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"From the Supervisor" column
Submitted by Pittsford Town Supervisor Bill Smith

From the Supervisor
Pittsford Town Supervisor Bill Smith

Public Involvement, Outstanding Staff Support Continual Improvement

- Pittsford has a long history of encouraging public involvement in Town decisions
- The past year's accomplishments are a source of pride and an inspiration to do more in 2020
- Our outstanding Town staff is the foundation for our continued success

When discussing government matters, especially around election time, there is much talk about the importance of "transparency." While there may be differing definitions depending on one's purpose, I believe the meaning is pretty straightforward where local government is concerned.

Transparency reflects a municipality's obligation to and efforts toward sharing information with its citizens. The key to transparency in government is engaging citizens and providing ample opportunity for such engagement. Town meetings that are open to the public. Town budgets that are available for review. Town laws and decisions that are open to public discussion. Direct mailings to every household for meetings about major initiatives. Extensive information available on the Town website. I'm proud to say my administration meets these important criteria thoroughly as a natural course of doing business. We go above and beyond as well. For example, while public comment has been part of Town Board meetings for decades, I enhanced this practice by added an opportunity for public comment before each Town Board agenda item. And by inaugurating the televising of Town Board meetings.

Transparency in government relies, above all, on an engaged public. That's why we go to such lengths to make sure you know about important public meetings, so we can hear what you think. It's why we did the recent Community Survey, to learn your views on issues relevant to Pittsford's future. It's why we had such an exhaustive process, with five years of continuous opportunity for public input, including public workshops and two public hearings, in formulating the updated Comprehensive Plan we just adopted. It's why we used every medium short of TV and radio to publicize the public workshops, including a direct mailing to every home in Pittsford for each public workshop.

We wanted to make sure that every element included in the final Comprehensive Plan had been subject to full public review and scrutiny.

It's why I visit neighborhoods to talk with residents. Why I hold my Supervisor Saturday open house sessions. It's why I answer my own phone and keep an open door policy in my office. It's why I do my best to communicate with you frequently, through every means possible, including the Facebook page so many of our residents follow. Doing these things lets me keep in tune with what our community wants and needs. It's the starting point for getting the job done. Public engagement helps me meet my first goal for our residents: to keep Pittsford one of New York State's best places to live.

To keep Pittsford a place where folks love to live, raise a family, work, shop, and visit requires continual improvement – continual improvement across the board. We see the results around us.

- Our renovated and expanded Community Center
- The new East Avenue sidewalk
- Our new athletic fields, parks and playgrounds
- The Town's new Dog Park
- Becoming a State-recognized Clean Energy Community in 2017

- Winning State grants for sustainability projects like electric vehicle chargers and solarizing the lodges at King's Bend Park
- Conducting our Community Survey and completing our Comprehensive Plan Update
- Our Aging-in-Place initiative, to make Pittsford an even better and more convenient place for residents to stay in through their retirement years
- Our Community Choice Aggregation program that's about to start, to get residents electricity cheaper than what you pay now – and from 100% sustainable sources.
- Converting to LED street lighting
- Our community-wide Toxin-Free Lawn Challenge and responsible lawn care initiative
- All of our other steps to reduce energy use, reduce our carbon footprint, and save money for taxpayers.
- Successfully taking the State to court to stop the Power Authority from clear-cutting the trees along our canal
- Expanded programs and services at our Community Center, including cooking classes, intergenerational programming with our seniors and youth, expanded drop-in gym activities for youth and adults, and a new composting program
- Our new Trail Passport program, part of encouraging healthy living
- Improvements to the Auburn Trail
- Improvements to the Children's Room at the Library
- New bike fix-it stations and racks at the Library and at Thornell Farm Park
- Expanding the reach and inclusivity of our programs by partnering with Special Olympics and the Autism Council of Rochester

We achieve this kind of improvement with close attention to the interests of Pittsford taxpayers. The Town budget I proposed for this year delivered a cut in the Town tax rate of 6.6%. We did so with a commitment to efficiency, fiscal responsibility and creative problem-solving that enables us to deliver, time and again, outstanding services to our residents. I've just proposed my Town budget for 2020. It contains an additional cut in the Town tax rate. Across the two years, we've cut the tax rate by more than 8%, and cut the general tax levy in each year.

Pittsford has a Triple-A credit rating. That's the highest rating possible. And Pittsford is the only town in all of upstate New York – everything north of Westchester County – to have it. It saves money for our residents because when we go out to finance a project, we get the lowest available interest rate. Our residents pay the least. Because our credit rating is the best.

I'll take this opportunity to commend our exemplary Town staff. For their skill, commitment and the quality of their work each day – maintaining roads, mowing lawns, inspecting and assessing properties and building project sites, unclogging sewers, cleaning and repairing buildings. Connecting a resident with the program or service they need – at the Library, the Community Center, Town Court. Working behind the scenes – our administrative staff and support staff in all departments, our IT and GIS folks, our staff members with legal, communication, finance, and human resources expertise, our supervisory and management staff who help unify our efforts.

Maintaining excellence in customer service and day-to-day activities while major projects are ongoing is a testament to the skills and commitment of each Town employee. They're impressive. They're committed to our residents. Each plays a vital role in Pittsford's success. I am humbled to lead such an outstanding team.

The work continues. With the continued input and advice from our residents, we'll continue together on our path of continual improvement for the community we're proud to call home. Should you have any comments about this or any other topic you may reach me directly by phone at 248-6220 or by email at bsmith@townofpittsford.org. My door is open and I answer my own phone. I'm always interested to know what matters most to you as a resident.