

## Supervisors Report August 2015

2015 has certainly been an eventful year here in local government in the Town of Stuyvesant. The biggest change has been due to retirements. Bernie Kowalski has retired after serving the Town faithfully for 30 years as Highway Superintendent. Bernie leaves the Town of Stuyvesant with some of the best maintained roads in the County, as well as our equipment and storage areas updated and well maintained. Now, it would be nice if we had a milder winter to deal with this year. The cost of the past two severe winters back to back, has put strain on the budget. We all wish Bernie the best!

Chuck Stiffler has been appointed to Bernie's position and will be seeking the elected position this Fall. Many small, but important policy changes have been documented in the 1<sup>st</sup> official Town of Stuyvesant Personnel Policy that was developed this year. I give our Board lots of credit for spending hours and hours on developing and implementing this policy. This will no doubt make life easier for future employees and elected officials. We have now also been notified that our long time Highway Department employee Frank Pino will also be retiring on October 1<sup>st</sup>. We all also wish him the best!

Speaking of budgets, we also saw the retirement of Mark Fitzgerald this year who also faithfully served the Town of Stuyvesant as Town Accountant. Mark was much more than just an accountant, as we are finding out in replacing him. Mark provided accounting services, as well as being Bookkeeper, Payroll Clerk, and advisor to the Supervisor. We have enlisted the services of Paychex to provide payroll services and, although it has been a learning curve, I do believe the services such as direct deposit have been welcomed by our employees. The firm Stickler, Torchia, and Churchill CPA's from Hudson were chosen from several well qualified accountant firms from the area, to provide accounting and bookkeeping services. Bob Paterson from that firm has been handling the monthly services needed and has been a pleasure to work with.

We finally got contractors on site at the Town's Historic Railroad Station to work on Restoration Phase II. This is a project that has been approved by NYS DOT to be

partially funded by a grant. Complying with all regulations involved has caused the project to inch along for years toward actual construction. The Committee continues to do their best in raising funds to offset the costs of this project. On a very local level there were donations made to Stuyvesant Pathways (a nonprofit group formed in Town to help with trails and projects at the station). With these donations this organization hired a local contractor to complete the two north windows and with the help from the mason on site from working on restoration, were able to get them installed. If you haven't been to the depot in while, please take a look at the progress. I recently vacationed in the Adirondacks and was inspired by visiting the restored stations of both North Creek and Thendara. These now serve as mini museums operated mostly by volunteers that are wonderful additions to the community. I do see this in Stuyvesant's future.

One thing I have had to learn to accept working local government is all progress comes very slow. This summer we have seen some very significant progress on a town project that has been in the works for over 25 years now. That is Hudson River access. This project began in the late 1980's and in 1990 the State acquired a parcel of land along the river that was determined at the time to be a good potential access point and boat launch. This project received the promise of some \$300,000.00 from a GE settlement over 20 years ago. Trying to get this project underway and satisfying all agencies has been difficult at times. NYS DOT has an interest in the safety of rail crossings; part of DEC wants to promote recreation while another part wants to maintain a forever wild opportunity. What we came up a few years ago was an acceptable compromise, and this past winter DOT installed a new gated crossing on Ice House Road providing safe and easy access to the Historic Ice House ruins and DEC used some of the settlement funds to develop an improved road, parking lot, and a wonderful pavilion overlooking the Hudson River. If you haven't been there, you need to check it out!

Just south of this point is the well known Ferry road point, and this summer NYS DOT has been installing a traffic light on State RT 9J at the intersection of this Road and County RT 46 to provide safe access to the Hudson River and the Historic homes on Ferry rd. Some years ago I attended a seminar by NYS DEC regarding shoreline stabilization and began talks with some DEC staff about local

residents' concerns of erosion at Ferry Rd point. This area was built up years ago and had a bulkhead protecting the area. Time has taken its toll on the bulkhead and we have been losing land mass and trees for several years now. The Hudson River Estuary Program just approved funding to hire a Shoreline Engineer to develop a stabilization plan for this area. Hopefully this will allow future residents the opportunity to continue to enjoy the views of the Hudson River from this location, as has been done for generations now.

In 1996 the Town of Stuyvesant adopted a Comprehensive Plan that has been an excellent road map for the future of Stuyvesant. In 2001 all new Zoning Regulations were adopted to compliment the new Plan. From about 2007-2009, I lead a group that reviewed the 1996 plan and made some recommendations to update the plan. We did a few minor zoning changes back then, but now for the past year or so Councilperson Kelley Williams has led a group of volunteers that has been reviewing our current Zoning laws. They have recently completed a number of suggested changes to our Town's Zoning Laws and the Board is in the process of reviewing them prior to conducting public hearings. I am sure these approved changes will improve the quality of life for town residents. Stay tuned for more on this in coming months.

The Stuyvesant Falls Bridge has been a subject of conversation both at the Town and County level. This bridge is the largest bridge the County owns and has been listed on the National Historic Register, making it a very significant bridge to both the Town and County. Last year the State (agency responsible for inspecting all bridges) lowered the weight limit on the bridge restricting local emergency vehicles and farming operations. The County has engaged an engineering firm to conduct an in depth study of the bridge, and help the county engineering department develop a plan for the future of the bridge. This study can be found on our town web site. A quick review of the study indicates that at some point in the not too distant future the bridge will need either a major reconstruction or replacement. We recognize that developing a plan for the bridge is not something that will come quickly, so the County has just very recently put out for bid and accepted a bid from Piasecki Steel to do some repairs that will get our weight limit back to an acceptable level that will allow emergency

vehicle access. This is not a resolve that will last forever so we are beginning talks about what the 5 or 10 year plan should be for the bridge. The decision for a long term fix will be a county decision but I do have a position on the Public Works Committee that will be making a recommendation to the full board of Supervisors. In talking with the County Engineer, we recognize that due to its listing on the register that the New York State Historic Preservation Office will have an involvement, and they will want to know if the community supports whatever plan gets put forth. With this in mind, I have been soliciting the interest of some local community members who will review the study and help make a recommendation to the County Engineer, who will then take that plan to the Public Works Committee.

All of us have felt the effects of rising costs while seeing declining or stagnant income levels. Local government is no different. Maintaining the services residents have come to enjoy and expect from local government while dealing with rising costs has been a challenge to both the Town and County budgets. I have to compliment all department heads in both governments that I have had the opportunity to work with for the past several years that have enabled us to keep your tax increases at a minimum. As September begins, we begin the 2016 budget season. The Town Board has been able to comply with the tax cap program for several years now, and this year I spent considerable time working with both the Town and County to see that both future budgets comply with the "Tax Freeze" program set forth by our Governor, so that Stuyvesant residents may be eligible for a tax rebate check this fall.

Our Town Clerk Melissa Naegeli has created a face book page to help keep residents informed. Like our page or join us at a Town Board meeting. Enjoy the fall weather!

Ron Knott