

## Conversation with the Mayor November 5, 2007

Vicky Daly

### That was a Meeting!

Every now and again we have a Village Board meeting at which actions are taken that essentially put our money where our mouth is. What is Village government trying to do? Enhance quality of life in Palmyra and to spur economic development. The November 5th meeting was a meeting where that happened. More often than not, the twice a month meetings (first and third Mondays) are brief, efficient, and sort of humdrum. Village business is not usually exciting. We try very hard to be good stewards of the people's money, watching the budget very closely and being innovative in ways to get things done more economically. You know how stimulating that is. Our last meeting was different because of two seemingly unrelated actions that were taken.

The Board voted to direct Attorney Art Williams to draft a contract between the Village and the Palmyra Skate Park Committee. The contract would enable the Committee, which is now in the process of incorporating, to build a 50' by 100' skate park in the top of the Village Park on land which would be leased from the Village for a nominal fee. Many things have to happen before the kids are skating or using their bikes there, but the project is now under way. Will quality of life be improved? Ask the kids and their parents.

That action in itself is noteworthy, but the other half of our twin bill was the passage of local law #4, the Historic Preservation Ordinance. We have been talking about preservation in the Village for about a year. It was the situation in Fairport where it appeared that a handsome 19th century church was about to be razed to make way for a chain drugstore. That would be a tragedy for Fairport and the neighborhood. How much bigger a tragedy it would be if one of our famed four churches met a similar fate and was replaced by a fast food restaurant. To that end, we began to investigate and learn. Cynthia Howk of the Landmark Society has made two presentations at the Fire Hall, and Murray Gould, president of Port City Preservation was here just a few weeks ago. Murray spoke at the Village Board and then continued the conversation at Lorri's following that meeting. A committee of interested volunteers has met regularly for months and crafted the document, which was presented to the Board. Why are we doing this? How will it work? How do I find out more?

Preservation for us means economic development through protecting one of our major assets - our nineteenth century commercial, residential and church architecture. It is unique in the region and one of the reasons people come to Palmyra - to the restaurants, the shops B&Bs and the Inn. New businesses have been started here because of the way we look. Homes have been purchased here because of the way we look. History is on display not only in our five museums, but also all around us. Years ago, Don Jordan gave me a ride in his school bus yellow plane and it occurred to me that Palmyra looked like the Village under the Christmas tree. If we lose that look and the financial impact it has, we can never regain it.

We have, over the years, lost magnificent buildings or seen them remodeled - the Jarvis Block, the Palmyra Hotel. Had there been an ordinance, money could have been available to do things properly, maintaining the fiscal and aesthetic value of the building. The existence of a preservation ordinance opens doorways to outside monies not available otherwise. Tax credits, both NYS and federal, are available to developers, and now perhaps to homeowners, when an ordinance is in place. Funding through the CLG (Certified Local Government) program is available to communities that qualify. There are only 60 in New York State. It should not surprise you that Pittsford is one of the 60. So are Brockport and Saratoga Springs. An ordinance is step one to this separate, designated pot of money.

How will it work? A Commission of five members will be appointed from people who have evidenced an interest in serving. A 'job description' will be made available; letters of application invited; interviews held. Once appointed, the new commissioners will be trained, probably by Julian Adams, NYS Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation. We could not do better. This has been offered and there is no cost to the Village. After training, the commissioners would familiarize themselves with the community and make the community members aware of the possibilities available to them. As a group, the commissioners would be a tremendous resource of information and ideas for property owners. Their job is to work with owners to preserve and protect worthwhile architectural artifacts - for the sake of the individuals and the community as a whole.

Does that mean I cannot do whatever I want with my home? Yes, but you cannot now. Once zoning regulations are in place, we have to live with them, get a variance, or move. When we rebuilt our garage years ago, we needed a variance, so we went through the process. Mr. Grier pointed out that the Code office deals with matters of safety. True. This ordinance goes one step further and protects the homeowner's investment in his own property and protects him also from the whims of his neighbors. On a recent visit to the village where I went to high school, we saw on their Main Street a private home whose outside walls sported multiple urinals used as flowerpots. Frothy female undergarments were displayed on clotheslines between them. Beauty is reputed to be in the eye of the beholder, but really.

How do I find out more? Stop in the office and pick up a copy of the ordinance. The names of committee members are on the document and they, or I, would be happy to answer your questions. This is an exciting step in Palmyra's progress to be truly the Queen of Canal Towns. Both the Palmyra Skate Park and local law #4 are work in progress, but both give evidence of a community that recognizes what can be done to ensure that the future in Palmyra is going to be bright. As always, we are looking at quality of life for our residents and support and improvement of the local economy.