

Annual Report for the Town of Durham, NY

April 2022

The 2020 Durham Comprehensive Plan mandated that each year, the town should publish an Annual Report describing what Durham achieved during the prior year, and what is planned for the coming year.

This document is the second Annual Report. It is made up of three reports – one from the Town Supervisor, one from the town Highway Superintendent, and one from the Chair of Durham Connect, which is the committee set up to help implement the Comprehensive Plan's recommendations.

The Comprehensive Plan also mandated that the town should hold an Annual Meeting to present the Annual Report and to receive feedback from residents. The second Annual Meeting will be on Saturday, June 11, at 10:30 am, at Brandow Park. All Durham residents are invited. There will be refreshments and a raffle for which everyone who attends will be given a ticket.

Town of Durham Report

By Shawn Marriott, Town Supervisor

Newcomers and Town Development:

The issue of newcomers is still extremely polarizing in our town. It has gotten worse in the last few months. We need to find a way to strike a balance with welcoming new people into our community and protecting our core values and way of life.

We are still having record months with house sales, and sales are still rising. They have not plateaued as of this date.

I think Airbnb regulations are going to have to be something our town looks into in the near future. It is a very large growing trend.

People who do not like decisions made by the town board want a planning board. If we had a planning board, it would be required to follow the same rules and guidelines that we do. No matter what decision either the town board or a planning board makes, there

will be a side that is not happy with the decisions made. The majority of people in this town are happy with having the board act as the planning board.

DHPC [the Durham Historic Preservation Commission] is an ongoing discussion. The town board must look into the laws governing the committee and iron out some clarification issues and update the law. Its members work for the board to protect the town, for its historic value, and serve as a neutral representative of the town to protect the town as an entity.

Video for Town Meetings:

This is a board decision, as to whether to have audio and video. I still have conference calls available to those who cannot attend in person. There are some that are adamantly against video for meetings. Personally, I am indifferent to it, but I can see multiple sides of the issue. The pros and cons need to be weighed.

Broadband:

Mid-Hudson [the town broadband provider] is scheduled to start working on the projects reported last year in the Hervey Street and Cornwallville Road areas very soon. Applications have taken a long time to get from Central Hudson to let the project move forward due to some state regulations that were imposed. These restrictions have since been lifted and hopefully that will speed up the process.

Patty Handel [Durham's County Legislator] and I have met with the members of Greene County Legislature, Mid-Hudson, and members of the State Senate and Assembly in attempts to acquire and utilize ARPA [American Rescue Plan Act] funds that were given to the County to provide broadband to most, if not all of Durham. Greene County has deemed Durham as the most underserved town in the county for broadband. We are hoping these funds will be available to the town.

We are slated to have meetings with Central Hudson as well, to attempt to move the process along faster and be a flagship project for the rest of the towns in Greene County. Our broadband committee has done a fantastic job of providing data and mapping, which has put us in first place to be ready to start utilizing funds to move forward with the project.

Budget:

This year's budget will be interesting as always. GSK going onto the tax roll last year was a delicate situation. This year, while everything around us is absolutely going up in prices, we will have to weigh out what services we need and expenditures. Our budget is extremely tight. We operate very close to our budget, generally within \$50,000, so there is not a lot of wiggle room. We generate our money from property owners in this town. Our tax revenue goes to the county and services are provided to the town in return for that tax money. The town benefits with this system. We do not see large fluctuations in revenue because of this, which means we have a very stable budget.

Taxpayers can expect the board yet again to spend days and nights going over every line of the budget, till midnight most nights, making sure we are saving money wherever we can. As a reminder, anyone is welcome to come and sit in at the budget workshops and see what goes into the budget process.

ARPA-Funded Projects:

ARPA funds have been distributed to towns and counties throughout the State. Durham received its first of two disbursements (approximately \$136,000). The funds have guidelines attached to them with what and how the money can be spent. Each day these rules change. We started a committee to review all the suggestions sent in by people from the town and return with suggestions to the board. These funds need to be spent within four years.

Some very good suggestions have been made, and as always, everyone has a differing view of how the money should be spent. But that is exactly what makes this process work. We will work together through our differing opinions and produce solutions and find the best way to utilize this money.

Durham Highway Department Report

By Joe van Holsteyn, Highway Superintendent

We were able to do more last summer than we had planned on, owing to the fact that we got about \$50,000 more from the state than we were expecting. In addition to repaving Sunside Road, we paved Cochrane Road to the intersection of Prink Hill, rather than just to the bridge after Cunningham Road as we'd planned, and two more sections of Allen Teator Road. We were also fortunate in that asphalt and fuel prices were down.

This year, however, is a different story. The price of asphalt is likely to be up 25 to 40 percent, and fuel is already up by 20 to 30 percent. We're also having supply issues. During the pandemic everything was slower, but now things are starting up again—there's a lot of industry, a lot of construction—and it's becoming difficult to get replacement items. In the fall I needed to order tires for the trucks and I was told there were only four of the kind we needed on the whole East Coast. So I ordered all four of them. I'm also trying to pre-order items.

There wasn't a lot of snow this winter but we had a lot of ice storms. Many of the storms were only a couple days apart. When we have ice storms we have to add more salt to the sand/salt mix, which makes it more expensive. The guys hate driving in ice storms

as much as anyone else. They are driving quarter-million-dollar vehicles and it's nerve-racking.

The biggest project for this summer is to replace the two culverts on Hervey Street Road that washed out during a heavy rainstorm in October. We put in temporary culverts to keep the road open through the winter but now we have to put in permanent ones. We're doing the installing ourselves to save money.

Another project we hope to do this summer is finishing the paving of Sutton Road all the way to the top, which will probably cost over \$200,000. It should take a couple of weeks to complete. We also have a lot of cleanup from the winter to do, including fixing lawn damage caused by the plows.

Durham Connect Report

By Bernard Rivers, Chair of Durham Connect

Durham Connect is a community group that was set up two years ago by the town board to help implement the recommendations in the *Durham 2020 Comprehensive Plan*. It is led by a Chair and a Deputy Chair, one from the community and one from the town board.

The volunteers in Durham Connect's working groups include town board members, full-time residents, second-home owners, committed Republicans, committed Democrats, committed non-voters, and more. All of them are united in their desire to make Durham a better place for everyone.

The Comprehensive Plan's summarized recommendations, and Durham Connect's achievements between Spring 2021 and Spring 2022 in implementing them, are as follows.

- **Improve Communications:** *Recommendation:* Find new ways to inform residents of community developments. These should include significantly enhancing the town's website, publishing a town newsletter, publishing an Annual Report, and holding an annual town meeting to present the Annual Report and receive feedback from residents.

Working Group achievements over the past year: The second and third issues of the twice-a-year town newsletter The Durham Courier were mailed in May and November 2021 to Durham's 1,800 property owners and emailed to the town's email list. The town's first Annual Report was presented and discussed at the town's first annual town meeting in June 2021, with 75-80 attendees, and the second Annual Report will be

presented at the June 2022 Annual Meeting. A proposal and a master plan for enhancing the town website were submitted to the town board in November 2021 and are currently under review.

- **Increase community activities:** *Recommendation:* Organize and encourage a range of community activities.

In August 2021 a movie night was organized in Brandow Park. But other planned results were not achieved, primarily because of Covid.

- **Enhance economic development:** *Recommendation:* Work with local business leaders and organizations for the development of a critical mass of retail, restaurant and other businesses within Durham. In particular, encourage the provision of a medical facility within Durham.

Working Group achievements over the past year: A second annual flu-shot clinic took place in East Durham in September 2021. Other ideas have been worked on but have not yet been implemented.

- **Advocate for improved broadband:** *Recommendation:* Work for fast, reliable and affordable broadband internet service that can be accessed by every residence and business within Durham. Work also for improved cell phone service.

Working Group achievements over the past year: In October 2021 a report with detailed findings and recommendations regarding broadband availability within Durham was presented to the town board. It showed that 40% of Durham's residents lack access to wired broadband. In November 2021, the town board resolved to "accept receipt" of the broadband report and to "continue to review, study and work to implement the report in accordance with the best of its ability."

- **Improve historic preservation:** *Recommendation:* Encourage the development of a unified approach to historic preservation.

Working Group achievements over the past year: Training was conducted on how to clean and repair Durham cemetery headstones. Data is being compiled for enhanced history pages at the town's website.

In November 2021, Durham Connect was presented at the Greene County Legislature with an *Ellen Rettus Planning Achievement Award*. The submission for this award was sent in by legislator Patty Handel, who wrote that Durham Connect arose out of a desire that the Comprehensive Plan not "just sit on a shelf collecting dust," and added: "*Durham Connect* is an innovative example of how a town government and residents... can work collaboratively to further their shared goals."

We actively encourage more Durham residents, both full-timers and second-home-owners, to participate in this important work. There is a need for people with specific skills – website or print design, proposal-writing, book-keeping, history research, newsletter-writing, planning or publicizing community events and sports activities, etc. – as well as people whose biggest strengths are enthusiasm and a desire to contribute. To find out more, please contact Bernard Rivers, Durham Connect Chair (Bernard.Rivers@Gmail.com) or Joan Breslin, Durham Connect Deputy Chair (BreslinJ@CRCSD.org)