



**JUST A COINCIDENCE?** - Was it fate or just good luck? The same week that Lansing Boy Scout Troop # 48 went ice-fishing on Oneida Lake, a Norwegian adventurer completed his solo traverse of Antarctica. (Bet he didn't catch as many fish as our boys!) Here our scouts prepare to venture 1/2 mile onto Oneida Lake.

## Community Voices: Letters To The Editor

February 13, 1997

Dear Editor,

We would like to invite all registered Democrats in the Village and town of Lansing to the first 1997 Lansing Democratic Committee meeting. It will be held Wednesday, February 26 at 7:30 pm in the meeting room at Woodsedge.

This meeting will organize the committee to elect Democratic candidates to Town of Lansing offices in the November, 1997 elections. Irene Stein, chair of the County Democratic Party, will speak about issues of interest to Lansing and Tompkins County Democrats.

Everyone interested in the future of the Town of Lansing is urged to attend. People interested in running for office on the Democratic ticket and/or in working to elect other Democrats are especially welcome.

Come meet your friends and neighbors.

**Marcy E. Rosenkrantz**

Vice Chair, Lansing Democratic Committee  
25 Franklyn Drive

February 8, 1997

Dear Editor,

A blood drive will be held at Pyramid Mall in the Village of Lansing on Monday, February 24, 1997 from 10 am to 3 pm.

Medical technology has made wonderful advances, but there is no substitute for human blood to preserve life during lengthy surgical procedures, when treating accident victims and in countless other procedures.

Please ~~find~~ make the time to save a life by donating blood. Walk-ins are welcome or call 1-800-272-4543 to schedule an appointment at your convenience.

**American Red Cross Blood Services**

### Councilman Cleveland Home From Hospital

Town Councilman Jeffrey Cleveland returned home late last week following an unexpected stay at the Cayuga Medical Center for an emergency appendectomy. A complete recovery is expected.

# Zoning: A View From Dryden

**Ed. Note** - Our Town Council is now reviewing the draft zoning ordinance submitted last November by the Lansing Planning Board prior to holding a series of public informational meetings. As knowledge of other rural towns' experiences with zoning might help frame discussions about potential positive and negative impacts of future zoning in Lansing, we begin our tour around Tompkins County with a look at zoning in Dryden.

**By Matthew Shulman**

Though Dryden Zoning and Building Code Enforcement Officer Henry M. Slater was in college during the debate that preceded adoption of town-wide zoning in 1969, he still hears the echoes of the arguments - both *pro* and *con*.

On one end of the spectrum are folks who believe that if they own property they should have the right to do anything they want with it that doesn't violate state law, recalled Slater. An opposing view is that the community should be able to define permissible land use because what one person does with his or her property affects neighbors' property.

Dryden and Lansing each has its own particularities, said Slater during a January interview in his office, but both towns have basically the same mix of people. Both have a dramatic mix of stable and transient residents and both have folks with differing educational levels and expectations of government services. The debate in Dryden often fell along these lines.

"A large portion of (Dryden's) residential community in the SW part of town wanted zoning," said Slater, "while others felt their rights to use their property were being diminished."

#### Fears

Many long time residents didn't "appreciate" zoning, said Slater. They'd never experienced it; had heard 'horror stories' about some zoning elsewhere that restricted homeowners' rights down to the color you could paint your fence; and feared newcomers trying to remake our town into the cities and suburbs they'd just fled.

#### Hopes

In addition to some people who were concerned about the effects of uncontrolled development on their property values, most town officials back in the 60's were concerned about promoting business and residential development in a way that would protect agriculture, said Slater. Their goals were to channel economic development along the Route 13 corridor; to preserve agriculture; and to promote residential development in the foothills.

Zoning was one tool that Dryden pursued, but it also passed a "Right-To-Farm" law so anyone who wants to build near a working farm must acknowledge the fact that the farm, and all acceptable agricultural practices, will be protected.

#### Evolution of Zoning

Zoning need not be immutable, said Slater. Dryden has had three or four zoning adjustments in the past five years to accommodate changed perceptions of what constitutes appropriate land uses.

Unforeseen circumstances can make portions of a zoning ordinance outdated and require adjustment. As things change, zoning has to be flexible enough to adapt without being so weak that its overriding intent is destroyed. "It's a delicate balance," Slater acknowledged.

Dryden's zoning is structured to respond to residents' requests for changes. "If someone submits a legal petition with 25 signatures, the Town Board will consider their request," said Slater. However, an individual's request for a zoning change without any community support would be less likely to be approved.

#### Outcomes

"There are trade-offs and there's always going to be winners and losers" with any legislation, said Slater. "It may be the luck of the draw as to where you live when (zoning) goes into effect."

The people who are there when zoning is enacted are going to suffer to the extent that their existing rights are diminished, said

Slater, "but the diminishment of rights may be offset by the increased protection you get." The value of this relative trade-off lies at the heart of zoning decisions, he said. By defining what types of land uses are "compatible" within a given part of town, one can eliminate (or at least minimize) certain conflicts.

On the positive side, a look at Dryden's growth from 1983 to 1997 shows that, "an economic boom has developed where zoning exists," Slater pointed out.

On the other hand, "zoning is segmentation," he said. People of modest means or living on a fixed retirement income may be negatively impacted. "The mobile home folks always take the hardest hit," Slater noted.

"Grandfathering" a pre-existing non-conforming use allows the existing business to continue to operate while defining the future direction of the neighborhood's development. If such a business is more than 50 percent destroyed (as was the case when a '94 tornado hit Empire Livestock) a variance is required to rebuild in the area. In the case of Empire, the variance was approved after an agreement to rebuild the facility so loading operations would occur behind the building away from roads and neighbors. "If it had been a tire storage yard, the variance to continue the non-conforming use might not have been granted," explained Slater.

Agriculture has not fared as well as had been hoped, but the problem has less to do with zoning than with technological, marketing and political pricing changes in the national dairy environment, Slater believes.

#### Observations

Slater did have one suggestion for Lansing as our Town Board considers the Planning Board's draft zoning ordinance. "It may be appropriate, said Slater, to have a "Sunset Provision" in any zoning law." This would guarantee that zoning is periodically reviewed to permit evolution as society develops. "We have to look at the age we live in; things evolve so fast."

Home occupations represent one area of rapid growth that no one could have predicted just a few years ago. As mass work centers become fewer and fewer, home occupations will be the thing of the future. "Zoning needs a periodic review to accommodate such unexpected shifts in the way our society functions," he said.

Finally, it's important that the entire community become involved in discussions that will shape the town's future. In small towns like Dryden and Lansing, it's a good bet that this will be the case.

Interviews with personalities familiar with zoning in other rural Tompkins County towns will appear as time and space permit.

- Ed.

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