

One Community – Two Municipalities

Pittsford includes two separate and distinct municipal governments, one representing the Town and one representing the Village. In my experience, most people who live in the Village of Pittsford are aware of this distinction, but many who reside outside of it are not. And many residents, whether in the Village or outside of it, do not understand the differing roles of the two municipalities.

The Village government has jurisdiction within Village limits. The Town government has it for the rest of the Town outside of the Village. There are many collaborative and service sharing agreements between the Town and the Village and the Town provides some services to Village residents as a matter of cooperation with the Village government. For instance, both Town and Village snow plows clear roads running through the Village. However, each municipality has its own elected officials, staff, and volunteer boards that address its own various issues and operations.

For example, the Village has its own Planning and Zoning Board and its own Architectural Preservation and Review Board, in addition to having its own Board of Trustees. These boards have authority for making decisions about projects such as the proposed development at 75 Monroe Avenue and any development that may occur on Schoen Place. These two matters fall solely and exclusively within the jurisdiction of the Village government. By contrast, the Town government has every bit as much authority over either of them as it has over a project in Paris, New Delhi or Kuala Lumpur.

An independent Village government is an instrumentality that can focus on those considerations unique to our Village. As compared to other parts of the Town, it has a unique infrastructure, architecture and geographic configuration. Issues posed by greater density of housing are unique to the Village, as are particular aspects of accommodating traffic and pedestrian safety. The Village government can pay close attention to all of these things and through such effort acquires specialized expertise.

It's a benefit to the entire Town to have at its heart a physically beautiful village of human scale. When you have friends or relatives coming in from out of town, where do you make sure to take them? To the Village.

A hundred years ago, our village had a very similar look to most other villages in the immediate area. Today it's unique among them, retaining its historic character, its architectural distinction and its human scale to a noticeably greater extent than we find elsewhere. It retains a distinctive vitality. This didn't happen by accident. It happened because, especially as development pressures of various kinds accelerated in the second part of the 20th century, municipal leaders with foresight and understanding used the instrumentality of a village government to get things right in Pittsford, as other villages in western New York were progressively swallowed up, paved over, had their architectural inheritance bulldozed, or lapsed into decay.

This, by the way, offers a splendid example, on a more focused scale than we're accustomed to discussing, of the benefits of meaningful home rule. Our Village is an area, within another political

entity, that has the ability to govern itself in a way that accommodates its own circumstances that differ from those of the larger entity.

Compare this to the situation of western New York. The much greater population density of New York City and its environs means that it dominates statewide decision making. It also means that downstate has its own particularized needs, deriving from that density and all of the factors relevant to it. The result? Statewide policies necessary and desirable for the Financial Capitol of the World – but that have depressed the economy of most of the rest of the state for decades, with no end realistically in sight.

The example of the Pittsford Town and Village governments, working independently within a reasonable scope of home rule with respect to one another and yet cooperatively, offers a better model of governance.

Our Town government is grateful for longstanding collaboration with our Village counterpart. We recognize that Village needs and priorities are often different. The Village government accords the same respect and understanding to the Town. The result has served our community well.

The more all Pittsford residents, wherever they live, have an idea of the different roles of each of our two municipal governments, how they work and what they do, the better for the continuing success of our greater community.

As always, if you have comments or questions, please stop by my office in Town Hall, call me at 248-6220 or send a message to bsmith@townofpittsford.org.

Bill Smith is Pittsford Town Supervisor.