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“From the Supervisor” column

Submitted by Pittsford Town Supervisor Bill Smith

### **From the Supervisor**

**Pittsford Town Supervisor Bill Smith**

## **Preserving Pittsford’s History, Character – and Open Space**

May is Historic Preservation Month. Established in 1973 by the National Trust for Historic Preservation, Preservation Month reminds us each year to take stock of our historic places and spaces and to renew our commitment to preservation in our community.

In Pittsford, our commitment to historic preservation follows a long-held tradition and is evident all around us. Currently, the Town has over 80 individually **designated historic properties** and a Town historic district – the Milepost District – that includes Pittsford’s oldest house and what remains of a pioneering family’s farmstead. Most of Pittsford Village, located in the heart of our community, is a Historic District. The Town’s Mile Post Historic District, which also includes the Pioneer Cemetery, the old schoolhouse next to it and the surrounding area, recognizes a location of unique historic and architectural significance.

We are a place rich in history. Fortunately for us all, Pittsford is a place whose residents have worked together for decades to support those aspects of the natural environment and the built environment that, collectively, help to comprise the historic look, feel and character of the Town. The Town’s **Design Review and Historic Preservation Board**, made up of volunteers with experience in architecture, preservation and design, is responsible for keeping an inventory of historically significant structures, considering landmark designations, and promoting historic preservation. The board often works and shares information with **Historic Pittsford**, a local non-profit that works to preserve Pittsford’s history and historic resources through community education and advocacy. Historic Pittsford’s Little House Museum at 18 Monroe Avenue offers a glimpse into Pittsford’s past. So do their educational programs.

We are also fortunate to have an extremely knowledgeable resource in **Town and Village Historian** Audrey Johnson. Audrey not only gathers and preserves significant historic information about Pittsford and its early inhabitants – she shares this unique history with our residents. Whether researching a family lineage, speaking about historic milestones, or leading a tour of landmark buildings and homes, Audrey imparts intriguing details with the warmth and care of someone truly connected to her subject.

Preserving the history of the Town includes stewardship of the open spaces that remind us of our pioneering and agricultural roots (I’ve more to say on that below). It also has to do with preserving structures. Homes, barns, places of business – these are a visual record of our Town’s history. The Town currently is working on a **demolition statute** to provide for meaningful review of applications to demolish structures in the Town. We seek to ensure that we do not lose inadvertently structures of historic significance – those that contribute to the unique character of our community.

The Town periodically conducts an inventory to identify potential historic landmarks. Our **Comprehensive Plan** update, now drawing to its conclusion, includes consideration of how best to mitigate the effects of potential future development on the aesthetic quality and quality of life in Pittsford. Work toward this goal builds upon on our experience from previous initiatives such as

incentive zoning – a technique to maximize open space in any parcel being developed – and considers additional techniques for open space preservation.

We are all concerned about the impact of further development on the character of the Town and quality of life for our residents. Pittsford has been a leader in open space preservation, most notably with our award-winning Greenprint Plan. Passed in 1996, it preserved from development two-thirds of the then-remaining farmland in the Town. It's the project that first got me involved in local government; I ran for the Town Board in 1995, and was elected, for the purpose of supporting Supervisor Carpenter's Greenprint initiative and seeing it enacted.

How important is it to **you** to see Pittsford's remaining open space preserved, or as much of it as is reasonably possible? As development pressures continue, is it time to contemplate a Greenprint 2.0? If so, it comes down to a question of what residents are willing to pay for. In Europe, governments can simply declare that parcels of privately owned land can't be built on. It's a reason why so many Americans are impressed, for example, by the beautiful English countryside. It's also the reason why there's an acute housing shortage in Britain and sky-high real estate prices.

In America, property rights are protected by the federal constitution. The government, at any level, may not take privately-owned land without just compensation to the owner. And it's considered a "taking" if a government imposes significant restrictions on use of land – such as decreeing "You can't build anything here" – without compensating the owner for the difference between the value of the land undeveloped and the value of the land if developed. In order to work, the Greenprint required the people of Pittsford, acting through their Town government, to pay that difference in value to the owners of the land to be protected.

Please make sure to participate in our Pittsford Community Survey. You should have received a mailing with a code unique to your household for the purpose of doing the survey. You'll find it at [www.PittsfordSurvey.com](http://www.PittsfordSurvey.com). Among the questions it poses are several along the lines of what I've discussed above – whether residents are willing to pay more in Town taxes for the purpose of preserving more of the Town's remaining open spaces.

Especially in light of the brutal tax environment in the State of New York, our Town administration in Pittsford does everything we can to minimize *Town* taxes – the only taxes Town government has control over – to help mitigate the burden imposed from Albany. This is why my Town budget for 2019 cut Town taxes, both the overall tax levy and the tax rate.

The Town would not spend money on a "Greenprint 2.0" without knowing we have community support by first putting it up to a vote of residents, as we did with the Community Center renovation and with the new Athletic Fields. Because that's what it comes down to: is the community willing to take the most aggressive stance toward protecting open space by paying to do so? The Community Survey can give us some preliminary indication of this. If not, be assured that the Town has numerous techniques in our Zoning Code, and in zoning code changes proposed through the Comprehensive Planning process, to make further development as harmonious as possible with the existing character of the Town. The point is that the time to consider this is now, while there still remains open parcels susceptible to development. That's why the Community Survey solicits your views on this subject.

If you'd like to discuss open space preservation, historic preservation, or any other topic, you can reach me directly by phone at 248-6220 or by email at [bsmith@townofpittsford.org](mailto:bsmith@townofpittsford.org). As ever, my door is open and I answer my own phone.