

Letter to the editor:

9-22-19

I'm Paul Andreassen, Saugerties Town Councilman, and I'm running for Town Supervisor. There was marginal planning and little budgeting for the ice arena. *Relying on grants, projected revenues and recreation fees from future development to fund a project is not realistic.* When the lack of budgeting for improvements or expenditures is questionable everyone should be concerned. Costly improvements that put the town in any debt or fiscal stress warrants additional scrutiny not less.

Arguably, over the last two decades, town boards could have planned better for infrastructure and capital improvement projects. Let's correct that trend.

In general, all commercial construction projects go before the Planning Board and, if necessary, the Zoning Board of Appeals. Some might argue that this should apply to the Town as well. As an example of what it takes to develop a project in the Town of Saugerties, Anthony Montano spent a year in front of the planning board. No one seemed to care how many thousands it cost him in design and re-design or meeting after meeting to get through the process. The zoning board of appeals, of which good people such as Patti Kelly, Jeannie Goldberg, Joe Mayone and Henry Rua are members, grilled the Verizon cell tower consultants requesting a variance wanting to site a tower in the Mt. Marion area. *Nobody gets through these boards without questions, discussion, debate, revisions and SEQRA (State Environmental Quality Review Act) compliance. The ice arena never went through such review.*

The Town Board, responsible for the taxpayer's money, approved \$1.3 million for the ice arena in one night. The approval process was expedited without a hearing, debate, discussion, consultants describing in detail the plans, specifications or contract language and without the town's accountant explaining, in public, what this project entails or how it would be paid for.

Incidentally, I abstained from the vote for multiple reasons but requested a clerk of the works be assigned to the project. Some members of the recreation committee and members of the town board seemed to think it would be an added expense to an already expensive project. Lisa Greco on the recreation committee and Mike MacIsaac on the town board agreed that a project of this size and scope should have an independent overseer.

Going back a few years, in the spring of 2017, before running for the town board, I offered to chair a committee of like-minded professionals to research the feasibility of a permanent structure to house the ice arena and its ancillary spaces that could be used year-round. *I never received a response from the Town Board.* Last month I open the paper to see the headlines of a month's delay. That does not bode well for those who were beating the 'time is of the essence' drum.

Fortunately an earlier motion to approve a chiller, for an additional \$500,000, was pulled from the agenda when I wrote an email to the board with concerns to identify where the funding would come from, potential permissive referendum requirements, segmentation of a capital project and our own procurement policy requirements. *We are not supposed to conduct the Town's business in a vacuum.*

The ice arena project is approved. Majority rules. I remain skeptical of the process and only hope that the town did not make a mistake in approving this so hastily. Watch for delays, overruns, additional charges, hidden costs, problems with site conditions and the loss of revenue. *I live and pay taxes here too.*

If I am elected supervisor, all Town construction projects will go through a rigorous planning process and will be transparent.

Respectfully,

Paul Andreassen

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