

MINUTES OF THE CITY COUNCIL MEETING  
HELD ON  
MARCH 8, 2017  
7:00 P.M.

The regular meeting of the Mechanicville City Council was held at the Senior Center, North Main Street, Mechanicville, New York on Wednesday March 8, 2017.

Roll Call:	Mayor Baker	Present
	Commissioner Gilheany	Present
	Commissioner Higgins	Present
	Commissioner Hipwell	Present
	Deputy Commissioner Foard	Present

Mayor Baker: Called the meeting to order at 7:00 P.M.  
Don Fletcher led the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

Motion to accept the February 8, 2017 Minutes:

Motion: Commissioner Gilheany Seconded by: Commissioner Higgins

Roll Call: AYES: 5 NAYS: 0

Commissioner reports were as follows:

Mayor Baker asked the City Historian, Paul Loatman, to give his annual report. Mayor Baker thanked Mr. Loatman for doing a great job.

City Historian, Paul Loatman gave his annual report, which has been attached to the meeting minutes.

Mayor Baker stated that he received a letter from the Water Derby committee and the Derby will be on April 2, 2017. Lastly, Mayor Baker wanted to have a brief conversation in reference to the Dog Park, he stated that he appreciates the Girls Scout Troops patience. Mayor Baker stated that the City Attorney Val Serbalik is working on the legality of the Dog Park but Mayor Baker wanted to hear from the Council to make sure they approve of the Park which has the possibility of being located behind the playground on South Main Street. He stated he didn't want to proceed with anything if there were any objections.

Deputy Commissioner Foard stated that she doesn't have any objections but that she is concerned about the noise for the residents that live in that area.

Mayor Baker stated that the Dog Park will be located down over the hill in the back of the playground which should protect some of the noise he also stated that the park will only operate in the day hours. Mayor Baker stated the Council will be working together with the City Attorney to get proper paperwork that is needed to deal with the legality of it and that the

Council will get back to the Girls Scout Troop 1114 after tonight's meeting because it will be discussed in executive session.

Attorney Serbalik added a few things. He stated that the location is zoned residential which allows parks and recreation so there will be no need to go before the zoning board. Attorney Serbalik stated that he will talk to the Council in executive session but would like the person in charge of organizing this to call his office and schedule an appointment so they can discuss what the Council has proposed. Attorney Serbalik informed the members of Girls Scout 1114 that the City will require that the Girl Scout Troop to obtain a liability policy. He suggested that when they met with him they have the information with them.

Tara Morelli from the Girls Scout Troop 1114 stated that the Girls Scouts were just going to help create the dog park as a gift to the City and the City would maintain it from there on out.

Mayor Baker stated that is not how the Council understood it and they would talk about it in executive session.

Commissioner Hipwell stated that he would like to obtain input from the people that live on South Main Street.

Tara Morelli from Girl Scout Troop 1114 stated the they have started to set up a committee between citizens of the City that would meet with the Council and they would continue to maintain the property together but, the idea has always been that it was going to be gifted to the City, and help create the foundation of what was needed to be done in order to have the city residents help to continue to maintain it with the city employees.

Ray Martin asked that if that area is on city property already wouldn't this city have a liability policy that will cover any liability if you went there with your dog.

Mayor Baker stated there has to be a rider on another policy to help cover it. He informed the Girl Scout Troop 1114 that he would be getting back to them.

Commissioner Gilheany stated that she was hoping to have a year-end report ready for this meeting but will definitely have it for the next council meeting.

Commissioner Higgins stated that on Monday, March 13, 2017 NYSEG will be starting South Main Street where they will be putting the main line in, they are hoping to have the main line complete in 6 weeks and then will begin all the services and they are hoping it is complete by June 1, 2017.

Commissioner Hipwell stated that on behalf of himself and the City Council he would like to thank the Mechanicville Fire Department for a job well done on two (2) major fires in the City last month. He thanked the mutual aid departments, Clifton Park ambulance that had to take a patient out of the Saratoga Avenue fire, and the Mechanicville Police Department who all did an outstanding job. He also stated that a fireman was transported to the hospital from the South

Main Street fire but was released the same night. Again, Commissioner Hipwell thanked everyone for an outstanding job done.

City Attorney Serbalik requested an executive session on the litigation of USDA matters, and tax sale matters.

Supervisor Tom Richardson stated that the upstairs portion of the XO tower was renovated by volunteers this past year and they are starting to work on the part of the museum that is going to be hooked to the building and the train station next door. Supervisor Richardson stated that there is a group from Ballston Lake working with the Chamber of Commerce to put a model train replica of the railroad yard upstairs in the XO tower and it will be open in the summer for the public to view.

Deputy Commissioner Foard stated that the tax collection began on February 21, 2017 and as of this date about 46% of the warrant has been collected. She stated that the Accounts Office will be open this Saturday March 11, 2017 from 9:00 A.M. to 12:00 P.M. and tax collection ends March 15, 2017.

Chief Waldron had nothing to report.

#### Public Comments:

Barbara McGuire of 101 South Second Street stated that she is aware that the Council sent a letter to withdraw support for the Hudson Riverview Apartments was sent to Homes and Community Renewal but she is asking the Council to make a phone call and reiterate that three-fourths of this City does not want this project to go through.

Mayor Baker responded by saying that he actually had a phone conversation a week and a half ago with HCR and he would like to come back and speak with us to see what we would like to see up there. Mayor Baker also stated that he has heard and not sure how factual it is but, people have been hired to go to the Senators and Assemblyman to get them to support the project but, Mayor Baker was told through HCR that they will not support it if the City Council of Mechanicville does not support it.

Barbara McGuire also stated that there was an article in The Express stating that the amount of arrests and tickets increased in the City and she just wants to make sure knowing that that there is no thought to dis ban the Mechanicville Police Department.

Mayor Baker emphasized that while he is in office that will never happen.

Joseph Micklas, business owner, stated he has seen a letter written by Mr. Dirr and there was a statement in the letter that and he wanted to alleviate confusion that they were withdrawing from their meeting with the planning board. Mr. Micklas asked if anyone has responded to the letter asking why there is confusion since there is no project and to clarify to Mr. Dirr that they would have to resubmit an application to move forward. He also stated that when someone reads the

letter you get a clear impression that the group is thinking there is action out there and they are just withdrawing their modification plan.

Mayor Baker stated that he has personally told Bill McNeary, Chris Dirr, and their people that this project has not been approved and they need to go through the whole process again.

Mr. Micklas stated that what is said to someone over the phone means nothing and he is urging the City Council to put it in writing. He stated they are clearly moving forward with something they think they have and the Council and the City Attorney have clearly made a statement that it is not the case. He stated that if it is put in writing then that will hold up in any further actions or litigations. Mr. Micklas stated that there is a large gap in the building code policies and the master plan that the City has adopted over a long period of time that makes the this type of zoning and project fit into the conformity of the master plan. He stated that the City is doing things against what they adopted in their own business.

Kim Dunn of 250 South Main Street asked that in resolution 13-17 it states the City pays \$15000 for Jeff Honeywell and was wondering if essentially that means we have two (2) City Attorneys?

Mayor Baker informed Mrs. Dunn that Jeff Honeywell is the contractual attorney; he takes care of the entire City's contracts, labor issues, etc.

Kim Dunn asked if we pay him \$15000 per year no matter what? She also asked that if throughout the year we have no contracts and only use them once or maybe not at all we still pay \$15000?

Mayor Baker told her yes that was correct but he did say that in the four (4) years he has been here the City has used them quite frequently not only for contracts but for labor issues.

Kim Dunn asked on resolution 14-17 the funding application for USDA, is this application to get more grant money or loan money?

Mayor Baker stated that resolution 14-17 is for Barton and Loguidice to provide engineering services. Mr. Baker stated we are still trying to get more grant money but this is to continue the process we are already working on. It is the \$1,000,000 water project. We have a \$3,000,000 grant and a \$2,000,000 zero interest loan which is \$5,000,000 total.

Commissioner Gilheany added this is an additional \$1,000,000 on top of that.

Kim Dunn asked about resolution 16-17 in reference to the water meters. She asked why there are two (2) separate bids out one (1) for the equipment and one (1) for the installation. Mrs. Dunn thought it would make more sense for the company the equipment was bought from to install it since they would be more familiar with the product.

Commissioner Higgins informed her that one company sells them but does not do the installation they only sell the products.

Kim Dunn asked if the City could install them ourselves.

Commissioner Higgins said we could but it would take too long. These companies will do all the scheduling with the homeowners and they will go in the evenings and weekends to get it complete.

Kim Dunn asked what the time frame would be since we are replacing the entire City. Is there a start and end date.

Commissioner Higgins stated they are hoping it is done before the next meter reading.

Kim Dunn asked in reference to resolution 18-17 what the cost of LOSAP was for 2017 and if the projected cost for 2018 was known.

Mayor Baker stated that he doesn't have it with him but can certainly get that for her.

Kim Dunn also stated that resolution 19-17 states the City is changing insurance companies again and it seems like it is being done frequently recently and wanted to know why this is being changed.

Mayor Baker stated the City moved to a different plan for our retirees and that plan did not work at all, it was costing people a lot of money.

Kim Dunn asked why someone didn't check that out before the initial switch. She stated that the City tends to jump into things and then have to back out of them.

Mayor Baker stated that one of the big issues with the policy in place is that you can't go to Albany Medical Facilities, and you can't go to Saratoga Hospital. You would think United Health Care would allow you to go anywhere.

Kim Dunn stated she understands and does not blame the City for changes but that she thinks someone should have done their homework before switching in the first place.

Mayor Baker stated he agrees with her.

Kim Dunn stated that in the resolution for the City Assessor that she was blown away by the hourly rate and wants to know the benefit of switching her from a salary employee to an hourly rate.

Commissioner Gilheany stated it was for accountability.

Paul Loatman stated that a few years ago there was a report that there was a huge amount of water that was missing and would like to know what the situation is on that now.

Commissioner Higgins stated that they are suspecting a lot of the meters are reading incorrectly.

Paul Loatman asked if the City knows how much water is unaccounted for.

Commissioner Higgins stated he does not know at this time but can get that information.

Paul Loatman asked if the Hudson Riverview Apartment project didn't exist what approvals and from whom would people need to get to put a project there; whose approval would be required. Mayor Baker stated that the zoning is all set so it will have to be the planning board.

Attorney Serbalik stated that any application would go before the Zoning/Planning Commission. He further stated that as far as he knew the prior project of Mr. Dirr involved an application for state subsidies. The City Council has voiced opposition to the application for subsidies and he City Council was successful in getting that project squashed, as the application was withdrawn. Attorney Serbalik stated at this time there is no project before the Zoning/Planning Commission. He stated he was unsure if any new applications for that property have been filed but the prior project is dead as of now. He stated that if someone wants to submit a new application, and it is similar to what was contingently approved by the Board in the past, which was an apartment complex, and it complies with the zoning; it would go directly to the Zoning/Planning Commission. At that point Mr. Serbalik stated that the Zoning/Planning Commission would review the project and conduct a site plan review.

Mr. Loatman stated that the City being opposed to this project doesn't have any legal impact on this project.

Attorney Serbalik stated that in respect to the "Dirr" project they came in and said they were going to build this project contingent upon obtaining the subsidies. Mr. Serbalik stated that the Council disapproved of the application for them to receive subsidies.

Mr. Loatman asked that if the Council disapproves does that negate the possibility of that happening.

Attorney Serbalik responded that Council opposition to state subsidies may possibly negate the possibility of any developers' ability to obtain subsidized financing, approval of a project is totally out of the Council's control and would be before the Zoning/Planning Commission.

Mr. Loatman stated that he spoke with a member of the zoning/planning commission and they the member told Mr. Loatman that he wasn't sure if this project was dead or alive.

Attorney Serbalik stated that it is dead. He stated that despite what Mr. Micklas said the letter from Mr. Dirr was unequivocal. Basically it stated they were withdrawing the application for the project, and to pull the project from the zoning/planning schedule. Mr. Serbalik stated they withdrew the project, therefore there is nothing for zoning/planning commission to rule on until they or any other applicant files a new application.

Ray Martin wanted to thank the Council for all the wonderful work they do. He stated that in reference to the "Dirr" withdrawal letter that the key is they want to withdraw the modification to their plan. He stressed the word modification. He reiterated they did not say they want to withdraw their plan. He stated that they are dealing with some very sophisticated lawyers and

lobbyists and it would be in the City's best interest to look very carefully at the fine letters that are involved. Mr. Martin asked the Mayor if he would be willing to write the letter that Mr. Micklas asked about.

Mayor Baker stated he will talk to the Council and the City Attorney about this tonight but will tentatively say yes.

John Enzien from the Mechanicville Housing Authority wanted to follow up on the letter that was sent by Chris Dirr. Mr. Enzien stated that he believes the developer has just said to the City that they are withdrawing their application for site plan review and it should not be interpreted that they are withdrawing their application to New York State HCR for millions of dollars in tax credits. Mr. Enzien stated that they are in fact moving forward and that he believes that by sending that letter to the City that they are saying to the State (because their site plan was already submitted) that they are already granted site plan approval. He stated that the State is getting that impression and the only way to correct that impression is to send a three (3) sentence letter back to Chris Dirr and Mr. Enzien recommends that HCR is copied on that letter, informing them that there are many problems with the application. He states they embellish a lot of points and they point out there is a public bus stop at Price Chopper. He states that it is known that there is no public bus stop, but if you are a representative from HCR counting on the validity of their application you would have that impression. Mr. Enzien states that he could sit here all night and fault the application. He also states that they are a reputable developer and they do a good job administering these programs throughout the country and that they do build quality luxurious housing and that was his personal initial concern from the beginning. Mr. Enzien stated he believes that they have failed to take into account the quality of housing that they are offering and laying into the age of our communities housing stock (much of it deteriorated and much of it in need of housing rehabilitation repair programs). Mr. Enzien stated that if you have a developer being financially backed by the United States Government Building for quarter million dollar units with all the modern amenities and putting them up against 1940 housing that lacks many of the modern amenities that new construction units of today have and you offer these units at the same market rent then you are going to create a glove of vacancies in the community. He added this would stress the already strained neighborhoods and this would deny landlords the revenue then they will have trouble paying their taxes and maintaining their properties. Mr. Enzien stated they will be competing against the private housing stock. He stated that they are supposed to demonstrate in these applications that their developer will not have any negative effects on the private housing stock and Mr. Enzien believes that they have failed to demonstrate to show that. Mr. Enzien stated that one of the ways they demonstrated in the application to the State is that they are coming up with comparability's that their rents are in fact below street rents in the City of Mechanicville 11%-33% on average. Mr. Enzien informed everyone that that is not true their rents are dead on par and in some cases slightly above which will also create a problem for the local private landlords. Mr. Enzien stated this problem will be exasperated over a long period of time. Mr. Enzien stated they are creating that picture to the State even though it is not true because additionally their market catch bin area is virtually unheard of. He goes on to state that no community becomes 1% of the primary market area that they have carved out for Mechanicville. To put that into perspective he states Saratoga Springs is approximately 29 square miles to make them 1% of the equivalent size primary market area you would have to draw 3000 square mile around the radius of the City of Saratoga Springs. Mr. Enzien states that

from the beginning there has been no public input and that the application lacks primary information that is required in the application and among them is a public hearing, community surveys, feedback, and also the local waiting list of the Public Housing Authorities. He states these are considered proper sources of information and he noticed in the 2015 application they inflated the Mechanicville Housing Authorities waiting list at over 500 people when in all actuality there were 80 people on the waiting list. He reiterates he could debate the merits of the application all day but until it is communicated to HCR they have no way of knowing what the alternative facts are. Mr. Enzien states he believes it is imperative that the Council write a letter to Mr. Durr telling him that he is subject to the local zoning and planning board requirements because essentially Mr. Enzien believes that Mr. Durr's letter follows suit to what he has done since 2014, which is operated in non-transparent ways, to reinterpret our master plan, to know he is exempt from our local zoning and planning board requirements. Mr. Enzien states he disagrees with all of Mr. Durr's actions and how he has handled this matter, he goes on to say that if this product was so good why is it that no one knew the true nature and scope of this project until four (4) months ago. Mr. Enzien states that only Mr. Durr's actions could be credited for that and that we need to communicate with the State and he recommends we have our Assembly person, and our Senator contacting them and letting them know there are other concerns. Mr. Enzien states he has objective reasons for not supporting this project. He states he is not against low income which is evident by Mechanicville's size of our subsidized housing inventories which is much larger than our surrounding communities. He states this developer is trying to have it all ways and that it is time he is called to the table. Mr. Enzien states he respects their right to pursue their project; he respects their right to continue to submit their application to HCR, and he is hoping the State says to them in a denial letter and that they need to go back to the community and have surveys, public hearings, etc. Mr. Enzien wants to know why Mr. Durr is afraid to have dialogue with this community. Mr. Enzien reiterates this is a wonderful program they are offering to the Capital Region because it is needed, there is a lack of affordable housing, but it is non the less the wrong fit for the community of Mechanicville because we have already the most affordable rents in Saratoga County. He states that Mr. Durr's own application states that, we have lower property values, lower median incomes and with that comes lower rents. Mr. Enzien employs the Council to get a letter out to HCR as soon as possible.

Barry Carola of 22 South Main Street asked if it is possible to get a bus route back in the City of Mechanicville. He states he rode the CDTA bus to work, he caught it at the corner of Park Avenue and Main Street, and kids were riding it to Hudson Valley Community College. He stated years ago they petitioned for it and went to Supervisor Richardson but nothing could be done and he was wondering if the Council could try and get a bus route. He stated once you get to Broad Street in Waterford the entire CDTA opens up.

Commissioner Higgins recalls that at the time they stopped the route because there were not enough riders.

Barry Carola stated that was there position and that was reiterated to him by Mr. Richardson but he stated he rode the bus for a few years and there were 10 or 12 people that got on. He stated that CDTA is publically funded and we are one of the fastest growing counties in the State so he is confused as to why we don't have bus service.



Commissioner Hipwell stated that he received a call to his office a year or two (2) ago but they said it came up in a survey and it wouldn't work for the City of Mechanicville.

Barry Carola stated he feels Saratoga County is under-served when it comes to the miles for our population. He thinks it would be good for our community to have this service.

#### Resolutions:

RESOLUTION 13-17: Honeywell Law firm as Independent Legal Counsel

Moved by: Commissioner Hipwell

Seconded by: Commissioner Higgins

AYES: 5      NAYS: 0

RESOLUTION 14-17: Barton & Loguidice to perform engineering services as it relates to the USDA funding application regarding the City Water Supply and Distribution System.

Moved by: Commissioner Higgins

Seconded by: Mayor Baker

AYES: 5      NAYS: 0

RESOLUTION 15-17: Barclay Damon to review and prepare all documents required in the Financing process for the City Water Supply and Distribution System.

Moved by: Commissioner Gilheany

Seconded by: Commissioner Higgins

AYES: 5      NAYS: 0

RESOLUTION 16-17: Publication for bids for contract 1A – water meter equipment purchase and contract 1B water meter equipment installation.

Moved by: Commissioner Higgins

Seconded by: Commissioner Hipwell

AYES: 5      NAYS: 0

RESOLUTION 17-17: Change the Board of Assessment Review from the second Tuesday of July to Tuesday July 18, 2017.

Moved by: Mayor Baker  
Seconded by: Deputy Commissioner Foard  
AYES: 5 NAYS: 0

RESOLUTION 18-17: Approval of the Volunteer Firefighters Service Award Program list.

Moved by: Mayor Baker  
Seconded by: Commissioner Hipwell  
AYES: 5 NAYS: 0

RESOLUTION 19-17: Change from the current United Health Care to CDPHP

Moved by: Deputy Commissioner Foard  
Seconded by: Commissioner Gilheany  
AYES: 4 NAYS: 0 Abstain: 1 Mayor Baker

RESOLUTION 20-17: Change Assessor position from salary to hourly.

Moved by: Commissioner Gilheany  
Seconded by: Mayor Baker  
AYES: 5 NAYS: 0

RESOLUTION 21-17: Contract with Barton and Loguidice to perform planning and administration to restore the Train Station.

Moved by: Mayor Baker  
Seconded by: Commissioner Hipwell  
AYES: 5 NAYS: 0

RESOLUTION 22-17: Bernard P. Donegan, Inc. designated as financial consultant to the City of Mechanicville.

Moved by: Commissioner Gilheany  
Seconded by: Commissioner Higgins  
AYES: 5 NAYS: 0

RESOLUTION 23-17: Payroll and Vouchers.

Moved by: Commissioner Gilheany  
Seconded by: Commissioner Higgins  
AYES: 5      NAYS: 0

RESOLUTION 24-17: South Street Safety Improvements.

Moved by: Mayor Baker  
Seconded by: Commissioner Higgins  
AYES: 5      NAYS: 0

NEW BUSINESS: None

OLD BUSINESS: None

Executive Session: Time 8:00

INTRODUCED BY: Deputy Commissioner Foard  
SECONDED BY: Commissioner Higgins  
AYES: 5      NAYS: 0

## ANNUAL REPORT OF THE CITY HISTORIAN FOR 2016

Submitted by Paul Loatman, Jr.

Mechanicville City Historian-January 12, 2017

A “Registered Public Historian” who serves on the Advisory Council for the Center for Applied Historical Research (CAHR) at The University at Albany and its Public Historians Education Committee, I am a Member of the Association of Public Historians of New York State (APHNYS), the Organization of American Historians and the National Council for History Education. CAHR acts as a clearing-house for municipal historians; organizes training seminars and workshops on behalf of APHNYS; maintains a website for local historians; and promotes the professional development of those seeking to become APHNYS “Registered Historians.” The group will begin serving this year as an editorial board for the State University of New York Press, proposing series for publication in areas of expertise of Board Members. CAHR’s website maintains a link to the Mechanicville History page.

This report reviews the roles of the municipal historian as defined by APHNYS: research and writing, teaching and public presentations, historic preservation, and organization and advocacy. Copies will be filed with the Saratoga County Historian and the Office of the State Historian.

Like my colleagues, I receive genealogical inquiries on a regular basis which are technically beyond the purview of local historians, per APHNYS guidelines. Heritage Quest Online makes federal census data and local municipal Directories readily available to the general public. However, since I maintain an alphabetized hard-copy database that also includes New York State Census returns for Mechanicville not available on-line for 1865, 1875, 1892, 1905, 1915, and 1925, I am able to provide information not otherwise accessible to genealogists. I am also fortunate that the current secretary of the local Catholic parish readily responds to my questions relating to queries I receive from people searching for ancestors who may be listed in parish death and baptismal records. Heritage Hunters of Saratoga County has also published on-line data for our local cemeteries and is a source to which I refer people. Given our community’s immigrant history, I receive a large number of inquiries which can be complicated by the fact that many people with “Mechanicville” mailing addresses lived in municipal jurisdictions outside of our community and they do not show up in our records.

Other types of questions regarding local history most often come from people accessing the City’s History page website which includes over fifty articles I have published on local history as well as my e-mail address. The nature of these inquiries can be inferred by describing some of my responses to their questions in the past year:

1. I provided the Reunion Committee of the MHS Class of 1966 photos of the old Mechanicville High School on North Main St. and the first photos of the new high school in Halfmoon. The Class of 1966 was the last graduating class to attend the old high school and used the pictures in its reunion publication. Each year, “MHS 50<sup>th</sup> Graduation Committees” contact me with similar requests.

2. I provided Ann Marie Barber Gibson with copies of the bi-centennial 1976 book, “Saratoga County Heritage,” the photographic collection, “A Day on the Life of Saratoga County-2002,” and my own book published by Arcadia Press on Mechanicville that she wanted to present to her uncle who maintains a keen interest in local history

while celebrating his 100<sup>th</sup> birthday. During our discussions, Mrs. Gibson revealed that her work for the State Department of Health involves analysis of mortality statistics. She noted that misunderstandings sometimes arise among colleagues regarding differential immigrant group mortality rates. In such instances, she has referred them to my articles describing the dangers of the working conditions in the local paper mill and railroad industries. Sharing this perspective gave me a new perspective on the relevance of studying local history.

3. Helen Wolf of Shelby Michigan sought information regarding the electrocution of an ancestor who died in 1926 while employed by the Boston and Maine Railroad. A search of local records failed to turn up any evidence of the event, not surprisingly. I suggested that the tragedy most likely occurred outside of Mechanicville since railroaders based here covered a wide geographical area. I suggested that she contact the Boston & Maine Historical Society which maintains an on-line site for further information.

4. Frequently, new property owners seek information about the history of their recently-purchased homes. First, I begin with the obvious suggestion of advising them to examine copies of their deeds and to check with the City Commissioner of Accounts for tax records. When possible, City Directories cross-referenced with census data permit me to trace ownership back into the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Numerical City Directories are especially useful in this regard, but few of them date earlier than the 1950s.

5. After reading my article "Ye Olde Fire Laddies" on-line, Robert LaDow of Florida contacted me seeking information on his ancestor, Daniel LaDow, who was Village President in 1883 and founded Mechanicville's second fire company in 1884. I sent him digitized photos of his forbearer and of the fire company's annual dinner held in 1930. In the course of our correspondence, it occurred to me that he was related to Colonel Ellsworth's family, as was Richard Hoover of Washington State. Previously, Richard had donated the Bible that Col. Ellsworth is believed to have carried with him when he was killed in Alexandria Virginia in 1861. After contacting Dick, I put him in touch with his proverbial and literal "long lost cousin," leading to one of those unforeseen serendipitous outcomes of engaging in local history.

6. Following inquiries from local residents, Mayor Baker and I discussed the historical background that led to the erection of the 1962 Veteran's Monument that was recently relocated from North Main Street and rededicated in Tallmadge Park on November 12<sup>th</sup>. We each agreed that the monument sought to recognize contributions of all men and women who had performed military service for our country during times of war. Memorials dedicated exclusively to those who died in those wars have been established in other parts of our larger community, including the Mechanicville High School Auditorium and the Saratoga National Cemetery.

7. I provided Fr. Tom Morrette, Pastor of All Saints on The Hudson Catholic Parish, two articles explaining the origins of the celebration of the August 15th Feast of The Assumption that the local Italian community has been observing since 1903. Fr. Morrette has gone to great lengths to continue the tradition during his four-year tenure here and wished to become better informed regarding the history of the celebration.

8. Following recent changes in American foreign policy, I interviewed Anthony Cocozzo, former Superintendent of Mechanicville Public Schools, on his memories of traveling to Cuba in the early 1950s with his family. Tony and other family members recently re-discovered photos taken at that time in Havana, sparking a discussion of the

background behind the trip and the impressions it made on him as a young boy. One observation indelibly impressed upon his memory was the advice offered by his father that Havana casino workers should never be offered tips because their supervisors regularly compelled them to turn them over to management. This young boy's first experience with exploitation of the downtrodden under the Batista regime in power at that time left a strong impression on him. I am not aware of anyone else in our community who has had similar experiences.

9. Christopher Wright, whose grandfather was a former Mechanicville resident, sent me two digitized photos taken of his ancestor who was serving in the U.S. military service in 1942. The family has always assumed that the pictures were taken in Mechanicville. However, close examination of the photos presented urban view-scapes of a different community, and confirmed by the fact that automobiles in the photos displayed California license plates. Strong personal memories are not always supported by factual evidence, a lesson that is sometimes hard to accept. This experience confirms the advantage of digitizing photographic records which can then be closely examined to reveal details not otherwise noticed.

10. Frank Tornello of Schenectady inquired about the status of the building on Route 67 in Willow Glen that once served as one of Mechanicville's elementary schools that he attended as a third grader. After the District's schools were consolidated at the end of the 1957-1958 academic year, the school became a municipal building for the Town of Stillwater. Recently, it was converted into a private residence. The school was part of a network of six neighborhood elementary buildings, a reminder of how decentralized education was at that time.

11. Robert Kasper of Plattsburg, researching Lithuanian ancestors who arrived here in the 1890s, has kept up a long-running correspondence with me regarding the matter. Searches in local newspaper, church and cemetery records demonstrate that tracking immigrant history is difficult. Spelling of surnames was inconsistent [ e.g., "Kaspar," "Casper," "Kasparowitz" appearing in various documents referring to the same person]; changes made depending upon the literacy, writing skills-and empathy- of the record keepers all cloud the issue of tracking the movement of immigrants in America.

12. Judy Farnan of Stillwater inquired about the history of the brick yards that were a mainstay of the local economy a century ago. I referred her to an on-line article I had written about the industry's history that explained the tenuous financial arrangements surrounding the business. I also explained the difficulty of identifying exact yard locations because what were once nine separate enterprises were periodically consolidated by "brick trusts" from New York City and Boston. The industry depended upon the labor of Italian immigrants who supported families in the Old Country by commuting annually between Mechanicville and Naples during the March to November brick making "season." By the 1930s, the fading industry was reduced to a single local yard which used by local boot-leggers until it was raided by Federal Revenue Agents. The subsequent trial led to the conviction of a number of local citizens in Federal District Court in Utica in 1936. The transcript of the trial, in my possession, makes for interesting reading. Judy shared colorful details of this part of the industry's history based upon her family's recollections, as have many other older residents who appear to relish recalling Mechanicville's flaunting of Prohibition laws.

13. Paul Giersch of Oregon sought information on ancestors who had lived here a century ago. I traced his family history in census, cemetery records, and local Directories dating to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century as well as photographs I possess taken in 1897. My discovery of his collateral relative living here led me to arrange a meeting between her and Giersch during a visit he later made to Mechanicville. During the visit, we met in Hudson View Cemetery where I helped him locate ancestral gravesites..

14. I met with Fr. Tom Morrette in October and provided him with a list of “benchmarks” outlining important dates in local Catholic history while drafting the Program to celebrate the conversion of the recently-closed Assumption Church into the Fr. Joseph Scerbo Ministry Center. The building, erected by Irish immigrants in 1852, served as the focal point of Catholic life in the community continuously from 1852 until its closing in 2009. Since then, it had remained in a state of limbo.

15. In November, I met with the owner of the “Fort house” on the corner of Park and Second Avenues who has been restoring the building following a devastating fire. I pointed out the building’s history as the first home in Mechanicville erected with indoor plumbing connected to the Village’s sewer system in 1897. This innovation led the Village to require all residences to connect to the municipal sanitary system. Quite simply, this enlightened step greatly improved the public health of the community and significantly reduced child mortality. Few villages in New York State had taken such steps as early as this date. During the present owner’s restoration, original wood flooring, stair casing, and banisters as well as a stained glass window have been salvaged.

16. Mayor Dennis Baker, in anticipation of making improvements to the Tallmadge Park bandstand, asked me if it qualified as a “historic structure” that might restrict attempts to rehabilitate it. While noting that the term “historic structure” lacks precise definition, I revealed that photos dating to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century confirm that the original bandstand differed in size and shape from the current structure which was probably erected sometime in the 1920s. Furthermore, the current bandstand has been altered a number of times since it was built, a fact clearly shown in later photographs I have examined. Future adjustments that do not alter the building’s footprint will preserve its structural integrity.

17. Commissioner Tim Hipwell raised questions about the history of the large cannon mounted in Tallmadge Park, regarding its age and its original placement. Photos dating to the 1890s when the Park was turned over to the Village of Mechanicville show that the piece was originally located in the northwest corner of the Park. However, how it got here in the first place is far from certain. It was located on the property when Francis Tallmadge deeded the land to the Village of Mechanicville in 1895. A local ordnance historian who examined the cannon’s markings at my request believes that it is an Army piece cast during the 1830s in a federal arsenal in Virginia. It is also possible that it came from the Watervliet Arsenal which donated surplus cannons of indeterminate age to local communities in the 1880s and 1890s. Stillwater acquired such a piece at that time, according to local newspaper records. However, I have been unable to date to find any record regarding the Tallmadge Park cannon’s origins, but will continue to research the issue.

I have made some interesting acquisitions through donors’ generosity and their appreciation for history. Mrs. Al Collins of Schaghticoke bequeathed the original Bible used by the Baptist congregation when it began services on Park Avenue in 1899. She

also provided me with the 1911-1912 ledger of Justice of The Peace, T.J. Finigan, who held court in the Stillwater portion of Mechanicville Village. Finigan's docket primarily dealt with vagrancy cases, in modern parlance, the problem of the homeless. The favored solution to dealing with this "floating proletariat" required shipping the problem elsewhere. Fines and penalties were suspended if violators left town, promising never to return. Typically, this age-old "solution" employed since the passage of the Elizabethan Poor Laws in the 16th century, never really worked as evidenced by the number of repeat offenders noted in the ledger. The Village's problems with transients were exacerbated by the fact "hoboes" often wound up deposited in railroad centers like Mechanicville.

Mandy Lane of Halfmoon presented me with a collection of documents and a Bible from her late grandmother's collection touching upon the history of the Methodist Church in Mechanicville. I have turned over this material to the Director of the Mechanicville Public Library to add to its local history files.

Mrs. Jane Perkinson of Newtown Pennsylvania sent me an embossed copy of a late 19<sup>th</sup> century postcard picturing the Grand Central Hotel previously located on Park Avenue on the present site of The End Zone Restaurant. She had already donated a collection of more than 100 historic picture post cards to me a year ago. A former resident and descendant of the Fort family which opened a store here in 1869, she selflessly purchases and donates historic postcards or other artifacts relating to Mechanicville history she sees advertised on e-bay. Her commitment to preserving our history is exemplary.

Meg Canavan of East Dorset Vermont donated a large collection of newspaper articles, photos, memorabilia, and original correspondence related to the Hewson and Canavan families of Mechanicville and Stillwater. Of special interest are four pieces of correspondence dating to 1898 related to Eddie Hewson's service as a cavalryman in the Spanish American War. Hewson fought alongside Teddy Roosevelt and the Rough Riders at San Juan Hill in Cuba. I sought the advice of Jennifer O'Neill of the NYS Archives to suggest possible placement of this material. She provided me with a list of repositories which include original documents related to Spanish American War that may be interested in acquiring this material. I hope to place the entire collection where it will be preserved and accessible to researchers. My preference is to keep the entire collection together because, while it documents one family's history of military service from the Civil War through the conflict in Viet Nam, it is much more than a simple genealogical artifact. The material was turned over to me with that intent in mind.

Warren Broderick, a long-time historian in Lansingburgh, sent me a copy of an April 26, 1864 notice in the *Troy Daily Times* announcing the opening of sash and blind mill in Mechanicville by Robert A. Moore. Moore became an important factor in the business that became a major source of local employment through the rest of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The fact that a Troy newspaper ran such an announcement indicates that Mechanicville business interests attracted attention beyond the community a few short years following the Village's municipal incorporation.

Former Mayor Anthony Sylvester sent me a copy of a November 1842 "Waybill" listing the names of three Mechanicville residents who traveled to Troy at that time. The Waybill is intriguing because the firm providing the service offered passage by both stagecoach and canal packet. However, the document does not indicate which method of transport these passengers took. I have tried a number of research avenues to find an



answer which may help us better understand how a small settlement like Mechanicville had contact with the larger world at that time, and am seeking the help of Troy historians, including Warren Broderick, in resolving this issue.

The most interesting of the quarterly CAHR meetings I attended this year involved a “behind the scenes” tour of the State Education Building in Albany in July arranged by fellow-CAHR member, retired State legislator Jack McEnany, that was conducted by a former Education Department staff member. The building at one time housed both the State Library and the State Museum and it continues to host meetings of the State Board of Regents. It may be no exaggeration to say that each room is a museum unto itself relating an important part of the Empire State’s history. It is unfortunate that more members of the public cannot get to tour this historic site.

Saratoga County local historians met in May at the Crandall Library in Glens Falls to hear Historian John Scherer of Clifton Park describe the process of “Creating a Historic Preservation Commission.” Connie Frisbee-Houde from the State Archives later presented her summary of examining contents of suitcases left behind by patients committed to the Willard State Hospital in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Her research revealed much about society’s attitudes regarding the treatment of mental disorders and the status of immigrants who made up a disproportionate number of the Hospital’s inmates. Folklorist Todd DeGarmo later conducted a tour of the Folklife Center at the Library and described the Center’s efforts to document the recent history of Mexican immigrants who make up a largely invisible part of the agricultural labor force in Upstate New York.

On June 18<sup>th</sup>, I attended the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebration of the Mechanicville Public Library. I took the opportunity to explain to the gathering how I had acquired the Ellsworth Bible mentioned earlier. I intend to add the document to the Library’s collection following the completion of steps to establish its provenance. These efforts include consulting a Cohoes appraiser of historic artifacts recommended by the State Archives; discussing the possibility of DNA testing of the lock of hair in the Bible with John Bonafides of the State Historic Preservation Office at Peebles Island; and seeking the assistance of the Abraham Lincoln Library in Chicago in identifying the collector whose card appears enfolded in the book. The Bookstore previously displayed the largest collection of privately-held Ellsworth artifacts at the time of his Sesquicentennial in 2011, a collection that I consulted at that time.

On August 28<sup>th</sup>, I attended a meeting of local historians and “heritage administrators” organized by Congressman Paul Tonko at Peebles Island in Waterford. I took the opportunity to present the legislator with a copy of my book on Mechanicville and suggested that his interests dovetailed with that of the CAHR group of which I am a member. He asked me to contact a member of his staff in his D.C. office to follow up on this suggestion. I later arranged for her to contact Professor Ivan Steen, Chair of the CAHR committee, in order to see how we might cooperate with the Congressional Heritage Caucus, of which Tonko is Co-Chairman, to advance the cause of public history.

On October 20<sup>th</sup>, CAHR members and professors from local colleges and universities who conduct undergraduate and graduate Public History programs met for an informal discussion of how we might cooperate in advancing the cause of public history. This is the second such meeting to take place in the past year. The CAHR committee met later in December to follow up its agreement to serve as an editorial group for The State

University of New York Press. Members had previously offered their suggestions on fields of interest that the Press might choose to publish.

I published an article in *The Express*, “Apples of Their Irish Eyes,” in March based on first-hand recollections by a local resident of an incident that took place when famished Irish immigrants debarked from a canal packet in the early 1850s. The memoirist later recalled that the famished immigrants stripped an orchard of its bounty in a matter of minutes while the owner looked on helplessly. The poignancy of the piece is displayed by the fact that the witness to this event was a young English immigrant whose father had escaped debtor’s prison and found refuge in Stillwater.

On March 17<sup>th</sup>, St. Patrick’s Day, I spoke at the Senior Center on the topic of Irish immigration in our area. Following the presentation, a number of people raised questions about the topic which led to a wide-ranging discussion of Irish immigration in the United States. I took the opportunity to note that when the Irish first arrived in this area in the 1850s, they were regarded as “the poorest of the poor.” However, by the early 1920s, the entire City Council was made up of Irish-Americans. Indeed, that Council boldly passed a City Resolution condemning the British government’s behavior in suppressing the rebellion in Ireland. This may have marked the first and last time the City Council chose to engage in national diplomacy.

Following the November 12<sup>th</sup> ceremony marking the relocation of the Veteran’s Monument in Tallmadge Park, I edited my previously-published article explaining the efforts made by World War II veterans that led to the creation of the monument in 1962 and had the updated version published in *The Express*.

In December, I published another article in *The Express* noting that two important centennial anniversaries in local religious history were largely ignored by the general public. The piece, “Lest We Forget,” recalled the fact that St. Paul’s Church, established in 1852, began celebrating services in its new building on North Main St. in 1916 following abandonment of the original Catholic place of worship on William Street. However, newspaper records and other evidence reveals that the abandoned building almost immediately began holding regular Sunday services there for Italian immigrant Catholics who planned to build a new church on Saratoga Avenue. However, these plans were later scrapped and the William St. building was dedicated as the home of the Italian ethnic parish of the Church of the Assumption.

In December, I published “Lincoln Sends His Condolences” in *The Express* explaining the background of an oft-quoted letter that President Lincoln had written in 1862 expressing his regrets to the daughter of a Union Army officer killed during the Civil War. While the President’s 1861 letter of condolence sent to the parents of Colonel Ellsworth is well known, his 1862 has garnered some attention as it has been circulated among local families dealing with personal tragedies in recent years.

In March, Supervisor Richardson asked me if our community possessed an historic artifact meriting the attention of the “YOUTUBE” show, Fireball Run. The venture was looking to schedule visits to communities in the Northeast as part of its annual “history scavenger hunt.” I initially suggested that the Bible the Colonel had been carrying with him when he was killed on May 24, 1861 might qualify. His copy of the 1859 New Testament had been recently donated to me and its provenance was being investigated at that time. I then suggested that we seek permission to borrow Col. Ellsworth’s uniform from the New York State Military History Museum. Tom contacted

former State Senator Roy McDonald, a frequent volunteer at the Museum, and the three of us met with the Director, Courtney Burns, on March 3<sup>rd</sup>. Much to our surprise and gratification, Courtney agreed to loan us not only the uniform, but a number of other Ellsworth artifacts.

Following Chamber of Commerce efforts to prepare the site, Tom, Courtney, and myself were filmed at the XO Tower on April 6<sup>th</sup> during the preliminary shooting of the show, displaying the artifacts, explaining the background of the Mechanicville community, and relating the importance of Ellsworth's death in inspiring tens of thousands of men to join the Union forces, a significant factor guaranteeing the preservation of the Union. The final filming took place on September 29<sup>th</sup> when Courtney and I made "on camera" appearances while discussing Ellsworth's career and displaying artifacts with the drivers who participated in the Fireball Run. The show will air on YOUTUBE in this coming Fall.

The following day, September 30<sup>th</sup>, I was joined by Assistant Curator Christopher Morton and Chief Curator Mark Koziol from the Military Museum as we explained the importance of local hero Colonel Elmer E. Ellsworth on the national scene to an audience of 40 high school history students and their teachers. The group was excited to see the Colonel's uniform and other artifacts first hand. The event was arranged by Supervisor Richardson and High School Principal Kevin Kolakowski. The Principal and teachers were quite impressed with the level of engagement and interest displayed by the students who were fascinated to learn how a figure from our small community had played such a significant role on the national stage.

On October 21, I presented a history of the Catholic Church erected on William St. in 1852 by Irish immigrants and its later transformation into the home of the Italian ethnic Church of the Assumption to a large gathering attending the Rite of Re-Dedication of the building as the Rev. Joseph Scerbo Ministry Center. A statue of St. Francis donated by Fr. Scerbo's friends in California located on the grounds of the Center was formally blessed following the ceremony. The congregation then enjoyed a special community dinner donated by The Ugly Rooster, DeCrescente Distributing, Roger Grout of McDonald's in Mechanicville, topped off with desserts by the "bakers of the parish."

In December, Danielle Sanzone of WMHT-TV sought my assistance in creating a history blog with a local aspect to coincide with the station's debut airing of the second season of "Mercy Street," the Civil War saga that takes place in Alexandria Virginia, the site of Colonel Elmer E. Ellsworth's death. I sent her an article I had written summarizing Ellsworth's career that she used to prepare a draft that I later edited for her. However, her post neglected to mention that Ellsworth had been born in Malta, a fact she later confirmed with me. She subsequently amended her blog, much to the satisfaction of commentators from Malta who had taken her to task for her initial omission. This Experience is a reminder that local historical sensibilities are tender and must be treated with care.

Almost two years following our efforts to have the City of Alexandria Virginia post a plaque marking the place of Col. Elmer E. Ellsworth's death, little progress has been made. However, the hotel site where Ellsworth was killed has recently been sold to a national hotel chain. Curtis Bateman, an Ellsworth descendant who has been working with "Historic Alexandria" officials to honor the Colonel, hopes that the new ownership will be more amenable to our efforts. I asked Curtis to remind them that Northern

heritage tourists are shocked that when discovering his assassin is memorialized at the site, but Ellsworth's sacrifice as the first Union officer killed in the Civil War is ignored. Hopefully, this deliberate oversight will be rectified in the near future.

Finally, my ongoing research on Ellsworth led me to contact the White House Historical Association regarding a suspicion I have long held. Evan Phifer, the institution's Research Historian, confirmed the fact that while First Lady Letitia Tyler lay in state, and Presidential wives Caroline Scott Harrison and Ellen Wilson had private funeral services conducted in the White House, Elmer E. Ellsworth is the only individual without family connection to a President to lie in state/repose there. Some recent historians have suggested that Abraham Lincoln regarded him as a younger brother. The honor accorded Ellsworth at the time of his death reminds us of the high esteem with which he was held by many of his countrymen at the time of his death.

I conclude with my annual reminder that according to APHNYS and State Education Department guidelines, municipal historians should be provided with a mail drop, office space, and other services needed to fulfill their responsibilities. For the record, I use my home and telephone for office purposes, and provide my own internet, computer, Xeroxing, postage, and e-mail services. Of necessity, I store historical artifacts and documents in my home, a matter about which I have grown increasingly uneasy. My employment in another profession permits me to operate in this manner, but these arrangements will not be permanent. I am well aware of the fiscal constraints faced by the City and raise these points merely as a reminder that there are established guidelines for conducting the office of municipal historian that hopefully can be met in the future. In the meantime, I trust that my continued service will meet your expectations.