**Saugerties Democratic Committee**

November 24, 2020 Meeting

**ROLL CALL**

Members: Lanny Walter, Louis Bloomfield, Aaron Levine, Sue Breen, Brigid Walsh, Cara Stammler, Christine Dinsmore, Rick Cousin, Kathy Gordon, Kathleen Gray, Hélène Lesterlin, Jeremy Russell, Joe Maloney, John Schoonmaker, Kevin Freeman, Katherine Smith, Nejla Liias, Matthew Maloney, Margo McGilvrey, Mike Harkavy, Mike Cimorelli, Pam Ross, Skip Arthur, Tim Scott, Bill Barr

Guests Speakers: Michelle Hinchey, Kirk Rheinhardt, Jane St. Amour, Margarita Asiain

**Michelle Hinchey:** Expressed her appreciation for the Committee’s contribution to her success in her run for NYS Senator.

**Approve Minutes from October 27, 2020 Zoom Meeting:** The Secretary announced that pursuant to comments received, the spelling of Mike Harkavy’s name had been corrected and the location of the proposed tower on Quarry Road corrected. Accordingly, he moved that the minutes be approved. Motion was seconded by Christine Dinsmore and passed unanimously.

**Treasurer’s Report for November 2020:** Tim Scott presented the Treasurer’s Report, as follows:

**Monthly Beginning Balance:** $1,185.32

**Collected Donations :** ActBlue14.40

**Expenses:** None

**Reimbursements:** None

***New* Total Balance:** $1,199.72

He noted that he is waiting for a check from the County and not sure what the delay is caused by. He encouraged members to set up a recurring donation with ActBlue since we are unable to physically collect contributions at meetings. Tim moved that the report be approved. The motion was seconded by Kathleen Gray and passed unanimously.

The Chair added that the UCDC Chair has approved a budget and is trying to pay off its debt. The membership will have an opportunity to vote on it.

**Guest: Kirk P. Rheinhardt, Saugerties Superintendent of Schools:** Superintendent Rheinhardt discussed the December 15, 2020 Capital Improvement vote and thanked us for our time. He said he looked at infrastructure as a first step after being hired. Adequate upgrades to infrastructure required between $30-40 million. Need $22M to keep it tax neutral. He summarized the work to be done and noted it was long overdue. If the vote passes in Saugerties, it will get 66 cents back on each dollar for funds raised by bond, but otherwise the return will be 60 cents/dollar. Using energy saving contracts that pay for themselves creates other savings. Jane St. Amour explained the budget priorities and how the proposal is tax neutral and that all priority one (improvements addressing primarily safety and health), two and most of three will be funded. Referendum is December 15, from 12-9 PM. If it gets a high vote from Saugerties, will get 66 cents vice 60 cents back. There will be two summers of construction. There are allowances for absentee ballots, but expect most balloting will be in person. Disappointment was expressed for not allowing absentee balloting due to the pandemic.

**Vote on revised Bylaws for Town Democratic Committee:** Bill Barr moved that the revised bylaws be approved by the Committee. The motion was seconded by Louise Bloomfield. Joe Maloney said there was no opportunity for discussion or community involvement. No redlined version was provided, dismissed members of committee to participate, the revision changed filling of vacancies by vote to appointment. Kathy Gordon moved to close the discussion and it was seconded by Mike Harkavy. Motion passed (18 yes, 4 no, Joe Maloney abstaining). The vote on the new Bylaws was taken and the motion passed 19 yes 3 no, 3 abstentions. The Chair congratulated the subcommittee and noted that the new Bylaws have been synchronized with the County Bylaws. He added that there is a provision in the Bylaws for amending them and that can be done at any time. [A copy of the new Bylaws is attached].

**Community Happenings-Keeping Track:** The Chair noted that it had been proposed that we try to stay in touch better with the community events.

**School District Update-Budget vote**. The Chair then asked if there was any further discussion on the school budget. If we find an allowance for Absentee voting due to Covid, we should inform the community. The Committee stressed the importance of encouraging the community to support this initiative.

**Air B&B Oversight:**The Chair noted that the town realizes that there is a problem locally with houses being taken off of the long-term rental market for Air B&B use. And there is a specific issue with a property on Blue Mountain Road, La Hacienda. Their proposal to convert it to short term rentals was turned down by the Planning Board but they may reapply. He noted that many people in the community are upset and individuals may want to discuss it with the Town Supervisor. John Schoonmaker added that the Comprehensive Planning Committee is looking into Air B&Bs and that information on those meetings can be found at this website: <https://townsaugerties.digitaltowpath.org:10234/content/Generic/View/490> He added that while it states that comments need to have been in by Nov. 6th, the committee is still accepting them. Beth Weredyk, from the County Comptroller’s Office, noted that the County Comptroller’s audit of short term rentals looked at the collection of the county’s 2% occupancy tax. The report’s main highlight determined that the current county setup and process for ensuring all short term rentals were filing and submitting their tax was not adequately capturing the entire universe, therefore the County was missing out on tax revenue. She explained that since that audit the County has signed a VCA (voluntary collection agreement) with Airbnb, going into effect in December, that should result in a higher collection of taxes from the short term rentals. Joe Maloney added that the county is looking at raising the short-term rental tax and said there is also conversation about Towns getting some of the County’s bed tax.

**Saugerties Police Reform & Reinvention, Commission update:** Christine Dinsmore. Meeting weekly, doing a Facebook survey. If you work, play or visit Saugerties, your opinion is wanted, she said. They are setting up subcommittees to look at specific issues and will hold a Town Hall meeting before submitting findings to Town Board. They have also created an inter-town -county group.

**Quarryville Cell Tower:** Margarita Asiain, who lives in Quarryville spoke. She has been discussing this with neighbors who are concerned about 1) why cannot other towers be used instead of putting one there, 2) extremely negative visual impact for many neighbors—it will eclipse mountain and sky views that they now enjoy, 3) will have lights on it, 4) depreciation of property value (is there any plan for compensation?), 5) neighbors concern have not been addressed and other options are not being explored (is it due to lack of wealth?). Kevin Freeman, who is on the Zoning Board Authority said the action is being led by the Town of Ulster on very short notice. There will be a public hearing on December 7. Individuals may send comments to [kfreeman@saugerties.townhall](mailto:kfreeman@saugerties.townhall). Will be applying the “Monroe Test”. Some justification for the location was presented. He said the ZBA has asked for a re-run of drone/balloon tests with “leaves off”. Tim Scott added that the Quarryville site is not the only site being considered.

**County Matters:** The County is tearing down old jail and building mixed housing in its place (a project of focus by the County Executive). There are some objections by County residents to having low income people in their neighborhoods.

**Biden Inauguration:** Kathy Gordon wanted to know if there is any interest in holding a black tie inauguration ball on January 20. Could we reserve the Pavilion at Cantine Field, with some possibility for people to stay in their cars, for example. John Schoonmaker said the Town very well may be shutting down again but he was supportive of having it as a contingency. The Chair said a committee should be formed to look at it and asked for volunteers. Andrew Zink, Aaron Levine, Rick Cousin, Margo, McGilvrey, Diedre Miller, Kathleen Gray, John Schoonmaler, Louise Bloomfield , Sue Breen and Nancy Schaef volunteered to work on it.

**Georgia Senate Run-off Election (Please consider bringing a check book for a group donation):** Rick Cousin moved that we donate $300 to Fair Fight where the donation can be split. Further to send a letter to Stacey Abrams for her contribution to flipping Georgia. The Committee is split about the effectiveness of sending money verses other means of support such as phoning and letter writing. The Chair asked the Committee to make donations to the Treasurer specifically for the Georgia race rather than taking it from existing funds. Nejla Liias suggested we all do our donations to ActBlue and email Tim what we donated. Christine Dinsmore did a friendly amendment that the Committee target $300 and add individual contributions. Send checks to the Treasurer, who will place all funds to Fair Fight. Motion passed 16 Yes, 2 No.

**Neighbor to Neighbor:** Kevin Freeman has a meeting November 30 at 7 PM. He added that the weekly protest at Main and Market has moved to Saturdays and all are welcome.

**Announcements:** Andrew Zink asked that we have a December meeting to strategize for next year. John Schoonmaker moved to meet on December 29, seconded by Kat Smith. Discussion: Nejla Liias countered that we not have a December meeting, that we need a break. The Chair noted that the County Executive Committee is meeting that night and therefore he, the Vice-Chair and Secretary will not be available. He countered that we hold two meetings in January. (Petitioning will begin in February). John Schoonmaker added that we could move it to the Coordinated Campaign Committee and let anyone who wants to be involved attend that and withdrew his motion.

**Adjournment:** Moved by Mike Harkavy and seconded by Bill Barr.

Respectfully submitted: William Barr, Secretary