coordinator: Not to be outdone by item number 7 Honeck and Johnson pitched their own mini-fits on this little number. Why was it fine to have former Councilwoman Mitts tend to the website but not Councilman Yee? Again, I give up. There was no logic to be found here. Especially when you figure one of Putnam's worst kept political secrets is that Yee wants to run for sheriff. This alone would compel him to do a really stand-up job on the town website- for free! Besides it can't be any worse than the job Mitts did for the last 6 months. Score one for Rights and Yee.

11. Special Counsel: I adore this item. Although we have a 90% zoning compliance rate in SE we now need a special prosecutor for 'Quality of Life' issues.

Well, what about my quality of life when I have to open my town tax bill and we're paying even more in legal fees? No one seems to have done any research on what this will cost. In a previous meeting Rights said he 'had expectations' that the fines and fees would cover the prosecutor's salary but when I asked how taxpayers could be certain of this he told me (and I'm not kidding) to 'Google it'. Yeah, well, allow me to do town research while you collect your \$80K pay check. Arggggggg. I suggested (as did another resident) that a Public Hearing be held on this so that residents could express their views. Don't hold your

breath. I'd call this item a stand-off as while Bonanno wasn't appointed there will be an RFP put out on this- all before any research has been done.

New Business: I just love the fact that there were 15 items on the distributed agenda and 14 unannounced items under New Business, with seven actually voted on. My, how user friendly. If any of the items voted on or discussed were of personal interest you'd be out of luck unless you'd called the Physic Hotline or fired-up the Oujia Board the night before. The height of hypocrisy hit when Councilman Honeck said that he didn't think this way of doing business was appropriate but neglected to mention that his partner in crime (NOTE: a **complete** figure of speech) was guilty of the same. Yeah, Johnson (AKA Mazzei's knight in shining armor) introduced two items on her behalf that were voted on. This one's a draw as both sides were guilty of the same dubious behavior.

Sheriff's Contract: It's ever so nice to take a stroll down Memory Lane and see the useless, door-knob jiggling \$60,000 patrol back in the news. Apparently it's so useless that we now want to 're-allocate funds' and let some poor cop stand at the junction of Route 22 and 312 during RUSH HOUR, no less, to direct traffic. And whose harebrained scheme is this??? Why the always-enigmatic D. Michael Rights, of course. I assume that combat pay will be available because between darkness, degree of difficulty and road rage this should really be a coveted detail. I'm giving this one to Johnson and Honeck as they didn't seem to acknowledge the re-allocation of funds as a good idea. Of course the real answer here is to get back the two old guys back in the station wagon and out on patrol.

Assessment Blue Ribbon Panel: More complete garbage. Now, if Rights had called it the 'Vendetta Panel' I'd have had to concur. As for a possible 'assessment freeze' this was the biggest joke of the evening. Look, Rights knows that this will sound great to those who voted for him but won't understand that a freeze means absolutely nothing. Because until and unless the TB controls or lowers spending we all have to pay the piper.

Do I like Assessor Ford? No, not in the least (for the record, he doesn't like me either) but, being one myself, you can bet I know a 'witch hunt' when I see one. It's juvenile, inappropriate and will accomplish nothing. Cut the budget and the BS but leave a 'freeze' in the 'Great Hall of Smoke and Mirrors' where it belongs. Blue Ribbon Panel- my *ss. Negative points to Yee and Rights for trying to dupe the public.

Sale/Leaseback of New Town Hall: Calling all reality checks... A truly hilarious concept that Rights can't seem to leave alone. This one was like picking at a scab. Believe me, I despise the building, the location and the use- but it's done, move on. I mean who but Harold Lepler would buy the JD building and lease it back to us until he could find a better use, throw us out on the street and attach it to 'our brand new town center' that he'll be building on 22. This round goes to Honeck and Johnson simply for not being nutty.

Route 22: Oh great, we're kicking it old school to embark on another 20 years of failure. Here's the deal, plain and simple. Until stakeholders sit down at the table and figure out a Regional Plan or some other appropriate compromise the widening is just not happening. Why on earth Supervisor Rights believes trips to Albany and his boundless charm and sparkling personality will prove otherwise is beyond me.

Note to Rights. Check your ego and intractability at the door and try something new. Because this is the same old/same old only with a different face attached. No points to anyone on this retreat.

Audit of Vouchers: Raise your hand if, as newly elected officials, you'd accept past accounting practices in our fair town? Nah, didn't think so. Score one for Rights and Yee here. I think that there could be surplus funds we need to know about and probably a few other hidden gems as well. Sure it's expensive but I believe an accounting over-haul would be money well spent.

Selling of Town Cars: This was one of my favorites and, believe me, there was a lot to choose from. I think that reevaluating who needs a town vehicle and who doesn't is a good idea. Figure out if it's cheaper to pay mileage or cheaper to use a town car. As I said last Thursday, I've seen the Recreation Jeep at the Danbury 'Park and Ride' at least twice in the past several years. And while I'm sure that there's a perfectly reasonable explanation I'd have to agree that our Rec Director probably doesn't need to cruise around at our expense. Yet I would tend to disagree with Rights regarding our disagreeable Tax Assessor's car. I'm

guessing it's cheaper to give Mr. Ford town wheels than to have him drive his own. Anyhow, a reevaluation is long overdue. And credit goes to (gulp) Rights and Yee on this. I imagine that this point will be easily lost if they target certain departments over others.

Old Town Hall: Jeeze... you mean the bond expired on this, already? After only a decade. Hard to believe. You mean that the architectural plans we paid over \$100,000 for are no good. Huh? Imagine that. Big minus points to Honeck and Johnson for dropping the ball 10 years in a row.

Gold Lot Block Building: The funniest part of this bit was when one of our genius TB members stated that this was the 'perfect spot' for the village PD. Yeah, because who would want to have a police presence on Main Street? What!#\$%^&* I thought that was the main point of creating the local force. No winner here although it's worth noting that Councilman Gross made a tepid attempt to mention that the building might be needed for the museum when renovations are started.

Receiver of Mail: A classic p*ssing contest. Rights wants unfettered access to his own mail. Mazzei wants to be in control. Well, I remember some (I'm sure completely coincidental) problems in '94 and if I were Rights I'd want a hands-off policy too. But this 'take it behind the gym' exchange went on far too long. On the plus side 'Parking Gate' has been resolved with Mazzei retaining her coveted space next to the building. Rights scores here only because I wouldn't want Mazzei within a hundred yards of my mail. Not that she'd do anything wrong, mind you... I'm positive she wouldn't. I just like my privacy.

Whew, that's it from my desk. My apologies for the length but you try sitting through one of these meetings. As always please feel free to e-mail me with any questions or comments that you might have.

With Best Regards,

Lynne Eckardt