

## Town of Bennington

### 2024 Year in Review

During 2024, the Town of Bennington was involved in the following projects, accomplishments and activities:

#### General Government Operations:

Former Councilman Gadd filled the vacant Councilman position for 2024, bringing his experience and familiarity of the issues to the Board. The Town Clerk transitioned DEC hunting licenses from Valeron paper to plain paper & no back tags, following changes made at the state level. A new photocopier/printer was purchased for the Clerk/Supervisor's Office. Archived records from a former town attorney's office were received for our files. The Supervisor attended the Association of Towns annual business meeting and training session in February. A moderate fiscal stress designation was noted for the Town from the Comptroller's Office based on fund balance and highway expenditures reported in the annual financial report for 2023. Many of the imbalances were addressed in 2024. The 2025 Town Budget was approved at a level below the tax cap and with a levy reduction for taxpayers.

#### Highway:

Summer road construction included projects on Tinkham, Sierk, Stedman, O'Connor, Graff and Sinn. Roadside mowing, ditching, grading, in-house equipment repair, and removal of both trees and nuisance beavers were completed as well as winter snow & ice control. A used 18' tilt trailer, a GMC Sierra truck and a 10' snow pusher for the tractor were purchased. The 1999 Peterbilt truck was declared surplus and will be disposed of in 2025. One Motor Equipment Operator resigned to take another employment opportunity. The County replaced a culvert and a pipe on Folsomdale Road during the autumn months. A three-year contract with the County was approved for Snow and Ice control on County roads. There continues to be no grant funding available for road repairs/construction other than what is currently received.

#### Buildings:

A major building project was completed in 2024 with the construction of an addition to the Highway Department garage, allowing for indoor storage of equipment as well as the ability to work on equipment indoors during bad weather. A bond anticipate note was issued through Evans Bank for a portion of the costs, with the remainder funded with federal ARPA money.

Minor facia repairs were made to the Historical Museum and funding was secured for a new roof on both the museum and gazebo in 2025. Ongoing maintenance and painting continue at the Town Hall.

### Green Energy:

The Town was served with an Article 78 proceeding, challenging the denial of a permit to construct a solar project on Church Road. Following legal negotiations, the proceedings were discontinued and the Town granted a permit, based on the applicant (Delaware River Solar) complying with the requirements of the existing solar law. Following the above development, the Town enacted a moratorium on accepting applications for solar projects pending the review and revision of the solar law. Meetings were held throughout the year gathering information and drafting new regulations, and a public hearing was held on a draft local law. Coming out of those hearings and reviewing comments made, the committee has made modifications and anticipate another hearing and potential adoption of the law in 2025.

The Niagara Solar project continues to make slow progress, with continued site and soils work being done in the winter of 2024-25 and an update was given at the May Board meeting.

The zoning update committee, comprised of members of the Town Board, Planning Board and Zoning Board of Appeals, will be working in 2025 to develop a local law governing wind energy conversion systems. A moratorium on accepting any application for these projects was approved in 2024 for eight months, and likely will be extended until the law can be established. The Wind Energy Advisory Committee recommendations from several years ago are serving as a useful guide for the update committee.

### Zoning/Planning/Assessment:

Our Town engineers provided free on-line training that was used by many Board members to meet annual educational qualifications. Members continued to work on routine land use requests, as well as participating in training and on the zoning update committee. One new Special Use Permit was approved (parking area on Bullis Road.) Long-time Board of Assessment Review member Robert Padak passed away in the spring. The state established an equalization rate for the Town at 90%. Property tax exemptions were reviewed and a new exemption was approved for volunteer fire personnel and a revised rate was approved for senior citizens on a limited income. An increased exemption for certain veterans was considered and tabled for further review in 2025.

### Court:

The Town Justice Court conducted its first jury trial in many years, following months of preparation and support from neighboring courts. Town Prosecutor Hamilton resigned in May and the Board approved the appointment of Matthew Dillon as our new Prosecutor.

### Culture/Recreation:

The Town Historian presented a video program "A Conversation with Friends" in November at the Cowlesville Fire Hall with over 100 people present. The Town Historical Society hosted an open house and strawberry social in July, and hosted several special programs/speakers during the year.

The Town's annual Memorial Day Observance was held at the Town Park despite rain forecasts that resulted in the band cancelling their participation. The American Legion from Attica again coordinated the placement of flags on the graves of veterans throughout the town. The Bennington Senior Citizens remain an active association, with monthly meetings, outings and parties, and weekly lunches at the Senior Nutrition Site at the Pine Lounge.

The Youth Recreation Program conducted the annual Easter Egg Hunt at the Bennington Fire Company grounds with approximately 80 youth participating, the summer swim program at Byrnclyff had 51 children receiving swimming lessons (and craft projects) during July and August, and the Alden Youth Baseball and Softball again utilized the fields at Pine Tree Park for practice and games. Men's softball from the Alden League also played at the park during the summer months. And, once again, Santa received letters dropped off at the Town hall and managed to respond to local children despite his busy schedule.

Summer concerts held in July at the museum and park included: Heart II Heart, 3 Parts Whiskey, Full Swing Band and Kelly's Old Timers. Attendance remained strong with 40 to 90 at each concert.

While not a Town government matter, the community was saddened to experience the closure of the Sacred Heart Church in Bennington Center in December.

#### Special Districts:

Fire Contracts for the four districts serving the Town are: Bennington \$110,000; Cowlesville \$90,370; Harris Corners \$35,928.09; and Varysburg \$11,570.07. Cowlesville Water District staff continues to replace water meters with new ones obtained through a joint grant with the County, and a water leak was detected and repaired at Bullis and Sargent Streets.

#### County Matters:

The Wyoming County Community Health System received Critical Access designation following a long process undertaken by hospital and county administration and fiscal staff. This will result in additional, reality based Medicare/Medicaid and insurance reimbursements that will add several million dollars in operating revenue to the hospital's finances. The Chief Executive Officer stepped down at the end of the year and a new CEO has taken over as of January 2025. The County Administrator position was filled and he has been instrumental in identifying cost savings and efficiencies. The County EMS program completed one year in service, bringing Advanced Life Support services to residents. This life saving program will continue to be modified to ensure that the appropriate levels of service are available when called upon. The County Fire Training Center renovation/addition project is underway, adding much needed training facilities and emergency services infrastructure.