

**Town Board Workshop Meeting
February 1, 2024**

A regularly scheduled Town Board Workshop meeting was held in person at the Esopus Town Hall, 1 Town Hall Way, Ulster Park, NY. on Thursday February 1, 2024, at 7:00 PM with the following persons in attendance:

**Supervisor Danielle Freer
Councilman Kathie Quick
Councilman Jared Geuss
Councilman Evelyn Clarke
Councilman Laura Robinson**

Recording Administrator Holly A. Netter, Town Clerk, RMC

4 ways to give public comment:

In person at meeting

Phone – 845 331 0676

Email – lreynolds@esopus.com with subject line “Public Comment” and meeting date

Mail – Town of Esopus PO BOX 700 Port Ewen, NY 12466

PLEDGE TO THE FLAG

PUBLIC COMMENT

Antoine Montpeirous, 199 Lindorf St. distributed and read the following to the Town Board:

It has recently come to the attention of the disabled veteran community that a clerical error in the calculation of the Veteran Disability Tax Exemption has impacted a handful of identified disabled veterans, as well as potentially other disabled veterans of our town. As a result of this, and the way the Assessor's office has handled this information so far, we have several questions we would like to direct to the Town Board.

- How is this error being investigated in regard to who it affects, how long it has been occurring, determining how it happened, and ensuring all files are correct moving forward? Who will receive documentation of the investigation? Will this information be made public?
- Why is the letter that was sent to veterans in late 2023 requesting updated paperwork be brought in continually being referenced in response to this error?

The letter indicated if your disability status has not changed you did not need to do anything. Nothing about a potential error was mentioned in the letter. The Assessor has referenced this letter in conversations with at least 2 different veterans. Was the office aware of potential inconsistencies at that time? The computer database system was corrected for those who DID bring in new paperwork- so it would seem as if the error was identified then.

- How are the disabled veterans who are affected going to be contacted? What is the timeline for this?
- Has the town reached out to the county and/or other towns to make them aware of the error and ensure it is isolated to the Town of Esopus? If the computer system is a county wide system, we feel it is the town's responsibility to bring attention to this so the county and/or other towns are reviewing the files for their disabled veteran population to determine if this error is more widespread.
- Why are members of the disabled veteran community being told to keep their knowledge of this error to themselves and not to make others in the community aware of it so as not to incite panic?
- What is being done in regard to the actions of the Assessor in how this error has been handled? The first veteran who brought attention to the error was told there was nothing that could be done. Until that individual pressed the issue, the Assessor did not have any intention of addressing the error. What type of oversight is there over the Assessor's office? How are the town's taxpayers supposed to have confidence there are not other calculation errors that affect other exemption populations or taxpayer property assessments?

We would appreciate your response to these questions and continued follow-up conversations that are transparent about this matter.

Supervisor Freer said they usually do not respond to public comment directly, however she has been dealing with the issue this past week and would answer what she could. She has been working with Assessor Shannon Harris and her Deputy Patty Smith to understand the issues and working on finding out next steps, who was specifically impacted, and stated we will be proactively reaching out to them personally to discuss their specific cases. Supervisor Freer assured him that this is taking top priority.

Supervisor Freer responded to the comment "that they were told not to talk about it". She said this was not the case. She reached out to Bryanna (his wife who had been in) specifically to

clarify. Instead of residents trying to figure out what their numbers are please come in directly to the Assessor's Office because each case is so different, and it is causing confusion. She explained how there was an individual who came in today who thought they were eligible, and they were not impacted at all. She said you can talk about it all you want but please direct them to the Assessors so we can look into the facts as it relates to their specific case.

Antoine Montpeirous said he thought a lot of people here have issue with that because the Assessor does not have a welcoming attitude. Jonathan Vincent said they do not have the confidence that she will follow through with what she said she was going to do. Supervisor Freer said she understands and that is why she is so involved in trying to understand and they needed a beat to figure out how many people were impacted and what needed to happen next. This was an intense week, we can all agree on that, and I am here to help with those conversations and to make sure you are getting the customer service that you deserve. Antoine said his wife was blatantly given misinformation and was told that there was no recourse or help from the state or county.

The Assessor has been in touch with the County and Veterans Affairs at the county level as well. The vets were asked to continue to work with us. Supervisor Freer said she understands the situation did not get off on the right foot, but she gave her commitment to make sure that this is overseen and handled appropriately.

Jonathan Vincent, Roger St. said he pulled the list and there are 52 Veterans with the exemption in town. He was told that the Assessor's Office will only go back 3 years to check on the exemption; by law that is what is required. He asked how those individuals get back the funds they overpaid. Supervisor Freer said it is her understanding that they can only go back 3 years, but we can clarify that question.

Assessor will fill out a group form and submit it to the County by end of week.

He asked what the State is doing to make sure the Assessor has the appropriate training to address all Assessor issues? It is not the individual's fault if they are not properly trained.

Supervisor Freer said she knows they go to the appropriate training. She said again this is an unfortunate situation that we need to work through but was confident they have the proper training. The Assessor became fully certified in 2023. The system was doing something that they did not know it was already doing.

How do they know other taxpayers aren't overpaying? Is there a way you can audit that? Supervisor Freer said we are confident in our systems; this was an isolated issue and we are taking it very seriously; but does not think this is a widespread issue.

Antoine said how you present to the public should not be met with dismissing. They simply came in to ask a question and we were received with no willingness to help by the Assessor's office. Supervisor Freer said we take pride in the work we do here as it relates to

customer service and will look into additional training to make sure customer service is up to par. It's been noted and documented.

Robert Nelson said "It's going to get bigger."

Do we have a timeframe of when they will hear something? Supervisor Freer is hoping within the next week phone calls will be made. They will compile a one-page explanation to assist and create awareness.

Jonathan Vincent, Roger St. Being open to a mistake: instead of giving misinformation. Be honest if you don't know the answer and get back to the person.

Councilman Jared Guess said to recap of what will be done:

Reaching out to 52/54 vets that could have been involved and will hear directly from the Assessor.

Working with the County to resolve the issue by Assessor submitting a group form.

By next week have bullet points on one page with answers to the questions: can be placed on the website.

The vets in attendance said they try to help other vets; they are denied a lot, and they don't take it lightly.

Jonathan Vincent: should ensure that people know there are veteran exemptions available. He knows there are more vets in the community that do not know about the available exemptions.

Supervisor Freer said she hears and appreciates the conversation.

SUPERVISOR FREER MADE A MOTION TO CLOSE THE PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD. THE MOTION WAS SECONDED BY COUNCILMAN JARED GUESS. ALL MEMBERS PRESENT WERE IN FAVOR. MOTION CARRIED.

DISCUSSION: HOMETOWN HERO LAUNCH UPDATE

Supervisor Freer said she wanted to again make known to the Veterans that the Town was getting ready to launch the first phase of the Hometown Hero program which will include fifty banners displayed on the decorative light poles throughout the Port Ewen Business District. The cost of the banner will be \$100 and will remain in place for one year. The program was due to roll out this week but due to the current situation and the feedback from the vets in attendance, the rollout timeframe will be postponed. The goal is to have the banners in place for the 2024 Memorial Day parade. Brackets need to be purchased to replace some of the

damaged poles. A quote of \$5,800 for 50 brackets was obtained from the ornamental post company. A local fabrication company in town can make the brackets for \$30 each, which will provide substantial savings.

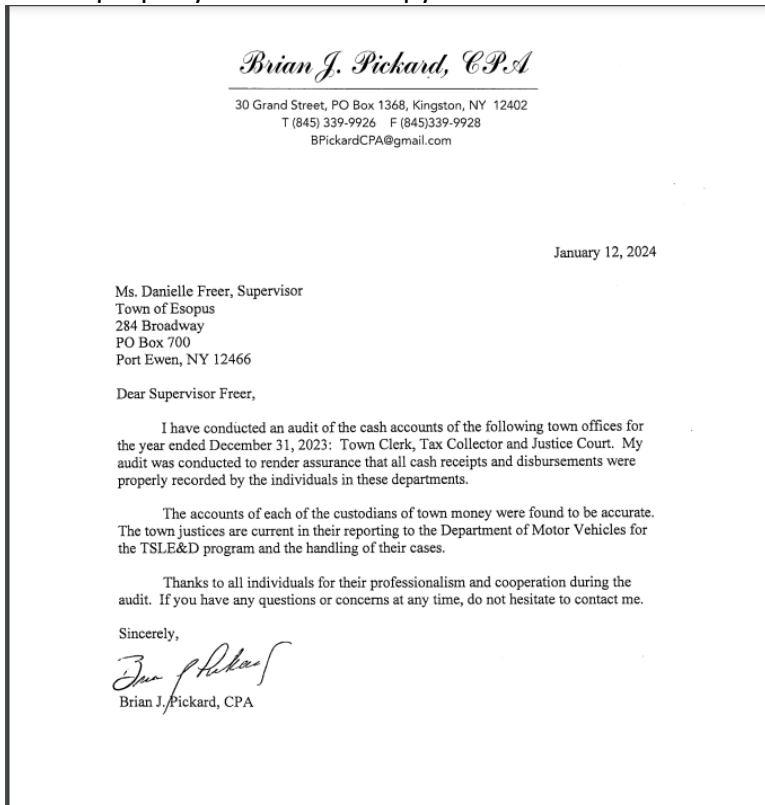
COUNCILMAN LAURA ROBINSON MADE A MOTION TO AUTHORIZE THE PURCHASE OF 50 BRACKETS @\$30 EACH FROM SCP FABRICATION. THE FUNDS ARE TO BE SPENT FROM THE ARPA ACCOUNT. THE MOTION WAS SECONDED BY COUNCILMAN KATHIE QUICK. ALL MEMBERS PRESENT WERE IN FAVOR. MOTION CARRIED.

REVIEW PROPOSED PLANNING BOARD FEE SCHEDULE: MARK JAFFEE AND ROXANNE PECORA

Building Inspector/Code Enforcement Officer Mark Jaffee and Planning Chairman Roxanne Pecora attended to review the proposed Planning Board fee schedule that was put together by Vice Chairman Darin Dekoskie. The document was reviewed, and clarification is needed on a few of the items. The questions will be brought to Darin for clarification and the list will be revised and reviewed again for approval.

RESULTS OF AUDITS: LETTER FROM TOWN CPA, BRIAN PICKARD, CERTIFYING COMPLETION OF TOWN CLERK, TAX COLLECTOR AND JUSTICE COURT AUDITS

Supervisor Freer announced that once again the Town CPA Brian Pickard had examined the accounts of the Town Clerk, Tax Collector and Justice Court and assured that all cash receipts and disbursements were properly recorded. A copy of the letter is attached for review.



SUPERVISOR TO SIGN PROFESSIONAL SERVICES FEE REIMBURSEMENT AGREEMENT WITH CHPE LLC

CHPE LLC PROFESSIONAL SERVICES FEE REIMBURSEMENT AGREEMENT

Supervisor Danielle Freer and Shannon Harris, Esopus representative of the Hudson 7, met with the Public Service Commission (PSC) earlier in the year to bring concerns of the pipeline project to the forefront and stress the importance of how the Hudson is the sole water source of drinking water for 7 communities along the Hudson River.

The Town of Esopus retained a special technical consultant, Tighe and Bond, to prepare a report reviewing the Voluntary Water Studies and TSS Trials (collectively the “**CHPE Studies**”), and to make recommendations regarding CHPE’s Hudson River cable-installation Environmental Management and Construction Plan (“**EM&CP**”), and consistent with Certificate Conditions 102-105 and 150 of the CHPE Article VII Certificate, which requires that CHPE consult with nearby public water intake owners along the submarine portions of the route regarding potential impacts during construction.

Tighe and Bond has billed the Town of Esopus directly on a time and material basis for services performed in reviewing the CHPE Studies and making EM&CP recommendations. As a result of the meeting CHPE agreed to reimburse the Town of Esopus \$32,913 for professional services rendered by Tighe and Bond. CHPE will remit payment within thirty (30) days of receipt of the itemized invoice.

COUNCILMAN LAURA ROBINSON MADE A MOTION TO AUTHORIZE SUPERVISOR FREER TO SIGN THE PROFESSIONAL SERVICES FEE REIMBURSEMENT AGREEMENT WITH CHPE LLC IN THE AMOUNT OF \$ 32,913. THE MOTION WAS SECONDED BY COUNCILMAN EVELYN CLARKE. ALL MEMBERS PRESENT WERE IN FAVOR: MOTION CARRIED.

REST ASSURED ALARM SYSTEMS QUOTE FOR ADA COMPLIANT DOOR AT TOWN HALL

As discussed previously, quotes have been solicited for the installation of electronic accessible doors with a release button to be installed on the lower level of the Town Hall. These doors will make the building more accessible for those in need and ARPA funds will be used for the purchase. The cost of the doors and installation is \$21,995.00. Only one company was interested in submitting a quote: Rest Assured Alarm System Inc from Kingston. There is a deposit of \$10,000 required with the balance due at the end of the project. An additional expense of \$5,000 is expected for electric.

COUNCILMAN EVELYN CLARKE MADE A MOTION TO AUTHORIZE THE DEPOSIT OF \$10,000 BE ISSUED TO REST ASSURED ALARM SYSTEMS INC. FOR THE ACCESSIBLE ELECTRONIC DOORS FOR THE LOWER-LEVEL ENTRANCE OF THE ESOPUS TOWN HALL TO BE PAID FROM THE ARPA FUND. THE MOTION WAS SECONDED BY COUNCILMAN KATHIE QUICK. ALL MEMBERS PRESENT WERE IN FAVOR: MOTION CARRIED.

MISCELLANEOUS/LIAISON LIGHTNING ROUND

Town Clerk: Holly Netter, Town Clerk arranged a renewable energy educational program February 14th in the community room. Solar education will be provided by BQ Energy's Paul Curran and Alicia Scott. Neal Horning will bring approximately 15 students from Mount Academy. A possible onsite field trip may be planned at the transfer station once the project is complete. This is not the first educational program hosted here at the community center, in the past classes from BOCES have studied our solar array but the BOCES staff gave the presentation.

Marc Hildenbrand reached out to secure the date for the **Legacy Jr. Bass Tournament** at Sleightsburgh Park again this year. The date will be **June 15th**. Once we approve it, he will get the insurance paperwork and application filled out and submit it to me. All members supported the event.

Park rental fee increase trash – Dan Vedder expressed the desire to increase the cost of the rental of the parks, we will compile information from neighboring towns and put together a proposed fee schedule prior to the Town Board meeting. If you would like to increase them, it can be done at that time because March 1st the calendars open for 2024 park rental. We also must get a handle on **BOCES rentals** started off 2-3 times last year 19 dates requested.

Tree Committee: The Tree Committee is looking for approval to purchase saplings from the DEC. They intend to foster and grow them to be able to transplant them to Broadway as needed and our parks. Steve Cerini will meet with the Highway Department and Marc Weinberger to take over the upkeep of the trees on Broadway.

SUPERVISOR FREER MADE A MOTION TO APPROVE THE PURCHASE OF THE SAPLINGS FROM THE DEC IN THE AMOUNT OF \$160. THE MOTION WAS SECONDED BY COUNCILMAN JARED GEUSS. ALL MEMBERS PRESENT WERE IN FAVOR. MOTION CARRIED.

Letter of Support Councilman Evelyn Clarke: Suggested sending a letter supporting the County Executive to have the New York State Department of Transportation (NYS DOT) conduct an investigation into road safety at the intersection of State Routes 28 and 212 in Mount Tremper. The site is where the accident occurred which impacted the entire community and several families in our town.

Cas Landi Park – Supervisor Freer provided a copy of the grant contract from the County for the Board to review; Attorney Paul Kellar will also review the contract.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

A MOTION WAS MADE BY SUPERVISOR FREER TO ENTER INTO EXECUTIVE SESSION AT 8:57 PM FOR THE PURPOSE OF DISCUSSING PENDING LITIGATION. THE MOTION WAS SECONDED BY COUNCILMAN JARED GUESS. ALL MEMBERS PRESENT WERE IN FAVOR. MOTION CARRIED.

A MOTION WAS MADE BY SUPERVISOR FREER TO COME OUT OF EXECUTIVE SESSION AT 9:16 PM. THE MOTION WAS SECONDED BY COUNCILMAN JARED GUESS. ALL MEMBERS PRESENT WERE IN FAVOR. MOTION CARRIED.

ACTION:

A MOTION WAS MADE BY SUPERVISOR FREER TO HIRE BENJAMIN NEIDL OF JONES HACKER MURPHY LLP AT A RATE OF \$350 PER HOUR AND TO SIGN THE DRAFT ENGAGEMENT LETTER. THE MOTION WAS SECONDED BY COUNCILMAN KATHIE QUICK. ALL MEMBERS PRESENT WERE IN FAVOR: MOTION CARRIED.

UPCOMING KEY DATES – MORE INFORMATION AVAILABLE ON OUR WEBSITE:

- 2.15 Next Town Board Meeting**
- 2.17 5th Annual Sojourner Truth Life Walk**
- 2.19 Town Hall Closed: Presidents' Day**

ADJOURNMENT

A MOTION TO ADJOURN THE MEETING WAS MADE BY SUPERVISOR FREER AT 9:16 PM. THE MOTION WAS SECONDED BY COUNCILMAN JARED GUESS. ALL MEMBERS PRESENT WERE IN FAVOR. MOTION CARRIED.

Respectively Submitted,

*Holly A. Netter
Town Clerk, RMC*