

Mayor's Report February 4, 2025

Last week, the Village added 40 5-ton stones to the seawall to bolster the weakest section. Thanks to the Village's new Deputy Highway Superintendent, Ray Dantoni, for excelling in overseeing the project. I would also like to thank NYS Assemblyman Keith Brown for securing a grant for the Village to pay for this critical project. Lastly, thanks to former Resident Rob Bergold and LaMay Construction for an outstanding job delivering and installing the rocks.

The Village received confirmation from NYS DHSES and FEMA that its Hazard Mitigation grant could be used to fund 90% of the cost of engineering, permitting, and other associated expenses for the reconstruction of the beach seaward of the seawall. The Village will commence on this project immediately.

In addition, the Village is making significant strides with the NYS DOT to change the use of Senator Schumer's \$ 1,000,000 earmark from repair funds to full reconstruction funds.

Deputy Mayor Pam Pierce, Emergency Manager Bill Raisch, and I held a Zoom call with members of the NYS DEC to discuss what they would require in the aftermath of a breach or significant damage to Asharoken Avenue. Although the Village could start working immediately after a breach and then apply for an emergency authorization, it appeared the better idea was to get a 10-year permit for road repair. An emergency authorization is good for 30 days and only allows the Village to do the smallest possible project to rectify the issue. Therefore, the Village will commence work on obtaining the 10-year permit.

On February 13th, I wrote to Governor Hochul advising her that the Village is getting close to completing the needed engineering and permitting to begin the reconstruction of the seawall. I asked her to provide funding similar to what she gave Baxter Estates (in Nassau County) to mitigate its road flooding issue. This funding method allows the State to pay the contractors directly instead of the Village paying them and then submitting requests for reimbursement. For a project estimated at 10 million dollars, it would be almost impossible for Asharoken to secure the money upfront to pay the contractors before State reimbursement. Baxter Estates made the same argument and secured appropriate funding from NYS.

The Village has been doing preliminary work on the 2025-26 budget. Because of significant increases in the cost of police retirement benefits, health insurance, general insurance, and the need to refinance two reserve funds, remaining under the NYS 2% tax cap will be very challenging. Faced with similar realities, many Towns and Villages on Long Island had to adopt budgets that exceeded the 2% tax cap. As I reported earlier, the Village must prepare an appropriate budget regardless of the tax cap. There is more work to do, and no

stone will be left unturned to achieve a budget that will best suit the Village's needs with the lowest possible tax increase. The Board of Trustees will have a work session on the budget on Tuesday, March 18th at 4 PM and hold a public hearing on April 1 before adopting the proposed budget.

The Village and the Asharoken PBA had a very productive second meeting to discuss the new 5-year contract. The meeting featured a frank discussion, and both sides are committed to reaching a fair agreement. A third meeting has not yet been scheduled.

During the month, I watched a webinar on the services that NYS DHSES offers to help Villages with their cyber security. One item of interest was a Rapid Cybersecurity Risk Assessment. The Village followed up with a phone call to get the details on this free program. It looks like a very important action point to follow up on, and the Village will schedule an onsite visit for the assessment.

The Board of Assessment Review met last week. Three assessment changes were granted, and the remainder were denied due to a lack of proper supporting documentation. I thank Village Assessor Rick Leonard for the excellent work he has done to improve the Village's assessments.

Carole Casamassima, Chairperson of the Save the Fireworks Committee, reports that the Centennial dinner/dance is filling up quickly. Please RSVP now to reserve your spots before the event closes out. It will be a great night celebrating the Village's 100th birthday. I am looking forward to seeing you there.

I thank Catherine and Landrigan Bradley for donating a memorial bench in honor of Barry Bradley. Barry was a decades-long Village resident who loved the Village and served as the sanitation man and Harbormaster. He greeted everyone with a big smile and enjoyed life to the fullest. The bench looks out over Northport Bay where Barry spent countless hours on the water. His memory will go on for years thanks to this wonderful addition to Village Hall. I encourage you to stop, take a seat on the bench, and reflect on the amazing community we live in and the difference Barry made in all of our lives.

Mayor Dr. Greg Letica