

Community Voices: Letters To The Editor

The following letter is the complete text of County Board Chair Barbara Mink's response to a January 24 letter from the five members of the Lansing Town Board. A news summary appears on page 1 and the full text of the Lansing Town Board members' letter appears on page 2.

January 26, 1997

Dear Editor,

The issue at stake here is the well-being of the residents of the municipalities we represent, and maintaining the integrity of the programs we fund.

First, a factual correction. The county has secured mortgages or liens on all of the homes for which we pay taxes except for two. These are not secured because the people who live there receive [federal Supplemental Security Income] SSI payments, and by federal law their titles cannot be taken by the county. So "these situations are handled very carefully," and there is no mystery about them, as the letter writers suggest.

In terms of revamping the structure of [the Department of Social Services] DSS, that should probably be done anyway, given the changes enacted this year by New York State. There are already proposals being made to change the appointment process,

and more thought being given to the role of the DSS commissioner, in light of the added responsibilities and, hopefully, flexibility the new regulations give to local offices.

As far as the DSS being "secretive and unaccountable to the people," such a perception is understandable, given the stringent rules of confidentiality that govern its operations. But those confidentiality rules, which prevent staff from discussing the details of a given case, are set by the state and federal governments, and would hold true no matter who was commissioner.

The "real problems facing this Department and County" are complicated and far-reaching. The scrutiny that goes into the operations of the Sheriff's department has been rigorous but bipartisan and fair. Who would want it otherwise? I would like that same kind of scrutiny for all county departments, and welcome participation from community members who want to get involved. But assuming we have the answers before we actually have the facts won't accomplish the goal we all have, which is trying to improve policies and procedures. I hope we can work together to find some meaningful answers.

- Barbara Mink, Chair
Tompkins County Board of Reps

Village of Lansing May Consider Paid Acquisition of Greenspaces

As the Lansing Village Board reached consensus on seven village goals for 1997 at its regular January 20 meeting, Mayor Donald Hartill asked the trustees to take a reading of the public's attitude about acquiring additional land for the village's long-term Greenways and green areas.

"Over a 10-20 year period when the village is built out, we'll have greenspace," said Hartill, "but will it be the space we want?" Current regulations allow the village to acquire six percent of land in new residential subdivisions, but this limits the planned development of parks and green spaces, he said.

"I think we should take a more pro-active stand to protect the environment," said Trustee Clifford Buck. He'd like to get public input on paying for such land.

Hartill concurred and said that land acquisition shouldn't compromise owners' rights and that the village should be prepared to bear the cost of acquisition.

The present village tax rate of \$1.41 per \$1000 of assessed value currently raises about \$350,000, said Hartill. "Does it make sense," he asked, "to increase the tax base

modestly to have a (land acquisition) fund to acquire desirable land on a pro-active basis?"

The Trustees agreed to gauge public response by speaking to village residents before deciding if the idea should be shared at informational meetings and come to a possible public referendum.

Village trustees established six other goals for 1997, including:

- ♦ developing a structure to deal specifically with senior citizens' needs;
- ♦ reactivating the public safety committee;
- ♦ completing action on a village lighting plan;
- ♦ completing a comprehensive plan for the village;
- ♦ going ahead with a planned office expansion with ground-breaking to occur by June 1; and
- ♦ making as much progress as possible with the North Triphammer Road Corridor Reconstruction project.

We extend our condolences to Nick Barra at the recent loss of his sister Antoinette Seller, of Ithaca.



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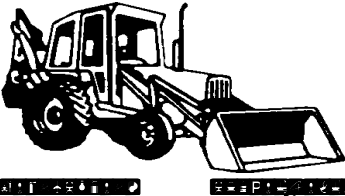
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