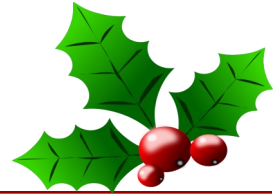




Town of Somerset



Volume 32, Issue 5

Holiday 2017

From Your Town Clerk

Dear Residents,

It is hard to believe that 2018 is almost here! As we look forward to the new year we try to share as much news as possible with you. Please read through your newsletter and if you have any questions feel free to call me at the Town Clerk's Office at 716-795-3575, ext. 2. Our website is also a good source of information. An item that we added to our site this year is online dog licensing. You now have the ability to renew your dog's license from the convenience of your home as long as your dog's rabies vaccination is current. This year has also brought two new Town Board members. If you have not had a chance yet to meet Chris Bronson or Jon Hotaling you should stop by a Town Board meeting and introduce yourself.

I hope everyone has a very enjoyable holiday and a great new year!

Tracy L. Carmer, RMC
Town Clerk/Editor



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A Word From Your Supervisor

Daniel Engert 795-3575, ext. 3

As the holiday season approaches, I want to take some time and write to each of you directly concerning the “state of the town.” I have fielded many questions and concerns over the past several weeks concerning the 2018 town tax rate increase, particularly in light of the uncertain future of the power plant. I made a very thorough presentation at the public hearing recently and I have posted it onto the town website for those who were unable to make it but I want to be very clear from the onset of my letter that it’s only the town tax rate that is being affected next year. Many residents who have called me thought that their entire tax bill was doubling next year and this is absolutely not the case. Property taxes are split between the school, the county and the town. The town tax is only 3% of the total property tax bill in 2018. The average taxpayer (with assessed valuation of \$100,000) will see an increase of about \$89 in their town tax bill next year. However painful it was for the board to restore the tax rate in **2018 (at \$1.68)** to just below the rate when I was elected Supervisor in **2012 (at \$1.77)**, I do believe that it is important to also maintain a proper perspective. My letter is lengthy and I apologize but I felt it important to be as comprehensive as possible as I will attempt to help provide context and answer questions. I sincerely appreciate your time to read it.

As most are very aware, over the past thirty years or so, the Town of Somerset has enjoyed the benefit of hosting what was once the largest taxpayer in all of Niagara County. Beyond employing many of our friends and neighbors over these many years, the Somerset power plant also paid approximately 70% of the taxes in town. The new reality right now is that as market pressures from low natural gas prices and the regulatory “war on coal” has negatively impacted the plant, we’re likely heading back to our pre-plant era. This was an era where Somerset was still a proud, hard-working town but without a huge taxpayer similar to Hartland, Royalton and Wilson in Niagara County. Even still, I think it’s important to recognize that **Somerset taxes will remain low comparatively, at \$1.68**. The 2018 tax rate in Hartland is \$2.49, Royalton is \$3.67 and Wilson is \$3.63. Towns without a village located within their boundaries, like Newfane, for example, can use sales tax revenue to pay for general fund expenses and therefore, they do not have a town tax, per say. Over the past five years, a Somerset taxpayer with \$100,000 of assessed valuation paid around \$115 annually for town tax and refuse/garbage collection. The same taxpayer in Royalton paid around \$545, in Hartland around \$426 and in Wilson around \$363. **Somerset residents paid approximately 75% less over this period and kept about \$1500 more in their pockets.**

So how did we get here? Let’s look back to 2008, the first year of the PILOT (Payment in Lieu of Tax) with the power plant. Revenue to the town from the power plant was \$1.3 million, spending was \$1.5 million and Somerset taxpayers were taxed at a rate of **\$2.61** that year (again, 2018 will be \$1.68). Each year since, the PILOT payment has decreased and in 2018, the payment will be just \$139,000 with spending levels around \$745,000. This is an incredible 89% loss of revenue, or about \$1.2 million in revenue lost from the tax base.

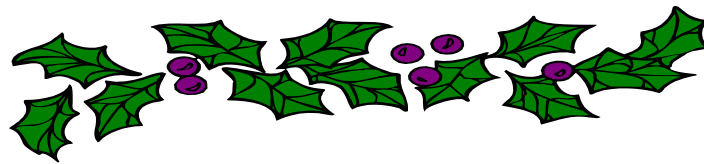
Another striking reality in Somerset is that 78% of assessed valuation in town is wholly exempt from property taxes so the tax base is shared by only 22%. The overwhelming majority of this exemption amount is attributed to the power plant, which otherwise pays in PILOT payments, and then agricultural exemptions which do not. To compare Somerset again with Hartland, their tax base is spread out over 90% as only 10% of their properties are totally exempt, Royalton is 87% taxable and Wilson is 90% taxable. So, when the largest tax exempt property owner (power plant) was still covering 70% of the tax base through their PILOT payments, the 22% who make up the tax base benefitted from a tremendously low tax rate over the past several years.

So, how did the Board address this declining revenue? The first strategy deployed was to attack our spending, just like anyone would do if their revenue was being cut. Working with the department heads, **spending levels have been cut by 54% to \$745,000** over the period. This hard work resulted in no service cuts or layoffs at any time, so far. The workforce has been reduced by 40%, highway transitioned to a new work model, work functions are shared between departments, and employees are sharing healthcare costs to name just a few measures. Every department has been touched and without shutting down

DID YOU KNOW? From Councilwoman Robin Jansen

Did you know that part of the Niagara County Sales tax that is collected when you shop, eat in restaurants, stay in a hotel, or buy gas in Niagara County gets distributed back to the Town of Somerset? Each municipality in Niagara County gets a portion of the county sales tax based on population. So every time you shop in a store, eat in a restaurant, or buy gas in Niagara County it benefits your local community. I try to spend my money in Niagara County knowing that some of my county sales taxes will come back to our town.

My husband Norm and I wish you a very merry Christmas and a wonderful New Year.



What Are The Three R's?

Reduce, Reuse and Recycle are all techniques to help cut down the amount of waste we throw away. Manufacturing new products requires that raw materials be extracted from the earth; immense energy is needed for production; products are then transported; and then finally products are purchased, used and finally disposed. The three R's educate us to reduce emissions and conserve natural resources, landfill space and energy.

How to Reduce: lowering the amount of waste produced. Look for products that use less packaging and buy in bulk.

How to Reuse: using the same materials repeatedly. Donate used clothing, borrow items that are used infrequently and ditch the single use mugs and plastic grocery bags. Instead, purchase a reusable mug and reusable bags that can be used over and over again!

How to Recycle: using old materials to make new products. Separate your recyclable materials like newspaper, cardboard, metal cans and plastic bottles from general waste into a recycling tote. Please refer to the recycling guide!



Continued from page 2

town government, there is honestly little left to cut. Secondly, almost **\$1.6 million dollars in reserves have been rightfully returned to the taxpayers** over the period in order to shield them from increased taxes but the reserves are almost depleted. Thirdly, we strived to maintain the lowest tax rate for as long as possible in order **to encourage new homeownership in our community and to create the best possible climate for economic development** at the site west of the power plant which was formerly eyed by Verizon in 2011. Achieving new revenue from another economic development initiative to help off-set the losses from the plant has been to this point and unfortunately, not successful. Economic development is difficult in rural upstate communities mostly due to state policy funneling subsidies and incentives into urban centers. While there have been corporate site selectors who strongly considered this parcel, none ultimately pulled the trigger to locate their projects here. This year, the power plant announced plans to submit a bid to build and operate a solar facility on this parcel which effectively took it off the market, although recently the plant notified me that the state did not select their bid and the future of this project is uncertain.

Some have asked me why didn't the Board incrementally raise the taxes by 20% or 30% over the past few years rather than such a large % increase in 2018? First of all, I think it truly demonstrates that this Board has been committed to maintaining the absolute lowest tax rate possible while delivering essential services. Having said that, it truly was difficult but decisions were being made in real time without the benefit of 20/20 hindsight. With the declining revenues from the plant, when was the "right time" to start shifting the tax burden? In 2014-2015-2016, the Town had, at least three known, site selectors who were scoping economic development projects at the former Verizon site. If a project was sited here, the additional revenue could have avoided having to shift the tax burden to the taxpayers as the spending cuts alone would have been sufficient to hold the very low tax rate. Again, the board wanted to maintain the lowest tax rate to attract development and a housing market. Secondly, the introduction of the tax cap really hurt the town because it was implemented right after the town finished the revaluation in 2011. The taxpayers rightfully expected that their tax rate would be reduced when the assessed valuation of their property increased as the town raised the amount of assessed valuation (again only 22% of this is/was taxable). We cut the tax rate by 55%. The following year, and again without the benefit of a crystal ball, the tax cap era began suddenly (as things happen in Albany) and to put additional pressure on municipalities, the Governor tied "property tax cap rebate checks" to the program. These rebate checks averaged around \$115-\$125 dollars as they were tied to the STAR rebate. If the town overrode the tax cap, which would have been required, Somerset taxpayers would not have received their rebate check. A combination of increased taxes being paid and not receiving the rebate checks would essentially double or more the amount of money that would be lost to the taxpayers, year over year. The board felt this was too harmful. In 2018, the property tax rebate checks are only tied to the school districts and not to towns so this was a factor in deciding when the "right time" is to start the shifting tax burden in 2018.

Regarding the tax cap, the Board did override the tax cap for next year but it was mostly caused by the NYS Comptroller. After a comprehensive audit of all town finances in 2016-2017, the only issue discovered was in how we used sales tax revenue to pay for our residents' refuse/garbage fees. The Town has been using sales tax revenue to pay \$150 towards everyone's refuse bill. Residents only paid approximately \$23/yr. for refuse/garbage collection over the past four years as a result. Unfortunately, the Comptroller will not allow the town to pay this charge with sales tax any longer but instead we are required to add it to the tax levy and residents must pay for it, in its entirety as a tax. That alone forced us over the cap and this scenario is likely to play out in other towns as the NYS Comptroller visits many other towns which have and continue to use their sales tax revenue to pay for refuse/garbage contracts.

Lastly, let me address another question that has come up. **What about the wind project?** If it ever was built, how much would this make a difference? It is a fair question when you have a deep pocketed, out-of-state corporate developer proposing a \$230+ million dollar energy project in your community. While this developer is poised to reap huge profitable benefits from massive taxpayer subsidized tax credits at both the federal and state levels as well as power purchase agreements which guarantee revenue streams for them (while increasing costs for utilities and ratepayers, of course),

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2018 Tax Collection Hours:



January 2 to January 31 (Monday—Friday) 9:00am to 4:30pm . (Closed 1/15)

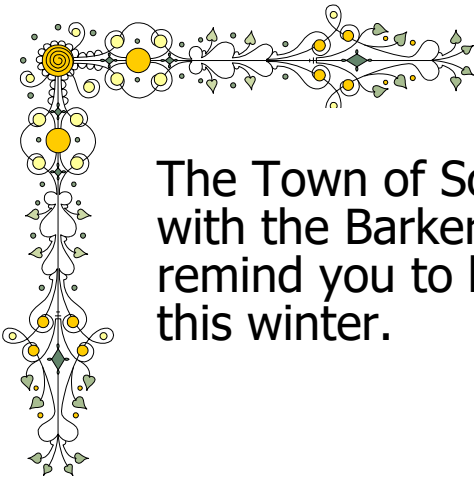
February 2, 9, 16, 24, and 23 (Fridays Only) 9:00am to 4:30pm.

March 2, 9, 16, 23 and 30 (Fridays Only) 9:00am to 4:30pm.

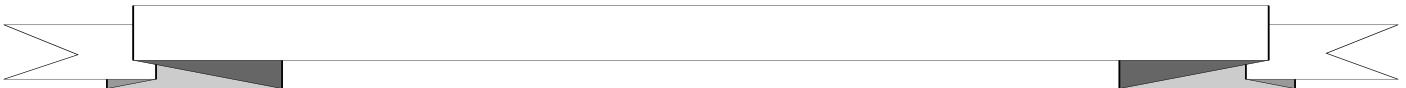
April 2 9:00am to 4:30pm

Payment methods are Check, Cash and Credit Card (fee applies)

Also, online @ www.somersetny.org



The Town of Somerset Water Department, along with the Barker Fire Department would like to remind you to keep your hydrants clear of snow this winter.



ATTENTION HOMEOWNERS

Niagara Community Action Program, Inc. has grant funds available for home repairs for qualified homeowners in Niagara County.

The type of repair can include gutters, downspouts, roofs, furnaces, hot water tanks, chimneys/foundations, porch repairs, replacement doors/windows, electrical and plumbing, accessibility modifications such as ramps, lifts, etc.

Please call Niagara Community Action Program, Inc.'s Rural Preservation Program at 716-434-4679 between the hours of 7:00am and 3:00pm, Monday through Friday, or email MCrager@niagaracap.org for more information.

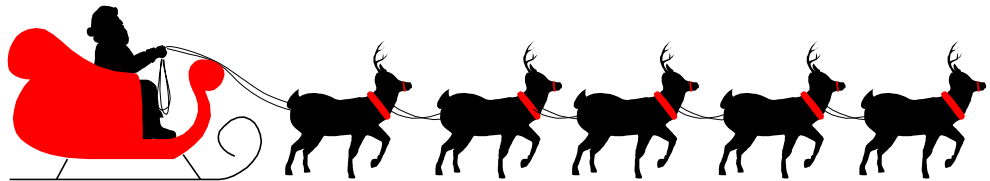


HISTORIAN'S CORNER

By: Pete Devereaux 795-3575, ext. 7

Our website has a section devoted to Veterans. If you are not on it, please complete the Veterans Service Data Form and send it to the Town Clerk so she can update the database. The form can be found in the Veteran's section of our website www.somersetny.org.

Wishing Everyone a Merry Christmas a very safe and Happy New Year.



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their “fair share” contribution, as they propose, would likely amount to only around \$31,500 in PILOT payments to the town. *Now, because the developer will not share anything specific about the location and scope of the project, this figure is based upon an assumption that 70% of the project would be located in Somerset versus the town of Yates and also whether there would ever be a PILOT in the first place because the Town will require them to pay full assessed valuation, like everyone else who doesn't have an exemption.* Nonetheless and for the benefit of a hypothetical scenario, the developer has alluded to this breakdown in the past. The PILOT payments that they have proposed numerous times (\$1.5 mil.) would then be divided between six different taxing jurisdictions. So what would this mean for a Somerset taxpayer? In 2018 it would have equaled approximately **only \$22 in tax savings for the average Somerset taxpayer.** Again, if less of the project was/is sited in Somerset, the “savings” impact would be smaller too. Thereafter, this **amount of “savings” impact would assuredly and incrementally decrease each and every year**, especially if cost of living increases, healthcare costs increase, pension costs increase, property values declined or the project was sold to another operator, just to name a few variables which we know could undoubtedly occur in the future. Make no mistake, the overwhelming majority of the town has consistently communicated to me and the Board over the past four years that they absolutely do not want this project located in Somerset which mainly benefits just a few large landowners. Those who write me, call, and/or show up to board meetings mostly say that they have made their decisions based on a multitude of factors, including health impacts, noise, visual impacts, property value loss, migratory bird and bat concerns to name a few. If someone wants to make or change their opinion on the cost/benefit/value of this project based solely upon the economic impact in their town taxes, they can now decide as this is an individual decision, for sure.

In closing, it has been a most difficult period but we have done our very best to position the town for this transition. We must now pivot and move forward. We are faced with a new reality in Somerset. We no longer host a thriving and successful power plant but rather one which is trying to find a path forward in New York. The state is finalizing the regulations setting intentional emission standards that no coal plant can ever meet. The final strategy in the “war on coal” is to regulate them out of existence in NYS. Unless the Governor changes his energy policy in some way, the last day any coal plant can operate in New York is December 31, 2020. I am hoping and praying that the plant will find a path forward to re-power with natural gas and save some jobs. Through it all, Somerset will press on to preserve our idyllic community and move into this new era together. Merry Christmas and Happy New Year to everyone! May you all truly enjoy this time of the year as we gather with family, friends and loved ones to celebrate the season of the greatest gift. Be well.

Daniel Engert – Supervisor, Town of Somerset



Highway Department News

Mike Flint, Highway Superintendent

716-795-3866

The Niagara County Department of Public Works is currently working on a project to replace the Carmen Road Bridge over Golden Hill Creek, just south of Lower Lake Road. This insert is intended to provide general information about the project, to assist Town residents that may be impacted by the construction of the bridge, and allow an opportunity for the public to discuss or submit comments/concerns that will be answered by the County.

The bridge to be replaced is located on Carmen Road, approximately 600 feet south of the intersection with Lower Lake Road and just over 1 mile north of Lake Road (NY 18). Between Lake Road and Lower Lake Road, there are two highway bridges that cross Golden Hill Creek. This is the northern most bridge and is the one closest to Lake Ontario (see map below). Although this stretch of Carmen Road is owned and maintained by the Town of Somerset, Niagara County has maintenance responsibility of the bridge.

The existing two-span timber bridge has two 16.5 foot long spans and was originally constructed in 1949. In 1980, the timber stringer superstructure was replaced with glue-laminated timber panels, while the original supports or substructures for the bridge (abutments and piers) remained. The timber bridge deck that supports Carmen Road has been in service for almost 40 years and timber

substructures underneath have been in service for 68 years. The condition of the timber structural components continue to deteriorate. The bridge currently has a load posting of 12 tons and is beyond its useful service life. The width across the bridge is narrow measuring 27± feet wide curb-curb with no shoulders. The existing railing system is non-standard. The existing bridge regularly snags debris from Golden Hill Creek during spring thaws and elevates creek levels that cause upstream flooding and potentially compromise the bridge.

The project plans to replace the existing two-span timber bridge with a new single span precast concrete structure in the same location. The new bridge will be wider than the existing. The travel lanes will remain the same width but the shoulders will be slightly widened to four foot width across the bridge and approximately 150 feet along each approach to the bridge. The shoulders will be paved with asphalt, improving conditions for pedestrians and bicyclists that cross the bridge with vehicles. The new bridge will be approximately the same length as the existing bridge and the replacement bridge will be designed to meet current design loadings and safety standards.



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The replacement bridge will be a 3-sided pre-cast concrete culvert, with cast-in-place concrete abutment footings placed on steel H-piles driven to rock. The bridge clear span (this is the opening for Golden Hill Creek to flow beneath Carmen Road) will be 36 feet, which is about 3 feet longer than the current bridge. The new bridge will be slightly higher than the existing bridge. The raised height combined with eliminating the center pier from the existing bridge will improve hydraulic capacity and efficiency. Without a pier, the potential to snag debris and backup the creek during high flows will be reduced, which in turn will reduce the likelihood of localized flooding upstream of the bridge. Increasing the height of the bridge will slightly raise the profile of the road. All work and grading will be within the highway Right-of-Way and no property acquisitions are necessary to complete the project.

This project is intended to provide a new structure to carry Carmen Road over Golden Hill Creek that will be serviceable for 50 years or more.

A full closure of Carmen Road between Lake Road and Lower Lake Road will be necessary during the bridge replacement. There will be an off-site, two way signed detour in place for approximately 2 to 3 months. If you are heading north on Carmen Road, the signed detour will take you west on Lake Road (NY 18) to Burgess Road. From there, you will head north on Burgess Road taking a right onto Lower Lake Road back to the intersection with Carmen Road. If you are on Lower Lake Road and normally would head south on Carmen Road, the detour will follow the same roads in the opposite direction (Lower Lake Road to the west, turn left onto Burgess Road, turn left onto Lake Road (NY 18) and head back east to Carmen Road.

FOR RESIDENTS THAT LIVE ON CARMEN ROAD SOUTH OF THIS BRIDGE

Carmen Road will be open to local traffic during construction, meaning that you will have access to your driveway at all times back to Lake Road (NY 18). However, you will need to follow the detour or use County Line Road to get to Lower Lake Road.

Anticipated Project Schedule & Costs

Expected Award of Project	Fall/Winter 2018
Construction Duration	June 2019-August 2019
Approximate Construction Cost	\$1.25 Million

If you have any questions or comments regarding this upcoming project, the County encourages you to please contact the County’s Design Engineer, by telephone, mail or email. Contact information is below and please include the six digit Project Identification Number (PIN) **5759.96** in your communications:

Mr. Dory A. Marsh, P.E., Project Manager

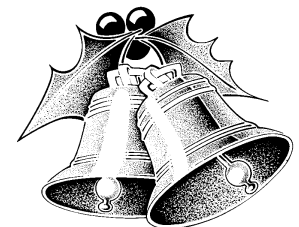
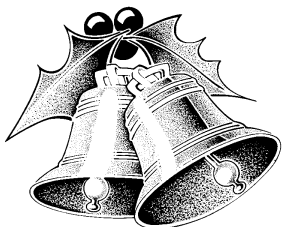
CHA Consulting, Inc.

2200 Main Place Tower

Buffalo, New York 14202

Email address: dmarsh@chacompanies.com

Telephone: (716) 847-6310





Windsong Radiology Group presents
Mobile Mammography-Driving Early Detection



Windsong Radiology Group has received a grant that will allow us to provide free screening mammogram services to the 8 counties of WNY. The mission is to increase the screening rates by 10% over the next 5 years. We are targeting the under and never served populations that have barriers to screening. These barriers can keep people from obtaining the much needed screening services they need and deserve. We are hoping to remove barriers by bringing the care you need to your backyard.

Faith United Methodist Church of Somerset has generously allowed us to access their parking lot and front entrance to provide this service. Windsong Mobile Mammography is scheduled to be at 1449 Quaker Road Barker, NY 14012 on March, 19th 2018 from 11am-4pm. This is the same day as the Food Express truck service the church already provides. Windsong requires every patient have a script and insurance for this service. If these are barriers for some, we have the help you need to obtain insurance and a script, through the Mobile Mammography Program Assistant.

There are many ways for patients to reach out for more information. Call 716-929-9494 to speak with a member of the Mobile staff or 716-795-9945 to speak with the staff at Faith United. Visit windsongradiology.com/mobile to view the calendar of events planned for 2018.

Organizations that would like to hear more about planning a screening event at their location can contact the Program Coordinator directly at jstasiak@windsongradiology.com



Calendar of Events

- **Now through December 15th** - *Barker Public Library Annual Holiday Secret Silent Auction* - 8706 Main Street
 - **December 9th** at Faith United Methodist Church - *Christmas Community Celebration* beginning at 4:00PM. Craft and gift vendors, cookie walk, Turkey/Ham sub meals, Christmas Carol sing-along with Paul Ferington, Barker Community Band
 - **December 10th** 1:00PM - 4:00PM - *Victorian Christmas at the Babcock House Museum*, 7449 Lake Road - carriage rides, organ player, Santa, and fresh baked muffins
 - **December 13th** at the Village Hall, 8708 Main Street - *Veterans Outreach*
 - **December 16th** 10:00am - *Annual Kids' Christmas Party at the Barker Fire Hall*, 1660 Quaker Road - Santa, candy, a magician and fire truck rides
 - **December 22nd** 7:00pm at Faith United Methodist Church - *Forever God is With Us*, arranged and orchestrated by Marty Parks
-

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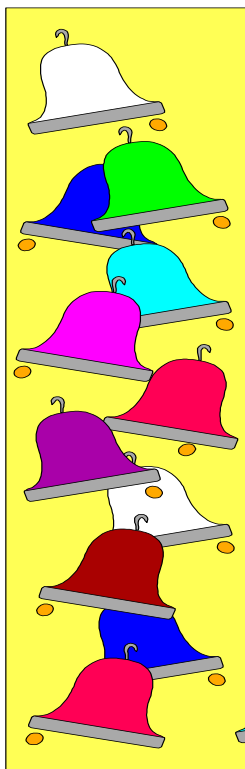
8700 Haight Road
P.O. Box 368
Barker, NY 14012-0368

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

Phone: 716-795-3575
Fax: 716-795-9041
Website: www.somersetny.org

U.S. Postage
Standard
PAID
Middleport, NY 14105
Permit #21

RURAL ROUTE BARKER, NY 14012



Recycling and Trash Holiday Schedule:

** December 26, 2017 (Regular pick up) Rescheduled to December 27, 2017

** January 2, 2018 (Regular pick up) Rescheduled to January 3, 2018

