

From the Supervisor's Desk

In the past month there have been some important developments on the federal, state and county levels which may have very positive consequences for our town.

First is the **American Rescue Plan**, which was passed and signed into law by President Biden in March. This bill includes significant assistance to towns and local governments. It is projected that Copake might receive as much as \$370,000 and the county can receive \$11.37 million. The exact details of the Plan will not be definite until the United States Treasury issues guidelines (which had not been issued as I am writing this). In the publicity, there is a wide range of projects on which funds can be spent. Some of the areas highlighted are investments in water, sewer and broadband infrastructure; the public health emergency costs of confronting COVID-19; and the costs of assisting impacted industries such as tourism, travel and hospitality.

I read a piece from the Brookings Institute discussing the American Rescue Plan which observed, "In 10 years, we may look back at this time and ask: *Which places merely spent their money, and which places invested it?*"

For Copake, I suspect that the answer will be someplace in between. We will have COVID-19 related expenses this summer, for instance with the Summer Camp, and these funds will help. But I also think that we need to invest in the future of Copake - and for that we need to look down the road and envision what will really help Copake in a lasting and fundamental way.

Developments at the State Level

In late March, New York State passed The Marijuana Regulation and Taxation Act. As a result of this act, depending on the number of plants, it will no longer be a crime or violation to grow marijuana. Nor will it be a crime or violation to possess or smoke marijuana in small amounts. A town cannot prohibit the smoking of marijuana generally but can prohibit smoking marijuana wherever smoking is prohibited. A town can prohibit smoking marijuana on town property, such as a town park.

As for retail sales, a business can apply to open a retail store unless the town passes a law opting out. A decision to opt out is subject to a permissive referendum. A town can adopt local laws placing restrictions on the time/place/manner of retail dispensaries and onsite consumption establishments.

I was interested to see an article entitled "Cannabis can be a Needed Boost for Rural New York" in a recent publication from the NYS Legislative Commission on Rural Resources. The article states, "The potential marketplace statewide is estimated to be

over \$3 billion dollars in the first year alone and according to the Rockefeller Institute would create 30,000 jobs.” Some towns will also be attracted by the 4% tax imposed on sales from retail dispensaries to consumers.

This is a huge issue which Copake needs to study. I would think that sometime in the next few months the Town Board should arrange for a public hearing or forum on the subject.

One more NYS development: the state has announced \$15 million in grants for homeowners to replace aging septic systems. In Columbia County there are two areas where such grants will be available – Copake Lake and Robinson Pond. I am working with the Columbia County Department of Health to find out more about this and we will get the word out to residents in those areas.

Discussions in Columbia County

At a recent special meeting of the Board of Supervisors, the possibility that the county could charge a 4% occupancy tax on short-term rentals was discussed with the full Board. The tax would be shared with participating towns.

Again, this is a very big and complicated issue. I think that in the next month or so we should probably appoint an ad hoc committee to make recommendations to the Town Board on how to proceed.

I will be monitoring all of these developments on the state, county and local levels and will keep all of you apprised of these various issues as we go forward.

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