

2015 Master Plan Committee Meeting

The **Master Plan Committee** Meeting of the Town of Cortlandt was conducted on March 5, 2014 in the Vincent F. Nyberg Meeting Room of the Cortlandt Town Hall located at 1 Heady Street, Cortlandt Manor, NY 10567 with the following committee members and appointed staff in attendance:

Master Plan Committee:

Supervisor Puglisi D. Puglisi, Town Supervisor	Barbara Halecki
James Creighton	Adrian C. Hunte
David Douglas	Michael Huvane
Michael Fleming	Theresa Knickerbocker,
Seth Freach, Town Councilman	Village of Buchanan, Mayor Elect
Dani Glaser	Maria Slippen
	Village of Croton-on-Hudson Trustee

Absent:

Daniel Hayes

Staff Advisors:

Edward Vergano, P.E., DOTS Director
Chris Kehoe, AICP, Deputy Director of Planning
Rosemary Boyle-Lasher, Assistant to Director of DOTS

Also in Attendance:

Mary Breining, Receiver of Taxes
Sgt. James Kranik, New York State Police
Lt. Nick Alongi, Westchester County Police
Holly Haight, Town of Cortlandt Fire Inspector
Justin Costable, Executive Director of the Cortlandt/Peekskill Regional Paramedics

Supervisor Puglisi thanked everyone for attending the Master Plan Meeting. For the past six months meetings have been held to help educate all the committee members on the various departments in the town and the services that are provided to the community. The purpose is for educated opinions and decisions to be made to help put together a Master Plan for the next 10 years.

To view all detailed PowerPoint presentations go to www.townofcortlandt.com.

Mary Breining, the elected Receiver of Taxes gave her presentation and explained that the Tax Office is primarily governed by the Real Property Tax and the Westchester County Charter. It is a statutory office and is unique because it is a collection agent. In other counties, the schools have their own tax receivers but in Westchester it is a special taxing district, therefore we guarantee the money to the schools and the county. Whether the town collects the money or not, it still has the agreement that it pays the county and schools their warrant and tax monies.

The functions of the office were reviewed. (There are four employees in the Tax Receiver's Office).

- Court ordered refunds - When a court order is approved, after the taxes are grieved, the refund comes from the tax office.
- Government Reports - the Tax Office provides to the Town Board, monthly reports of what is collected and the outstanding balance (that is the warrant, the guarantee).
- Verification of Taxes - if anyone is taking out a permit, sub-divisions or merging properties together it must be verified that the taxes were paid. There can be no opened taxes owed.
- Re-levy taxes - it allows the town to recapture money when a house changes hands. If the prior owner had any exemption that gave them a reduced tax bill, when the title passes, the tax gets pro-rated, backed billed or put on the next bill, so it is re-levied. The new owner has to pay back the reduced rate which they may not have been entitled to.
- Archives - record retention guidelines must be followed. Anything with a lien cannot be discarded; nor the tax rolls.
- Data Maintenance - is a huge job. The staff constantly has to update records (i.e. address changes, change of mortgages,). This must be kept current.
- In-Rem is a way for the town to manage the uncollectable taxes. Even though the tax isn't collected, it must still be paid to the schools and county, by the Town. After 21 months, the town has the option to foreclose.

Tax Billing: Take the assessment of the school district which is set by the state, (they determine what that areas assessment will be) and divide it by the schools levy and you get the tax levy, which gives you the tax rate. The warrant is not official until the Supervisor signs it. The tax office cannot start billing without that signature.

(Please see the Tax Warrant chart on the PowerPoint). The chart will show that the annual tax bill is broken down as follows: School Districts are 68.5%, Westchester County is 15%, the Town Tax is 11.0% and the Special Districts (fire districts, drainage, etc.) are 5.5% of your bill. Again the Tax Receiver is a collection agent. Many of the entities that are collected are not determined by the town of Cortlandt. The Schools determine their budget, as do the fire districts and the County. They have their own elected board members.

The County sets the dates of the tax billing schedule. Town and County are collected in April with the school tax being collected in September and January.

As far as receiving the tax payments, the most efficient payments are from TSO (transfer services organizations) they pay on behalf of financial institutions. Others pay by mail, walk-in or on-line. The on-line payments can be paid by bank check or by credit card (although a third party vendor fee is applied to credit card payments). Reminder notification and receipting can also be done on-line.

Liens are unpaid tax bills, after 12 months. It is a compounded number.

The town is sensitive to these homeowners and tries to work with them in paying the taxes.

The town manages this because we have to pay this money to the schools and the county.

Mary Breining concluded the presentation and mentioned that her office would like to promote more on-line services for the tax payers, to continue to provide excellent customer service, to reduce paper consumption and postage wherever she can and to reduce the lien balance, although this can be very complex.

Michael Huvane asked who the auditor is for the tax receiver and how often is their an audit? The New York State Comptroller office does the audit, one was done last year, but it is done randomly, typically every four to five years.

They do the reviews and give recommendations, which we abide by.

The Town also has their own annual, outside audit.

Michael Huvane asked that even though the Tax Receiver's office is a collection agent, if someone does not pay their taxes the town has to float that? Mary explained that Westchester County is guaranteed those funds, which is unique and she is not sure when that was set-up. There are only two counties in the state where the municipalities must collect the school and the county taxes. Westchester is one of them. Supervisor Puglisi added that it is considered a shared service.

Adrian Hunte asked if the town receives a credit, in terms of the administrative expense, for collecting the taxes. The answer is no, but whatever is collected in penalties does stay with the town. Supervisor Puglisi added that typically about one percent of the tax payers do not pay in a timely fashion. She added that every year that money for uncollected tax funds is put into the budget (approx. \$600,000 for 2014). Usually every two years, an In Rem auctions is held.

Jim Creighton asked if the fees and penalties that are collected make the town whole for the extra administrative costs for collecting these taxes. Mary explained that every property is different. Linda added that some municipalities have outside companies handle the legal process; however Tom Wood, the Town Attorney handles this for Cortlandt.

Jim Creighton asked if the Town should seek a change in that law. Linda responded that it would be extremely difficult to have that changed. Governor Cuomo believes in "shared services". Michael Fleming added that he is in favor of shared services; however it is the fronting of the money that is the issue. Supervisor Puglisi once again explained that by law, we must pay the county and the school any unpaid taxes. Mary added that she doubts the County would ever agree to this change because of their triple A bonding that comes from the Towns guaranteeing their taxes be paid in full.

Michael Fleming asked what Lakeland does for the parcels in Putnam County. Mary explained that Lakeland collects for their parcels in the Putnam Valley area. She explained that what is unique about Cortlandt is that we go over border lines with our school districts. Putnam collects for their residents. It is very complex.

Supervisor Puglisi thanked Mary Breining for her presentation.

Supervisor Puglisi explained that in the mid 1990's the Town of Cortlandt had their own Town of Cortlandt police force which consisted of approximately ten officers, a few of which were going out on disability. To be more economically responsible, a new plan was needed. That police department was disbanded and was replaced with a new police plan that became effective in 1999. That was an effort between the County Police and NY State Police. The County Police came to the Cortlandt Town Hall and used an office here as their Northern Westchester satellite. Then a referendum was held with the entire Cortlandt community, including the villages, to have a bond for a new office area for Troop K of the New York State Police. At the time the State Police were thinking of leaving the town. The referendum asked the town taxpayers be willing to allow the town of Cortlandt to bond the money to build a new headquarters in the Town. The vote was approved 3 -1 and took place April 1999. This became the ultimate "Shared Service".

Sgt. Jim Kranik from the New York State Police was introduced.

Sgt. Kranik has been a trooper for 15 years and has been in Cortlandt since 1999. He has been the station commander since 2007.

The resources presently in Cortlandt are as follows:

30 troopers, 3 sergeants, 6 investigators and one senior investigator. In addition to that at Cortlandt, there are two canine units, one bomb tech, hostage negotiators, drug recognition experts and crime scene technicians. He continued that the State Police were founded in 1917, and is one of the largest in the country (with perhaps, the largest aviation unit in the country). They also have a SORT team, which is similar to a SWAT team. They have scuba units, narcotics units and major crime units for serious crimes. There is also a satellite station in Mohegan Lake to assist with the response time. The biggest issue facing the town is the heroin issue. The police are doing everything possible to combat it but it is difficult. There is also the DEP, DEC and Metro-North police who work with the State Police along with the Village of Croton and Buchanan police departments. Supervisor Puglisi added that the partnership between the two police departments has been terrific.

Adrian Hunte asked if a resident dials 9-1-1, who will respond. Sgt. Kranik explained that all 9 -1-1 calls go to a central dispatcher in Hawthorne, the Hudson Valley Transportation Management Center. So either the County or the State Police can be dispatched to the emergency.

Michael Huvane asked in the case of a disaster, who is actually in charge. Sgt. Kranik attends many emergency drills. State Police is the incident commander for Indian Point, for example, but for any emergency, terrific incident command systems have been developed, so it would depend on the emergency. There could be joint command.

Jim Creighton asked about the response time? Sgt. Kranik explained that a long response time could happen depending on the incident and the time of day, weather, etc. Priorities need to be established. A home invasion would get immediate response, but a minor car accident may not. The Captain currently in charge of Westchester County is a stickler for response times, so every case or call is reviewed daily, any discrepancies will need to be explained.

Camp Smith, the National Guard is also located in the Town. They hold meetings regularly and it is a valuable resource to have in our community.

The MTA and DEP are not dedicated to Cortlandt, itself, but if there is an incident they will be called to assist.

Lt. Nick Alongi from the Westchester County Police was born and raised in the Town of Cortlandt, on Locust Avenue. Nick began his career with the NYPD and started with the County Police in 2002. Since 2011 he is the executive officer of patrol and is the municipal liaison in charge of the Town of Cortlandt patrols.

A brief history of the County Police was given: In 1979 Westchester County had a Sheriffs Department, which handled the civil issues, such as evictions (all counties have a sheriffs department.) There was also the Westchester County Parkway police. In 1979, both these departments merged to form the Westchester County Police department.

Commissioner George Longworth is the Sheriff and the Commissioner of the Department of Public Safety. The Westchester County Police are a full-service police department with over 350 employees, with 3 divisions: The Patrol Division, with Detective Tom Gleason as the Commanding Officer, the Special Operations Division, which includes the SWAT team, aviation, bomb squad, hazardous devices, etc., with Chief Inspector John Hodges in charge and the Detective Division which includes general investigation, narcotics and crime scene work which is handled by Chief Inspector Roger Rekicky.

The County Police do a lot of security assessments for multiple buildings (including all the county buildings, schools, senior citizen homes, private homes) in order to help make security improvements.

Marine units launch out of the Viking Boat Yard in Verplanck and down-county.

There are two canine teams, (active patrol canines are dogs that ride around on every day patrol and explosive canines).

The County Police also issues pistol permits and conduct commercial vehicle enforcement. The WCP are responsible to patrol many parts of Westchester County. Patrol is provided for other agencies, when needed. They also patrol many of the parkways in the County and the parks.

Supervisor Puglisi is in charge of the town and interacts with Detective Gleason and Lt. Alongi. They both oversee much of what goes on in Cortlandt, as far as the patrolmen go. In Lt. Alongi's office there are two sergeants, three patrol officers and a civilian secretary. They all work out of Hawthorne.

Anyone that needs to get in touch with Lt. Alongi can e-mail (naa5@westchestergov.com) or give him a call (864-7700) with any questions or concerns.

Supervisor Puglisi mentioned that there are several neighborhood watch groups in the Town and the Westchester County Police and State Police assist with these groups.

The WCP is responsible for monitoring sex offenders in the County. There is a detective that tracks the sex offenders throughout the county. There is a state and county website regarding sex offenders. The town has a link on the town of Cortlandt website.

Student Resource Officers (SRO's) are located in some of the schools in the town, provided by

the state and county police. Also, Entergy has direct contact with the both Police departments.

Seth Freach asked what the normal approach to handling an incident on the river would be, since there is so much river frontage in Cortlandt. Sgt. Kranink explained that both forces have a scuba unit and the marine unit could be accessed if needed but normally the Westchester County Marine unit is used for an immediate response.

The Westchester County Labs are also used with anything that occurs in Westchester County. That way multiple labs are not needed.

Supervisor Puglisi spoke of her appreciation for the police and that the services and resources they provide far exceed what a local Town Police could provide financially. The security of our community is of outmost importance (as are the finances).

The committee thanked Sgt. Kranik and Lt. Alongi for attending.

Holly Haight, the Town of Cortlandt Fire Inspector, gave an overview of the fire departments, EMS agencies and the areas that they cover.

There are 7 Fire Departments in the town (Verplanck, Montrose, Buchanan, Mohegan, Croton, Continental Village and the VA. (See www.townofcortlandt.com to view the PowerPoint).

There are 7 EMS Agencies: Verplanck, Cortlandt, Mohegan, Croton, Peekskill, and V.A. EMS.

Holly explained further the areas that are covered by the different Fire Districts (which are the taxing entities). No specific fire agency covers a specific district. It is more response time oriented. Mohegan has the largest district in the Town of Cortlandt (with 4 different stations). On your property tax bill you will see a fire department line, which is paid to the Receiver of Taxes and distributed to the fire districts.

The V.A. Fire Department is located on the V.A. property in Montrose. Verplanck Fire Department responds to emergencies at Entergy.

There are 4 primary marine units on the river. There is an emergency services boat launch located in Verplanck, which saves on time, to launch smaller boats, built by the Town of Cortlandt.

The Fire Departments also work closely with the Westchester County Police, the New York State Police, and The Rockland County Sheriffs Department (who help put out fires, conduct rescues and tow boats, on the river). These members are all volunteers.

Holly explained the call numbers by agency (see chart).

David Douglas asked if there was a breakdown to what the calls were for. Holly explained that they could be accidents, fires, carbon monoxide calls, etc. but it would be too difficult to break it down. She added that Mohegan, Verplanck and Buchanan all respond to EMS calls.

Jim Creighton asked why they send out fire apparatus to EMS calls. Holly explained that the EMS is not staffed 24 hours/day and therefore treatment can be assessed more quickly, if the fire

department responds.

Holly reviewed the extensive training for the volunteer firefighters and added it has become more stringent. They require 60 hours of training and 16 hours of OSHA (8 hours each following year). They also have to complete the National Incident Management System courses, which gives you a basic framework of what incident command is and it allows your fire departments to apply for federal grants. All firefighters must have a First Aid and CPR cards as well.

The minimum age for a firefighter is 16 years old, if there is a youth program. They can do certain training until they are 17 and then they can become active firefighters. Some agencies have explorers programs at age 14. There is no maximum age.

There is specialized training, once you become a firefighter, that you may want to pursue. Holly explained the FAST Team (Firefighter Assist and Search Teams) which, if there is a structure fire and anyone should go down, their responsibility is to get them out. They have special equipment and training.

A Hazmat team is located at the V.A. if it should be needed. If there is a confined space incident in the town the V.A. would be the first responder to assist.

All fire agencies work under the Mutual Aid Plan, which means each agency can assist any other agency. All agencies do train together and are always willing to assist when needed. There are 350 active firefighters in the Town of Cortlandt. Mohegan Fire Department is a combination fire department, which means they have some paid staff that drive and operate the apparatus. Holly continued that the Fire Advisory Board was established by the Town Board in 1997 for the purpose of advising the Town Board on all policy matters concerning fire prevention. The Board meets regularly.

The tax portion on your bill goes to pay for the equipment, trucks, the training, up keep and maintenance (not any salaries). Linda recognized and praised the 350 volunteers and thanked Holly for the presentation.

Justin Costable is the Executive Director for the Cortlandt/Peekskill Regional Paramedic Program. He reviewed the brief history of the CPRP program, which began in 1997 and has an inter-municipal agreement with Cortlandt, Peekskill and Buchanan. The Shared Service program is unique with many cost savings. The Town holds the licensing but it is managed by the hospital. The hospital, town and the city meet on a quarterly basis and review expenditures and discuss any issues.

They are based off a certificate of need, which is required by the state of New York to have it and maintain it every two years, which is very important. Justin noted that CPRP has a flawless record. They are also governed by the Westchester Regional Emergency Medical Advisory Committee (WREMAC) which sets forth policy and procedure on how they operate. They are now sharing protocol with all of New York State.

Justin reviewed the responsibilities of the EMS:

They respond to approx. 5000 calls per year and are the busiest fly car service in the agency. The EMS responds to every call, because the dispatch may not always be correct in identifying the emergency. The average response time is 6 minutes, which is below the national average. They provide mutual aid to the region. Calls are reviewed for educational purposes. Annual drills are held and on a monthly basis they provide some outreach to the community. They were the first in the county to receive the new cardiac monitors. In 2013 they were named the Westchester County Agency of the Year.

Future plans include looking for a north station for improved response times (currently are located at the hospital and the New York State Police barracks) and a change of Certificate of Need for both emergency and non-emergency transport.

Jim Creighton questioned the certificate of need for non-emergency transport. Justin explained that they hold a non-transport certificate of need, meaning they can't transport patients in the fly car. They would like this to change so they can transport in an ambulance. Nothing elaborate would be needed but a cost analysis would need to be done.

Linda thanked all the paramedics for their dedication to our community

David Douglas will do his presentation on Open Space/CAC at the April 2nd meeting. At that meeting we will ask the committee to prioritize all the topics. A survey will be given out, perhaps in advance of the meeting to be completed by the committee to further advance the Master Plan process.

Minutes submitted by Judi Peterson