

EDITORIAL

Fresh, Brainy Town Board Needs Issue: Create Greater Oneonta

Say you were elected to the Oneonta Town Board, determined to prevent fracking from happening in the town.

Then, you discover, there’s no natural gas under the town.

Now what? You’re bright, energetic. You get along well with your equally brainy and motivated colleagues, who find themselves in the same quandary.

That came to mind Monday evening, Dec. 15, at the discussion on town-city collaboration organized by Albert Colone and Bill Shue’s GO-EDC in the Oneonta Middle School cafeteria.

Common Council representation was spotty, although Mayor Russ Southard and Council members Bob Brzozowski and Madolyn O. Palmer were there, (plus City Manager Martin Murphy, Fire Chief Pat Pidgeon, Finance Director Meg Hungerford and other City Hall staffers.)

But the town board members – plus Town Supervisor Bob Wood, who played the evening’s central role – were there in force: David Jones, the first anti-fracker elected to the board, three years ago now, and freshmen Patty Jacob, Andrew Stammel and Trish Riddell



The Oneonta Town Board – clockwise from upper left, David Jones, Patty Jacob, Trish Riddell Kent and Andrew Stammel – should focus their energies on creating a Greater Oneonta.

Kent.

They were curious, attentive and, as evident in their back-and-forth after the meeting, having lots of fun working together.

This group, you quickly conclude, is a juggernaut in search of a target. (Hold that thought.)

Supervisor Wood was his usual restrained, diplomatic and cannily obscure self, but he’s been a reluctant passenger for too long on the locomotive Colone and Shue are

trying to stoke anew.

As the presentations – on a town-city water and sewer district; on O-STAR, a combined sports, tourism and recreation agency, and on actual consolidation of the two municipalities into a Greater Oneonta – underscored, unity offers too many benefits to ignore (or, in Wood’s case, to parry.)

Bottom line: Greater Oneonta might save as much as \$500,000 if it unified services, and might receive \$2 million, \$3 million, or even more in sales-tax revenues if the two municipalities became one.

One stumbling block has been the tax rate of the combined entity, down in the city, up in the town. But Shue reported, per a law passed in 2011, that can be negotiated in the consolidation agreement so that rural areas with few services pay less than urbanized neighborhoods.

Another stumbling block, allegedly, is that it would cost less for the town to build a whole new plant and distribution system to supply water to the Southside than it would for the city to run a pipe across Lettis Highway to Route 23. But consultant Fred Krone of GEMS (Grants and Essen-



Oneonta Town Supervisor Bob Wood was the personality in the room at GO-EDC’s forum on “collaboration, cooperation and consolidation,” but has the issue passed him by?

tial Management Services, Utica) said that the USDA and other agencies, so sold are they on consolidation, would help offset any inequity, so (former) town ratepayers wouldn’t be subsidizing (former) city ones.

With state and federal governments so eager to reduce New York State’s 4,200 taxing jurisdictions, Krone said, any consolidation “rings a whole lot of bells with lots of agencies.”

And yet, Governor Cuomo’s CFA system, supposedly bottom-up and rational, gave another \$600,000 toward the town’s

go-it-alone Emmons-based water system. Go figure.

Not only is the Emmons plan dumb growth – promoting sprawl and allowing businesses to hopscotch from the Town of Oneonta/County of Otsego into the Town of Davenport/County of Delaware – the grant flies in the face of state policy, which is supposed to support “collaboration, cooperation and consolidation,” a phrase much-heard Monday night.

Politics – someone’s pulling the strings – not rationality, is at play here, with potentially devastating effects for everybody a gen-

eration hence, if not sooner. (Also, given the otherwise relatively paltry CFA grants announced in the last few days, this ill-considered project is draining the well for everyone else.)

Forget fracking. Here’s a real issue for the brainy Oneonta Town Board to tackle, with Wood or without: How to achieve “collaboration, cooperation and,” finally, “consolidation” of the two Oneontas.

What does success look like? A prosperous, well-funded Greater Oneonta, with a flourishing downtown and tidy neighborhoods, adding needed infrastructure, prudently and consistently, from the center out, rather than willy-nilly.

Oneonta Town Board members – Jones, Jacob, Stammel, Riddell Kent – don’t take our word for it. You’re fresh to the issue. Drill down. Understand it. Come to your own conclusions.

We may be wrong, but likely – very likely – you’ll embrace smart growth and work toward the greater benefit of Greater Oneonta, which – with 6,000 people working in the city and living outside it – will benefit everyone in the City of the Hills’ orbit.

OTHER VOICES

Letter To Governor: Science, Economics Don’t Support Allowing Fracking In NY

Editor’s Note: Governor Cuomo revealed Monday, Dec. 15, on WCNY TV’s “Capitol Pressroom” that a fracking decision may be forthcoming by the end of the month, prompting this letter signed by 140 members of Elected Officials to Protect New York, including 25 from Otsego County, to send this letter to the governor the following day.

What has happened – what have we learned – since 2012?

The current “health review” notwithstanding, the necessary studies have not been done and the standard of safety for all of New York has clearly not been met. There has been no additional review or analysis by the DEC concerning cumulative environmental impacts or socioeconomic costs, at least none that has

been made public.

New information that is publicly available includes new concerns about direct and collateral damage from fracking, and anecdotal evidence has become empirical data. Currently the independent group Physicians, Scientists, and Engineers for Healthy Energy has cataloged more than 400 peer reviewed studies on fracking and its related activities, nearly all demonstrating harm.

The body of evidence on health impacts is significant and growing, including links to:

- high levels of ozone;
- a range of dangerous toxins in high concentrations in ambient air near fracking infrastructure, including formaldehyde and the carcinogen benzene; and
- numerous water and air pollutants (including carcinogenic radon) that pose a

25 Local Officials Among 140 Signators

Here at the Otsego County officials among the 140 signators:

- Town Supervisors: Diane Addresso, Worcester; Bill Elsey, Springfield; Anne Geddes-Atwell, Otsego; Todd Lewis, Plainfield; Robert Wood, Oneonta
- Cooperstown Village Board members: Jeff Katz, mayor, Lou Allstadt, Jim Dean, Cindy Falk, Joan Nichols
- Otsego Town Board: Carina Frank, Tom Hohensee, Julie Huntsman
- Oneonta Town Board: Patricia Jacob, Bennett Sandler
- County Board of Representatives: Rick Hulse, Otsego; Ed Lentz, New Lisbon; Beth Rosenthal, Roseboom; Kay Stuligross, Oneonta
- Also, Pam Deane, Otsego town clerk; Bob Eklund, town board, New Lisbon; Laura Gray Malloy, formerly on town board, Laurens; Mary Leonard, vice president, CCS board; Paul Stein, town board, Pittsfield

direct threat to human and animal health.

The list of environmental issues goes on, with significant impacts across the country, including:

- Anecdotal accounts of fouled wells became 248

confirmed of cases of water contamination, ultimately acknowledged by the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection.

- Other states have also suffered surface and groundwater contamination;

and explosions, leaks, spills, and blowouts are common.

- More data and studies reveal that well casing and integrity failures are endemic problems without a solution – meaning that a significant percentage of wells will leak gas and chemicals into groundwater and the atmosphere.
- Early concerns about seismic impacts and earthquakes, associated not just with injection wells - but with fracking itself – have been confirmed.
- Climate change has made extreme weather events and flooding more common, a disaster when combined with fracking sites.
- One of the biggest unresolved issues is how to responsibly handle the enormous quantities of toxic wastewater created along with radioactive drilling wastes. Sending this waste

to Ohio’s injection wells, to New York landfills, or spreading it on roads (illegally, or under a “beneficial use determination”) is environmentally irresponsible and completely unsustainable.

A great deal of attention has been given to potential economic benefits of fracking, but time has confirmed much of the initial skepticism over promised jobs and overstated economic benefits.

• In Pennsylvania, only a fraction of the promised jobs materialized; many of them temporary and filled by out of state workers.

• Royalty payments have fallen far short of what many landowners were promised due to “creative business restructuring” by drillers.

• Serious socioeconomic impacts have been documented. *Please See FRACKING, A6*

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LETTERS

Search For ‘Unclaimed Funds’ Ends In Disappointment

To the Editor:

If you received the giant postcard from state Sen. Jim Seward’s office stating you may have “New York State Unclaimed Funds waiting for you!

...There’s never any charges to search or file for unclaimed funds.” Don’t believe it. Don’t believe it.

I was surfing the Internet a while back and decided to look into that site. I put in the names of my mother and stepfather and, sure enough, their names came up saying that there were funds available.

To make a long story short I contacted my brother, since I had turned executorship over to him. He was the one that had to fill out the forms. We ended up going to the county seat and spending around \$70 to get the forms needed. Also there was the money I spent in gas driving over to Sherburne and back a couple times.

The government would not tell us

how much money was there until we bought and sent in the forms. I also sent a copy of my birth certificate, which it cost me \$20 or \$30 plus a three-month wait.

As we were getting the forms together we discovered my mother’s lawyer had never closed the estate. How is it the government did not required him to do this? He is now dead, so we would have to pay another lawyer to close the estate. There goes another \$300 plus? So we sent in the paperwork we had.

They sent us a request for more documentation! At the time they told us there was a grand total of around \$90! So we told him we did not want to pursue this matter any more. It was costing more money for form of proof than what we would get back. What’s the point?

So we requested a return of our

documents. They have refused to return the documentation that we paid for. The documents belong to us as we paid for them. If they had any intelligence they would copy or check off receiving the documents and return the originals.

To me, it seems the whole affair was just another way for the government to get more money from us by having us purchase all these forms and documents from the government. If the documents where already part of government why did we have to purchase them again? Couldn’t they have just looked them up?

Another example of government incompetency and their lack of understanding that they are public servants. We pay their salary, they are not supposed to make life harder for us.

R. SCOTT DUNCAN
Hartwick Forest