

# VILLAGE OF CASTLETON-ON-HUDSON BOARD OF TRUSTEES REGULAR MEETING

February 28, 2022

**PRESENT:** Mayor Joe Keegan, Trustee/Deputy Mayor Jenifer Pratico, Trustee Sharon Martin, Trustee Lissa D'Aquanni, Trustee Erik Samarija

**ABSENT:** None

**ALSO PRESENT:** Attorney Benjamin Hill and Clerk-Treasurer Padraic Ellis

**PUBLIC:** 24 (in person), 27 (via Zoom)

**CALL TO ORDER:** A regular meeting of the Board of Trustees, Village of Castleton-on-Hudson was held at Castleton Fire Department, 11 Green Avenue on February 28, 2022. The meeting was called to order at 7:00 pm by Mayor Keegan with the Pledge of Allegiance.

## **APPROVAL OF MINUTES:**

- Mayor Keegan moved, Trustee Martin seconded, motion carried to accept the minutes of the February 14, 2022 Regular Meeting, with revisions from Trustee Martin and Trustee D'Aquanni.

**PUBLIC COMMENT:** Mayor Keegan moved, Deputy Mayor Pratico seconded, motion carried to open public comment. Norman Wiley, of the Castleton Cemetery Association, stated that the Department of Public Works had done a great job of cleaning up after the last storm. Mayor Keegan moved, Trustee Martin seconded, motion carried to close public comment.

## **BUSINESS:**

**1. Plan-It Geo Tree Management Plan Presentation:** Mayor Keegan gave an overview of how the Village received funding for the Tree Management Plan and then introduced Alex Hancock and Chris Peiffer of Plan-It Geo. Ms. Hancock and Mr. Peiffer gave a presentation to the public regarding the Tree Management Plan, the majority of which had already been shared with the Board at a previous meeting. It stated that Plan-It Geo had been working since July 2021 first, on an inventory of all the public trees in the Village of Castleton-on-Hudson, and second, on a plan for how the Village should manage upkeep, removal, and new plantings. The presentation stated that 61% of the public trees in the Village were considered to be in either good or excellent condition. Mayor Keegan asked how the Village compared to similar communities. The Plan-It Geo representatives stated that with a proactive planting schedule the Village would be comparable to other similarly sized communities in the Northeast. Mayor Keegan moved, Deputy Mayor Pratico seconded, motion carried to open public comment. Michael O'Neal, of the Planning Board, stated that he was surprised that there were no chestnut trees on the inventory as they were once prevalent in the Village. Joseph Scandurra, of Green Avenue, stated that there are hemlocks behind his house which have a disease and asked if they were his responsibility. The Plan-It Geo representatives stated that it was his responsibility since they were on his property and offered solutions to the issue. Chris Carner, of the Castleton Fire Department, asked what tree would help to prevent erosion on the steep hills in the Village. The Plan-It Geo representatives

suggested fast growing undergrowth and white swamp oak. Mayor Keegan moved, Trustee Martin seconded, motion carried to close public comment. Trustee Samarija asked what makes some species more invasive than others. The Plan-It Geo representatives stated that less invasive species spread less quickly and drop fewer seeds.

- 2. River Access Presentation:** Mayor Keegan and Trustee D'Aquanni presented a brief history of the crossing at the bottom of Scott Avenue. The gate at Scott Avenue has been closed for over twenty years while crossings at the Castleton Boat Club and the Wastewater Treatment Plant are open. There was an agreement between the Village and the New York State Department of Transportation in 1994 to close the crossing to vehicular traffic. In the 1990s and 2000s, fences and a locked gate were installed. In 2009, the Department of Transportation presented three designs for the Village to access the river: an underpass, an overpass, and an at-grade crossing, of which DOT determined that the overpass was the only viable option. In 2010, the Village declined the overpass because of the expense of maintenance and upkeep.

The Village then applied for and received an Estuary Grant from DEC to hire attorneys to negotiate access with DOT. DOT again agreed to build the Village an overpass, for which the Village would still be responsible for maintenance and upkeep. The Village contracted with VHB Consulting to develop designs for an overpass that would not require an elevator. VHB drafted a preliminary sketch for a system of ramps instead of elevators, although this design has not been presented to the Department of Transportation.

Mayor Keegan moved, Deputy Mayor Pratico seconded, motion carried to open public comment.

Chris Carner, of the Castleton Fire Department, asked if the Village had sought out a quote for elevator maintenance as the 2010 proposal had been turned down due to the thought that it would be \$50,000.00 annually for elevator upkeep. The Board stated that they have not sought out a quote. Chris encouraged the Board to get a quote from a professional elevator maintenance company.

Jeff Anzevino from Scenic Hudson stated that Amtrak is looking to put up gates along the river to block off informal recreation areas and access roads, as shown in SH's Regional Access Plan. He explained that Tivoli is in the same situation as Castleton. Jeff talked about the use of at-grade safety gates in CA & IL as a precedent, and encouraged the Village to investigate safe at-grade crossings using these types of gates.

Leah Stone, of South Main Street, asked why the two other gates within the Village were open and if the speed of the trains could be decreased. The Board stated that the two other gates had been grandfathered in due to having pre-existing businesses on the other side of the tracks and that Amtrak is looking to increase speeds rather than decrease them.

Jessica Evans, lives on Main Street, doesn't see a problem with at-grade crossing especially since it's been done in other states and countries.

Norman Wiley, Village resident, asked if the Village has determined how much the liability insurance would be for an at-grade crossing or bridge and if emergency vehicles would have access to cross the tracks. He doesn't think that people will use the bridge. Mr. Wiley stated that we should have the State buy the park and use the money to fund a bus to take residents to Schodack Island State Park for free, if the crossing isn't opened. The Board replied that they have not requested a quote on insurance for a crossing but will look into it and that emergency vehicles would be able to access the park due to the Village having a key to the gate.

Anne DiFiglio stated that the elevators at both the Amsterdam and Albany bridges frequently do not work. She questioned why there are two private crossings in Castleton that are open when the Scott Avenue crossing is closed. Ms. DiFiglio stated that she has travelled on Amtrak where the same trains that went through Castleton continue to Virginia and go through towns at about 10 miles an hour. She also questioned why the Castleton crossing is closed for 24 hours a day when there are no trains going through for 23 hours and 45 minutes a day.

Al Saville, Village resident, stated that he helped to build the pillars that hold the gate. He stated that there was an opening that was deliberately left for access for pedestrians.

Faith Schottenfeld, Village resident, encouraged the Board to get better numbers before making a decision. She is concerned about who will be responsible for cleaning the elevators and stairwell of the bridge. She has been in overpasses that have been dirty and smelled gross. Does the Village have the staff to do this?

Allen Dillenbeck, Village resident, stated that he was unsure of how disabled persons would go up all of the ramps and cross the bridge if there are no elevators. He supports the bridge being closed in the winter.

Suzanne Donnelly, Village resident, stated that she does not support the overpass because it is too big (2000 sq ft each and 30' tall). She agrees with Scenic Hudson that the Village should continue to attempt to get an at-grade crossing. She serves as the President of Castleton-on-Hudson Main Street Association which just put out a policy statement supporting at-grade access. It's posted on their website. Riverfront access could be a real economic driver for our Main Street.

Ted Kulpa, Village resident, stated that the ramp bridge would be larger than his house and he supports the Village continuing to attempt to get an at-grade crossing.

Mandy, Village resident, supports at-grade crossing because it makes the most sense. The elevator/ramps seem like a lot of money. What were the circumstances of the fatalities? How do we reduce liability? Agrees that river access will be an economic driver for Main Street.

Michael O'Neal, Village resident, asked what the time frame would be for both the Board decision and the crossing being built. The Board clarified that DOT has not issued a deadline for the decision, as they did in 2010. The Board would like more time to gather information and even if they made their decision soon the project would not be put into effect for several budget years.

Joseph Scandurra, of Green Avenue, stated that the overpass at the State Park only needed to be 23 feet over the tracks and the ramps will have to be one foot horizontal to one inch vertical in elevation.

Trustee Martin suggested polling what design people were most interested in. Mayor Keegan took a poll: 2 for the bridge with elevators; 5 for the bridge with the ramps; and 22 were interested in pursuing at-grade crossing.

Crystal agrees that at-grade access would be nicer and easier but is concerned that DOT will never agree to at-grade. Reiterated that the only option is yes or no to the bridge.

Suzanne Cecala, Village resident, said that she thinks that momentum is gaining for at-grade crossing. She said that the Village hasn't pursued the legal option or revisiting the ALJ decision.

She mentioned the support letters from Congressmembers Tonko, Delgado and Maloney, and Scenic Hudson's Regional Access Plan.

Mark Wochinger, Village resident, stated that he would have liked to take his son fishing at the park when he was three years old if there was a safe way to cross the tracks. His son is now twenty-one years old and no progress has been made. Mr. Wochinger believes that the structure would not be an eyesore and that the view from the top of the structure would be great for fireworks and the view of Albany. Mr. Wochinger stated that if anyone was going to complain about the bridge blocking the view of the river then they should probably look at the 400 feet of housing along the river side of South Main Street.

Jillian Hines, Village resident, asked if the Village could accept the overpass and still fight for at-grade crossing. The Mayor said that he liked that plan.

Steven Rivers, of the Castleton Boat Club, stated that the Village has the ability to make the bridge a landmark instead of an eyesore by having it feature the Village's name. Mr. Rivers stated that there were multiple possibilities for the Village to create commerce at the park and use that money to offset maintenance costs for the bridge.

Theresa Scandurra, Village resident, asked in a world where cars drive themselves and change the temperature in your home with your phone, why can't we have a safe gate system to cross the tracks? She would like to see a safer gate system where the gate locks while the train is crossing.

Charles Peter, Schodack Town Supervisor, stated that if anything Amtrak will be looking at increasing the speed of the train through Castleton and will be looking at shutting down more at-grade crossings.

Duncan Moss, Village resident, stated that high speed rail can't happen on this section of the Empire Corridor. Doesn't think that it makes sense to take the bridge right now and to pursue an at-grade crossing.

Ken Malloy, Village resident, stated that he doubts that the Department of Transportation would offer us the bridge if they didn't think that we would be able to find access to an at-grade crossing.

Jeff Knaack, Village resident, asked if Department of Transportation has to give permission to any plan, and asked if the Village has pursued magnetic gates with DOT. He believes the Village should pursue an at-grade crossing with a magnetic gate.

Michael Slik, Village resident, asked how the signal gets from the train to the crossing and questioned why the sensor time couldn't be longer to account for train speed.

Mayor Keegan moved, Deputy Mayor Pratico seconded, motion carried to close public comment. The Board thanked everyone who attended, for commenting and for paying attention to this issue.

- 2. APPROPRIATIONS:** Deputy Mayor Pratico moved, Trustee Samarija seconded, motion to approve payment of the abstracts.

Abstract # 14 – Vouchers # 459 - # 461 in the amount of \$ 17650.33.

General Fund: \$ 6,674.12

Water Fund: \$ 3,673.17

Sewer Fund: \$ 7,303.04

**EXECUTIVE SESSION:** At 9:36 pm, Deputy Mayor Pratico moved, Trustee Samarija seconded motion to move into Executive Sessions. At 9:40 pm, Mayor Keegan moved, Trustee Martin seconded, motion to exit Executive Session.

**ADJOURNMENT:** At 9:42 pm Mayor Keegan moved, Trustee D'Aquanni seconded, motion carried to adjourn the meeting.

Respectfully Submitted,  
Padraic Ellis  
Village Clerk-Treasurer