



Town of Franklin

March 2003 Newsletter

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March 2003

Town of Franklin

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TOWN OFFICIALS

Town Supervisor

Mary Ellen Keith

Deputy Supervisor

Gene Goff

Town Councilmen

Timothy Goff

Walter Kretser

Janet Ordway

Town Justice

Roger Symonds

Highway Superintendent

Donald Vorrath

Deputy Highway Supt.

Eric Merrill

Town Clerk/Tax Collector

Lauren LeFebvre

Attorney for the Town

Edward Murphy

Assessor

Douglas Tichenor

483-0188

Code Enforcement Officer

Edward Lagree

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TOWN BOARD MEETINGS

Regular town board meetings are held the second Monday of each month at the Franklin Town Hall. The meetings are open to the public.

The next regular meeting will be held Monday, April 14, 2003, at 7:00 p.m.

Check the town Website for up-to-date information on upcoming town events and meetings, minutes of past meetings, and agendas for upcoming meetings, plus lots of other information on the Town of Franklin. ❖

Assessments: Up

“This is not my favorite part of my job,” Doug Tichenor told the town board as he prepared to fill them in on the town-wide update of assessments. By now, residents have received from Tichenor notification of their assessments, and many residents, especially those with waterfront properties, have been taken aback by sharp increases.

According to Tichenor, the

town’s overall assessment has gone up approximately 30 million dollars, from \$111,39,433 to \$146,061,670.

In what he described as an alarming trend, Tichenor pointed out that waterfront properties have been selling for “obscenely high prices”, and that Loon Lake and Rainbow Lake have been hit hardest.

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From the Supervisor

by Mary Ellen Keith

The board just approved two new HUD rehabilitation projects. These were added to the seven projects Friends of the North Country (FNC) already have underway from last year.

The FNC has notified us that they have not yet received 16 of the applications they mailed out to homeowners who may qualify for HUD rehabilitation funds for the upcoming building season.

The application questions can seem confusing and some of the legal wording worrisome. Anyone with questions about the application or who needs help filling one out is welcome to call either Friends of the North Country at 834-9606, or to call me at the town hall. We also can help you with the wording on the application so you will understand your agreement with HUD.

One of the legal items on the applications refers to the Note and Mortgage assumed by the homeowner. You would agree to a Deferred Payment Loan, or DPL, for three years for work up to \$15,000 and five years for work over \$15,000. This does not mean that you will have monthly payments. The payments may need to be paid only if the property changes hands – if you sell your property before the end of three-year or five-year period. This is added to HUD contracts so “investors”

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Highway Dept. Issues

Highway department issues seemed to dominate the March board meeting.

Walt Kretser and Gene Goff, town councilmen, have asked the New York State Comptroller’s Department of Municipal Affairs to audit the

Town of Franklin. When asked by Highway Superintendent Donald A. Vorrath whether the audit would be on the whole town or if it would focus on the highway department, with the perception that

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Paye Road

The next step in getting electricity up Paye Road should be taken within the next three weeks. The board will meet on March 24 to decide which of two proposals for surveying the road will be accepted, and the surveying will begin soon after.

The board invited surveyor Stacey Allott of Geomatics Land Surveying to meet with them on March 18. Chris Liefheit, who also sent a pro-

posal, was not available to attend the meeting.

Allott confirmed what the board thought might be the case, that with use and development over the years, Paye Road no longer follows its originally mapped route. The most significant variance is where the road intersects Swinyer Road. She also found that on the first section of the road the town’s right of way is

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I'll take "Old Sayings" for \$500, Alex

by Lauren LeFebvre

The answer is: You are burning the candle at both ends, you're running around like a chicken with your head cut off, you have too much on your plate, and (my personal favorite) you look like you've been dragged through a hedge backwards. The correct question is: What have people said to Lauren LeFebvre in the past two months?

Yes, yes, all of which fell on deaf ears until I got the "dragged through a hedge" comment. Time to clear my plate, blow out the candle and glue that head back on the chicken. We have a lot of ground to cover because my "plate" is the size of a buffet table, and this is just the Town stuff, so let's go.

First, as I was reminded by the board at budget time, the office of Town Clerk/Tax Collector is "part-time". True. My office hours are Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday 9:30 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. If by chance my car is parked by the Town Hall at a time other than those part-time hours, I'm just running in to drop off the mail or meet someone who has made an appointment. Please, please, please if my hours don't jive with yours, give me a call and we'll work something out. I'm too nice to tell you when you drop by on my off days "I have to pick up my kids", "I have a doctor's appointment", "I'm meeting my husband for lunch", "I have a parent/teacher conference", "My daughter has an orthodontist appointment". . . all of these I schedule for a Monday or Friday. I do usually end up at the Town Hall playing catch-up on those days and I don't mind in the least licensing your dog, helping you do research, or explaining levy lines on your tax bill -- just let me know so I can juggle the rest of my day to fit us both.

Next: Celebrations! I knew I was in trouble when the thought of planning July 4th made me nauseous. This is where I can scrape a lot off my plate. Here's what the committee has planned for 2003:

- **April 19** - Easter Egg Hunt and Party at the Town Hall, 1:00 - 3:00
- **May 10** - Food Sale to benefit the July 4th Celebration

- **May 20** - Town Tuesday hosted by the Celebration Committee to benefit Saranac Lake Free Library and the Bookmobile.

- **July 4th** - the bash at the park
- **October 31** - Haunted House

That plate is big enough to feed an elephant especially when you realize the committee is small and I'm still recovering from last year's Haunted House. What I need to perk me up, other than slugging down a pot of coffee in one hour every day, is feedback from you. What do you think of all of these events? Do you hunt for Easter eggs? Do you like food? Do you read? Do you celebrate July 4th? Do you like watch kids get the willies scared out of them? I really need a jolt!

It's time to clear my plate, you see. Will these events still happen if you just read this and use it for dog poo paper? Maybe. Will I help? It's time to clear my plate, you see. ❖

Scholarship Application Deadline April 1

The Town of Franklin Scholarship Committee is still accepting applications and urges all post-high-school students to apply.

The deadline for the next round of scholarship awards is April 1, 2003.

Any student residing in the Town of Franklin who has completed at least one semester of post-high school education with at least a B average and who is not on a full scholarship is encouraged to apply.

Contact Shir Filler at shir@northnet.org or HCR 1 Box 18A, Bloomingdale, NY 12913, for an application or more information.

You also can call the town hall to have an application mailed out to you. ❖

A GREAT WAY TO SHOW YOU CARE!

The Meals on Wheels program is in urgent need of volunteer drivers in the Vermontville area. If you can give one to two hours one or more days a week, please call Betty at the Saranac Lake Adult Center at 891-2980. Substitutes also are welcome!

TOWN CALENDAR

- Tuesday, March 25 – 55+ Meeting, 12:30 p.m.
- Wednesday, March 26 – Soup Supper, 4:00 – 6:30 p.m.
- Thursday, March 27 – Celebration Committee Meeting, 6:00 p.m.
- Tuesday, April 8 – 55+ Meeting, 6:00 p.m.
- Wednesday, April 9 – Building Use Meeting, 7:00 p.m.
- Monday, April 14 – Regular Town Board Meeting, 7:00 p.m.
- Saturday, April 19 – Children's Easter Party
- Tuesday, April 22 – 55+ Club Meeting, 6:00 p.m.
- Saturday, May 10 – Celebration Committee Food Sale
- Tuesday, May 20 – Town Tuesday dinner for the library/ Bookmobile

Dog License Fees Increase Debated

Dog owners in the Town of Franklin are required to apply to the town clerk for an annual license for their dogs. The fee is \$2.50, or \$7.50 for unspayed/unneutered dogs. Of the fee, 53 percent goes to the town and it is used to pay for enforcement of the town's dog control ordinance. The other 47 percent goes to the county.

Resident Jean Baltzly thinks that the town should take advantage of its right to raise the fee. Any money the town

makes from dog license fees goes towards the \$250 per year contract the town has with the Tri-Lakes Humane Society. "It's only fair and reasonable that dog owners bear the costs," she said.

According to Town Clerk Lauren LeFebvre, she takes in approximately \$200 a year from dog owners. By state law, the town could add anywhere from \$5.00 to \$10.00 to each charge.

Less certain is how many dogs in the town are not licensed. Mary Ellen Keith

says that years ago, the town clerk used to do a dog census every other year while making electioneering visits to town residents. While agreeing that a dog census would be a good idea, LeFebvre was not enthusiastic about it being revived as it was done in the "old days".

Attorney for the Town Ed Murphy agreed that the change in the fee, however, should be considered. "I think we should look at the full range of user fees out there," he said. ❖

Building Use Citizen Committee Report

The Building Use Citizen's Committee should have a preliminary layout for one of the options for future town office and meeting space, which would be adding on to the current Franklin Town Hall.

The new plan starts with a "footprint" of 4,435 square feet. The addition to the back of the town hall, with a full basement, would replace the existing kitchen and bathrooms.

In the layout, the current town hall space would be converted into office space for the supervisor and secretary, town clerk/tax collector, assessor and

codes officer, and judge's chambers, and a small bathroom. The rear addition plan includes a large public meeting room, two public bathrooms, a kitchen and a storage room for cleaning supplies. The basement would house a 300-square-foot record storage vault.

The plans will allow for the building to be on two or more heating zones so it wouldn't be necessary to heat the whole building while the office space is being used. Also, there would be outside as well as indoor access to the basement so large equipment could be stored there.

Frank Karl said that the committee still is considering other scenarios, including building a town hall or a community meeting room at the town park. The committee is looking at new town halls recently built in Lawrence in St. Lawrence County and in the Town of Galway.

The next meeting will be held Wednesday, April 9, at 7:00, in Franklin Town Hall. The meetings are open to any residents who would like to have input into the planning or who would just like to know what the committee is doing. ❖

Board Drafting Hall Use Guidelines

At one time, small towns in the Adirondacks had one- and two-room schools that served to pull the community together. With the move to consolidate school districts in the 1960s, loss of the school meant the loss of the central focus of some communities. In the Town of Franklin, however, the old school became the Franklin Town Hall, and the use of the old building as a meeting place and public center continues to help keep the community feeling alive.

As a matter of fact, the building is so heavily used that the town board is drafting guidelines for use of the town hall. The board hopes to balance the importance of the building's accessibility for residents and the need to have some controls.

The board will ask that one person take responsibility for an event and fill

out an application with the town clerk. At that time, the clerk can reserve the day and time and also can go over the guidelines before turning over a key.

Rules will include the fact that alcohol and smoking are not allowed and that the kitchen facilities can be used to warm up food for serving but not for cooking meals. They also will include instructions about heat and lights, cleaning up after the event, and securing windows and locking doors.

One issue that caused lengthy discussion among board members was about charging a deposit or a fee.

At the suggestion of a \$50 deposit, Mary Ellen Keith spoke up. "One of the beauties of our town is the availability of the town hall. I know there are some people who use the hall who just never could afford a \$50 deposit," she said.

An argument for the deposit was that it would be an incentive for people to be sure to follow the rules. The point in favor of charging a fee was that it would help cover costs of trash removal and insurance.

In the end the board agreed that the resolution should be drafted without deposits or fees.

"Our taxpayers already are paying the insurance with their taxes," Keith said. The town's insurance policy covers most everything short of extreme physical activity.

If at some time in the future it becomes necessary, the board can amend the resolution to add the charges.

The attorney for the town, Ed Murphy, promised to have the rules and a resolution drafted for the April regular town board meeting. ❖

Highway Superintendent's Report

by Donald A. Vorrath

This month's activities have been a continuation of February's report. The cold is taking its toll with equipment breakdowns, but your department is keeping up to its tasks at hand. We are definitely into a reserve pile of sand which will have to be a consideration for replacement for next season.

I've answered several calls from residents wanting to know why we don't use salt like the state on Route 3 and informed them of the cost differential but more importantly that it is safer to drive on snow/sand combination than the slush with salt. Also, salt is only effective in specific temperatures. The several rollovers that have occurred this season have been on the state roads where salt is the prime de-icing agent.

The war on terror has personally reached Vermontville with the activation of Sgt. Michael Canty. Michael's present tour is stateside in New York City, but all is in question as of now. We all wish Mike well and a safe return.

The Fisher plow on the '98 pickup is worn out. The cost of replacement parts and labor to install is ap-

proximately \$300.00 less than a new plow. This price quote is from Durocher, a Fisher dealer.

Starting Monday, I've instructed the staff to write their times in on time cards, reason being the clock has jumped time again and the employee who has always set and reset the existing clock will not do it again because of alleged tampering. The board's highway liaison committee announced a new clock would be purchased several months ago.

Eric Merrill, who broke his leg, is continuing to recover. He is out of hard cast and enjoys a movable brace and has started physical therapy.

I have recently written to the board concerning a new subdivision of 750 acres that is in the works in Merrillville. Naturally, a project of this scope will involve roads, drainage, rights of way, etc., and I look forward to input from the board. There will no doubt be more on this issue in later reports.

And finally: Perception.

The reality of an action can be as consequential as the perception of such, with results either positive, negative, or indifferent.

While I welcome the recent request for an independent audit of the highway department, I feel that a complete town-wide audit of all town departments and the board should also be considered.

It is the perception of many that the highway department is being singled out for this review. The reality is that all highway expenditures are approved by the majority of the town board members. Some previous practices and procedures, while inherited by me, recently have been corrected. These practices mainly involved the use of sick time to "pyramid" overtime. This was satisfactorily explained by the Teamsters' business agent and has since been eliminated. A few other items are in the process of discussion and review and will either be more clearly defined and/or altered, etc.

While I have always communicated with the members of the town board, their actions to eliminate certain procedures, especially in the middle of a contract, leaves many with the perception that there is more to this than "trying to save the taxpayers money."

Probably politics as usual.❖

NYS Senate Considers Property Tax Reform

The New York State Senate is looking at a package of bills that address property tax reform. Betty Little recently wrote to our town officials asking for their comments on the items. They include:

- making state land subject to property taxes;
- allowing school districts to charge tuition for students who live on wholly exempt property;
- placing the burden of proof for annual applications for real property tax exemption on not-for-profit organizations;
- requiring tax-exempt organizations

purchasing vacant land to have plans for using the property for exempt purposes within two years of purchase;

- providing full state reimbursement for local tax revenue losses by certain forestland exemptions;
- providing stricter standards in defining the terms used for nonprofits and for making sure that properties are being used for the specific exemption granted, and
- making it a local option to exempt properties from taxation when those properties claim an exemption based on providing for the "moral or mental improvement of men, women, or children."

Any town residents who have an interest in any of the above should contact one of our town officials or Betty Little's office. State laws on local property taxes can have a large affect on the Town of Franklin, in particular where state land and forest land are concerned.

With no local planning or land use laws, the town has little say about a piece of property that has the potential of significantly affecting the town's tax base, negatively or positively. One thing we can do is monitor what the state passes into law to be sure that new laws will work to benefit and not harm our town and taxpayers.❖

Assessment Update: Up

(Continued from page 1)

“Every single sale of waterfront property in the last few years has been way over what [assessment] I put on it,” he said.

Selling price is not the only fact to take into consideration in determining a property’s value. Comparable properties also can be considered. Unfortunately, Tichenor said, there are few comparables in the Town of Franklin as most properties throughout the town are unique. Also, when his work is reviewed at the state level, sale prices are the primary figure they use to evaluate whether or not his assessments are in line with statewide assessments.

The increase of the town’s value also

includes new homes built over the past year being added to the tax roll.

Tichenor also sees the beginning of a “gentrifying” trend in the Adirondacks similar to gentrification that takes place in city neighborhoods. He also has seen city people who have bought Adirondack properties as investments who now are cashing in. Overall, Town of Franklin properties have been increasing in value at 14 percent a year – a good return on their outlay.

“I’m not in the business to over-assess people,” Tichenor said, and he is uncomfortable with what he feels are overpriced sales. He especially is sympathetic to long-time residents and to retirees who bought properties in the 1970s and then

retired here on fixed incomes.

Of the 868 residential properties in the town, 266 have seen virtually no change in their assessments and 436 have actually seen lowered assessments. Of the rest, 74 residences had increases from \$100 to \$500, and 92 have had assessment increases over \$500.

Of the 453 vacant land parcels, 313 saw virtually no change, 93 were lowered, and 47 were increased, 16 of those over \$500.

Farm and commercial properties saw no increases. The twelve farm properties and eight commercial properties either stayed virtually the same or dropped.

While there have been some highly priced sales on non-waterfront properties, most of those properties saw modest change. The primary, or “basic lot” assessment town-wide has been increased to \$1,400.

Tichenor is spending the first two weeks in March meeting with residents who want to discuss their assessments. After that, residents will be able to grieve their assessments to the town’s Board of Assessment Review on Tuesday, June 3, 2003, at the Franklin Town Hall (not in Brighton, as was misprinted on the letter with the assessment notification).❖

From the Supervisor

(Continued from page 1)

can’t buy property, get it fixed up for free, and turn around and sell the property.

Some of the other issues that concern applicants are:

- If you are not sure if you qualify, you can apply anyway and the Friends of the North Country will determine eligibility.

- You will be involved in decisions about the work done on your home. A “housing rehabilitation specialist” from the Friends of the North Country will meet with you and thoroughly discuss with you the plans for the work to be done and will answer any and all questions you have.

- Friends will solicit bids from contractors. Once the work begins, Friends will oversee and approve the work through all stages. Town Codes Officer Ed Lagree also will inspect the work to be sure it is in compliance with all codes.

- If there are any potential conflict of interest issues, either Friends or I can help.

All information given in the application and pertaining to the work done your property is kept confidential. The 2003

building season is starting soon. Get in your applications in now to be sure to take advantage of the short North Country building season!

Burned Out Streetlights

Recently, two streetlights in town were out for a length of time. They were in remote areas and we didn’t know they were out, and residents in the area didn’t know how to go about getting them fixed.

All it takes is a phone call to the town hall at 891-2189. If I’m not there, you can leave a message. In addition to the location of the light, it’s helpful to identify the pole the light is on by the number on the pole. With that information, Niagara Mohawk can be called to come out to fix the light.

Gift of Town Map

Dean Montroy has presented to the town a framed map of the Town of Franklin dated from the late 1800s. The colored map shows the roads and homes in the town, and includes the names of the homeowners.

The map will be hung in the Franklin Town Hall.❖

Town to be Required to Pay Jurors

Beginning April 1, the Town of Franklin will be required to pay each juror who serves on a jury in the Town of Franklin \$10 a day for their services.

The new New York State law also will require town justice Roger Symonds to keep accurate records for the county on the jurors and their payments.

Because of the low crime rate in the town, there are few juries held in town, and Symonds said his annual budget should be able to cover the costs.❖

Highway Department Issues Dominate Meeting

(Continued from page 1)

the department is being "targeted," Goff responded, "Ninety percent of this audit will be towards the highway department. I will make sure of that." Kretser agreed. "They will carry the audit through to the rest of the town, but the focus definitely will be on the highway department."

In fact, most spending by the town is in the highway department's budget.

As the meeting progressed, there were several other highway issues brought out for the board to look into. One that has been festering is the highway department time clock. In light of the fact that the department has been accused of illegally tampering with the

clock, Vorrath asked that the board, which approved the purchase of a new clock months ago, finally to make the purchase. Goff said they have not yet made a purchase because they still are looking for a tamper-proof clock.

The highway department came to the floor again when a highway employee complained to the board about his name being added to the highway kitchen's "wall of shame," and his concern that other town employees had access to his confidential employee records in the highway superintendent's office. Vorrath and Town Supervisor Mary Ellen Keith assured the employee that no confidential records are kept in that office. Vorrath explained that the name on the wall was one of many, including his own, and that it was a joke; nevertheless, the board ordered that the name be removed.

The board advised the employee that

while they will follow up with his complaints, these are issues he should take to his union representative and that an open board meeting is not the appropriate place to discuss employee grievances.

Other highway issues Vorrath reported to the board at the meeting included the good news that the highway department reported no accidents or illness for 2002 to OSHA.

Vorrath will be attending a Highway Superintendents meeting this month and hopes to find out how much the town will be affected by cuts in money in CHIPS (state money given to towns for highways). The town may have to scale back plans for road repair and resurfacing this summer.

Vorrath also asked the board's permission to buy a York rake for this summer's highway work. ❖

Paye Road Electric Project Moving Along

(Continued from page 1)

49 feet wide; farther down the road the right of way is 66 feet wide.

While old maps show that the Paye Road used to run all the way to the Sink Hole Road, the board was in agreement that just the part of the road that currently is in use will be surveyed and that the survey specifically will focus on determining rights of way for running electrical lines.

Highway Superintendent Donald Vorrath has offered to have the highway department help with tree cutting, ditching, and placing culverts so the poles can go in. "There are residents who want power up there," he said. "They should not be denied basic utilities as far as I am concerned."

Residents of Paye Road who have attending board meetings to monitor the Paye Road progress were pleased at the news that surveying soon will be done.

The Department of Environmental Conservation apparently also has been interested in the developments. According to Town Clerk Lauren LeFebvre, DEC officials have made several visits to the town hall to pore over maps and search through town minutes. Town Supervisor Mary Ellen Keith was asked if the DEC was "trying to screw us up."

Rumors Abound Around Town

Aspen Group Teen Camp

Plans for the establishment of the Aspen Group camp for teens somewhere in the Adirondacks seems to be alive and well. At least one could think so since the group is advertising for counselors in the Adirondack Daily Enterprise.

Aspen Group came to Paul Smiths College last year with the proposal to set up their camp for troubled youths on college property in Onchiota. The plan fell through, however. The reason given was that they were put off by the strict New York State requirements for camps.

Paul Smiths College and North Woods Engineering were asked about Aspen Group's renewed interest in an Adirondack camp in Onchiota. Both declined to comment.

Town of Franklin residents for the most part accepted the idea of having the camp in Onchiota. Some neighbors resented the near clear cutting that had been done on the property in preparation for development of the camp. Town resident Frank Karl questioned whether or not it would be proper for the college to continue their tax-exempt status on the prop-

erty if it was being used commercially.

Loon Lake Development

A local realtor has been talking about a 750-acre development being planned for Loon Lake. Rumors have it that the property will be subdivided into approximately 70 ten-acre building lots, with lots of forested "space" between lots.

Such a development would be a major expansion for any Adirondack town, let alone one that currently consists of only 868 residences. ❖

Evil Tax Collector Closes Shop

Tax Collector Lauren LeFebvre's work is done!

Most years, the county pays the town for LeFebvre to continue collecting tax payments that come in after the end of the deadline.

This year, however, LeFebvre reported that all payments due had been received by February 3. ❖