

IMAGINE AMENIA

NEWSLETTER

www.imagineamenia.org

SEPTEMBER 2007

WHY CALL IT ImagineAmenia?

Imagination is the ability to see and think of things that are not immediately present to your senses.

Imagination is an active, rather than a passive ability.

Imagination makes it possible to plan.

Imagination allows you to think how things can be better than they are.

Imagination lets you predict what something done today will lead to tomorrow.

Without **Imagination** there can be no sense of horror.



ImagineAmenia Board of Directors

Susan Gregory
President

Betty Rooney
Vice President/Treasurer

Alison Hale
Secretary

Steven Benardete
Andy Durbridge
Charlotte Murphy
Harold Noah
Betsy Park
Darlene Riemer
Jerry Thompson
Elizabeth Whaley

www.ImagineAmenia.org
info@ImagineAmenia.org

Annual General Meeting and James Sheldon draw packed house.

Although the afternoon of Sunday, September 9, was sultry and humid, when many would have preferred to stay home, a vital energy filled the Amenia Fish and Game Club as an enthusiastic, standing room only crowd descended on the Fourth Annual General Meeting of ImagineAmenia. They came because they **cared enough** to become informed about the real issues facing the town. They came because they **cared enough** to get to know the candidates and the issues. They came because they **cared enough** to think about the Amenia they will bequeath to future generations. They came to become informed by a dynamic speaker, and yes...they came for the delicious barbecue and the good company which ended the event.

Those present represented an accurate cross section of the current membership of ImagineAmenia, but we were especially pleased to welcome so many new faces, several with young, energetic toddlers in tow. As Betty Rooney remarked at the close of the meeting, "It is for the future of children like these that we must...**care enough**."

The full house listened attentively as IA's President, Sue Gregory, gave her annual report. She spoke movingly about our beautiful town and the wonderful people who give selflessly of their time and energy, the incredible member volunteers of ImagineAmenia. The membership of this organization has often been accused of being simply, "the rich." Sue agreed that while a few may be materially rich, that above all, most of us are simply blessed with a "richness" of ideas and a "richness" of life around us, our families, our homes, our wonderful community, and our superb Hudson Valley.

After thanking many for their individual efforts, she emphasized the need for every voter to exercise their power of the franchise on **Primary Day, September 18th**, and then of course at the **General Election on November 6th**.

Treasurer Betty Rooney reported on the financial condition of our organization. While we receive occasional larger donations, she noted that the typical donation is \$25.00. She emphasized the necessity of substantial contributions to IA's Political Fund at this crucial time during the run-up to this vital election, as we incur expenses for materials and advertising on behalf of the candidates IA is endorsing.

All candidates running for Town offices received invitations to attend the AGM and be presented. Sue Gregory introduced those present and thanked them for their attendance. Warm applause greeted candidates Michael Chamberlin, Vicki Doyle, Dawn Marie Klingner, Bob Riemer, and Judge Norman Moore. Maureen Bonds was also thanked for attending, although she arrived too late to be acknowledged.

Four expired-term vacancies on IA's Board of Directors needed to be filled, and members present elected Steve Benardete, Andy Durbridge, Alison Hale, and Darlene Riemer to renewed 3-year terms. We thank the members who, unable to attend, sent in their proxy votes.

The business part having concluded, people settled in to listen to a talk by James Sheldon, founder of Little Town Views. **The speaker's focus was on the tax implications for small towns of**

(continued on page 2)

Land Conservancy and the Greater Good

In her book *The Greater Good*, Claire Gaudiani observes, “Most people think that Americans are generous because we are rich. The truth is that we are rich...because we are generous...” She correctly points out that individual philanthropists have funded hospitals, research labs, museums, religious institutions, universities, libraries and theaters. Scholarships, laboratories, operating rooms, studios, and classrooms have all been the beneficiaries of private funding. Indeed, penicillin would not have been discovered had not private individuals helped fund the research. On a local level, Listening Rock Farm in Amenia recently hosted the Simmons Scholarship dinner to raise scholarship money for Webutuck students. Thanks to the personal generosity of these donors more Webutuck students will get a chance at a college degree and a brighter future.

In Amenia questions regarding land conservancy have arisen. Most of us do not have enough land to put into conservancy and many do not fully understand the concept and the implications of land donations. Many feel that such actions benefit only the rich. Some people complain that they are left “scratching in the dirt trying to make ends meet, while the rich among us are living the good life putting land into conservancy in order to avoid taxes.” So, just what does it mean to “...put land in conservancy”? Who benefits by such actions?

A person who puts land in conservancy agrees to donate an easement to a land conservation organization such as the Dutchess Land Conservancy. The donor voluntarily gives a substantial portion of the development rights to that land in perpetuity to the Conservancy, and agrees to very specific and limiting terms regarding

future development. While the land is still owned by the donor, the Conservancy monitors and enforces the terms of the conservation easement. The terms of each easement are appropriate for the circumstances of the property. As each property is different, so too are the conditions of the easement. Typically an easement contains a “no build” area as well as an area permitting specific farm structures.

Who then benefits from this gift? Some people think mistakenly that these lands are exempt from local taxes. Not true! While the donor may get an income tax deduction from Federal and New York State taxes, they will still have to pay property taxes on all of their land to the local community for the maintenance of schools, highways etc. So just how does the average citizen of Amenia benefit from such conservation easements? Just as museums forever protect our heritage, land conservation maintains our beautiful vistas and open spaces forever. The donated land cannot be overdeveloped in the future. The community’s environmental resources, its wildlife habitats, its air and water quality, as well as the beauty of its farmlands and beautiful vistas are all protected. And if that is not enough, there is growing evidence that land conservation can reduce everybody’s property taxes (see sidebar). Isn’t that what most of us have said we want?

Land conservancy is an investment in our environment and hence in the future of our community and its people. Our communities are enhanced, not diminished by such gifts. Let’s celebrate,

not denigrate the people willing to invest in keeping Amenia, “pleasant to the eye.” Let’s recognize these protected lands and their donors for their contribution to “The Greater Good.”

CAN LAND CONSERVATION LOWER EVERYBODY’S TAXES?

A 2005 study by the Trust for Public Land titled “Managing Growth: The Impact of Conservation and Development in New Hampshire” concluded that:

“Decisions about conservation within any community should be based on the residents’ goals for the future and informed by a clear understanding of the likely tax consequences.”

“In the long term, contrary to the common perception that development will bring lower taxes, property tax bills are generally higher in more developed towns than in rural towns...The tax bills are not higher in the towns that have the most permanently protected land --conservation land or easements owned by a government agency or conservation organization. In fact, tax bills are generally lower in these towns.”

A 2002 Fact Sheet published by the American Farmland Trust on the “Cost of Community Services Studies” reported that:

“**Cost of Community Services studies conducted over the last 15 years show working lands generate more public revenues than they receive back in public services. Their impact on community coffers is similar to that of other commercial and industrial land uses. On average, because residential land uses do not cover their costs, they must be subsidized by other community land uses. Converting agricultural land to residential land use should not be seen as a way to balance local budgets.**”

Can land conservation lower property taxes? Yes, towns that protected the most land enjoyed, on average, the lowest property tax rates -- because they had less development, which requires roads, schools, sewer and water systems, and other services.

Annual General Meeting/James Sheldon (continued from page one)

large real estate developments — a topic on which he is a noted expert. He commended Amenia for its forward looking Comprehensive Plan and said that it would serve as a model for other small towns looking for planned growth. He noted the several large-scale development initiatives currently before our Planning and Town Boards. He warned that experience in other towns teaches that along with a larger tax base come even larger requirements and expenses for public services, especially school services. **The lesson is that towns must negotiate carefully and vigorously, to ensure that developers do not walk away with all the profits, leaving the towns to pay for the public service requirements they leave behind.** It is imperative, James Sheldon asserted, for towns to hire exceptionally skilled and competent consultants, so that Planning and Town Boards know

and understand the full fiscal implications of proposed large-scale developments.

He documented his points with many facts and figures, and urged members of the audience to go to his website, www.littletownviews.org, for details. A series of questions from members of the audience and answers from James Sheldon concluded the formal business.

The Board of Directors of ImagineAmenia was thrilled with the attendance, the enthusiasm, and the positive vibes that filled the room. It was plain to see that in Amenia there is a strong sense of caring, and indeed, a powerful sense of community. The enthusiasm showed that our citizens **care enough not to care less.**

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has.”

- Margaret Mead

Leadership for a changing Amenia

Amenia has gone through many changes in her 300 year history. Once the town was a center of iron-working activity, the hills stripped bare of trees for charcoal. Then came an agricultural boom due to our fertile soils, skilled farmers, and the arrival of a railway, which carried our produce into a hungry city. The lakeside resort identity that followed ended calamitously, and for years Amenia slipped quietly backward. Businesses either adapted or went under, and supporting our civic institutions became a struggle.

Over the past few years the world changed. The advances of technology, crowding and noise, and an ever-present fear caused people to look for a more peaceful way of life outside the cities. Our valley is now regarded by many as a diamond in the rough.

There are more aspects to the change: most people are still experiencing a contraction, while others are enjoying a boom. Huge investments are being proposed and new residents, some well-off, others barely getting by, are making Amenia their home. So it should be no surprise that there are divergent views on how to go forward on any given issue. Amenia is a town of multiple perceived realities. No, it's not a pathological condition! More aptly, it's the character of diversity.

This is an election year and we are called upon to choose our leaders for the next two or four years. Human nature is to choose the "familiar"...the group or individual which most represents one's particular reality, and this is a sure recipe for conflict. It's bubbling in Amenia and all over America and the world.

So, do we dig ourselves out and strive to find common ground, or do we pursue a policy of power through intimidation? I say it all depends on true leadership. Thoughtful people are beginning to agree on a list of characteristics, something like this:

- Leaders see themselves at the bottom of the hierarchy of power...as facilitators of other people's progress.
- A leader is not coercive and does not control by force.
- Leaders show no favoritism and can mediate emotional issues without taking sides.
- Leaders know the limitations of their knowledge, but take responsibility for getting good advice, making informed decisions and preparing people for the consequences of those decisions.
- Leaders understand the need to lead by example; by their own life, actions and integrity... they know that their behavior influences others.
- Leaders motivate people to attain their highest potential by offering them opportunities, not by constraints and criticism.

In Amenia we are blessed with the leadership of Janet Reagon, who provides a wonderful example of the positive leadership that will take us forward if we collectively want to be a functioning, motivated and progressive community.

Please consider your choices carefully.

Mark Doyle
Wassaic
Chairman, Comprehensive Plan Implementation Committee

1. BECOME A MEMBER. Our annual membership fee is \$15 for individuals; \$25 for families. Send your check made out to ImagineAmenia to PO Box 169, Amenia, NY 12501.
2. BECOME INVOLVED: Check one:
 - Sign me/us up. We'd like to be involved, attend meetings and help out!
 - We want to help out, but please keep our name(s) anonymous.
3. SUPPORT POLITICAL ACTION for the upcoming campaign, **which starts right now**, by sending a check or money order to support the **ImagineAmenia Political Fund**. Contrary to what some have said, it was scores of modest donations — many of which were from citizens who felt the need to remain anonymous — that enabled ImagineAmenia to present the facts and the issues to the voters in 2003. We hope to be able to do the same in 2007.

NAME

ADDRESS

CITY/TOWN

STATE

ZIP

TELEPHONE (day)

TELEPHONE (evening)

E-MAIL

A Message from the President of ImagineAmenia

On July 19, 2007, the current Town Board passed the Comprehensive Plan and Zoning Law with a majority vote of 3-2. Consider that it took a committee working together once a week for almost five years to complete. Five years. We were all invited to participate in every step, every meeting, every hour. Truly, a milestone and an accomplishment we should be proud of.

But wait a minute...is it finished? Over? Pay \$15 for the document and bury it in a stack of books and papers? What does happen next?

Here's the perfect opportunity...ask the candidates that are running for public office! Stop them on the street, call them, ask them when they are out campaigning. Ask them if they have read the new Comprehensive Plan. Ask them if they understand its goals and purpose? What are the steps that need to be taken to implement the Plan? Do the Planning Board and Zoning Board of Appeals members have any new responsibilities under the Plan? How do you think Amenia should look ten years from now?

We need Town Board members capable of sitting at the table with developers to engage them in civil, productive, back and forth negotiation. We need to elect Town Board members who have the ability to plan with substance and conviction for the future of Amenia. It's not enough to say we need a new Town Hall and an indoor swimming pool and have no plan on how to achieve them. It's not enough to conjure up conspiracies, to plant a rumor and walk away. It's not enough to disagree and walk away. It's not enough to protest at the end of the process and walk away. We not only need Town Board members who can deal with significant complex new challenges from aggressive developers, but board members who can write grants, participate in clean-up days, and respond quickly and professionally to emergencies. We need candidates who can and will answer the questions now.

Ask many questions today, tomorrow, next week. Vote on Election Day, November 6.

We all have a tremendous responsibility in the future of Amenia. Remember, it's not about me, or you, or some corporation, or developer. It's about this place, this land, this valley, to the east, west, north, south. It's how we participate in the process, the growth, the preservation. These are the choices we make. Let's get on with it.

This was here long before we were. It will be here long after we are gone.

Susan Gregory, President

**BREAKING
NEWS!**

Message from Primary Day: LOOK TO THE GENERAL ELECTION

Subject to any change after the counting of absentee ballots, Amenia voters on September 18 selected two great candidates to run for Town Board in November — **Vicki Doyle** and **Bob Riemer**.

In selecting these two, voters showed that experience, knowledge, and ability are requirements our town officials must have.

Voters also responded to another fact: both these candidates have solid, workable ideas not only about what Amenia's future should be, but also about how to achieve it.

Voters also appreciate the fact that both these candidates are in favor of – and regularly practice – civil discussion of questions concerning the town. Though both are well-informed on all questions affecting Amenia's future, they listen when a citizen – any citizen—speaks, both in Town Hall and when you run into them on the street. They both understand that CIVIL DISCOURSE IS THE LIFE BLOOD OF DEMOCRACY. And they practice what they believe.

The primary results are especially gratifying in view of an extraordinarily vicious attack on Michael Chamberlin – and also on ImagineAmenia – launched just before the Primary. Chamberlin was attacked personally, and ImagineAmenia was blamed for everything except the 9/11 attacks.

This last-minute assault should have surprised no one, since both last-minute and personal invective are things the folks who oppose us do very well. In fact that seems to be ALL they do. Read their letters to the editor and review their public comments in Town Hall. Search for a single positive proposal, a single usable suggestion for managing growth and Amenia's future.

You will search in vain.

All you will find is complaint, attempts to obstruct, imagined conspiracies, and personal accusations. Vicki Doyle and **Janet Reagon** have been subjected to this low treatment for years. Bob may well be next in line to join them as a target for calumny.

Those of us who understand that the future matters have a lot of work to do before this election. We have to raise the level of discourse so that it focuses on ideas, and on the REAL issues facing our own. We need to energize voters who will think before they pull the lever, rather than respond to the latest nasty personal rumor.

WE NEED ALL YOUR HELP if we are going to help voters to recognize the real issues in this election: ELECTING A TOWN BOARD MAJORITY WHO UNDERSTAND HOW TO PLAN, HOW TO DELIBERATE IN A CIVIL MANNER, AND HOW TO DEAL WITH THE BIG DEVELOPMENTS THAT ARE AT AMENIA'S DOORSTEP.

PLEASE VOTE ON NOVEMBER 6.

PLEASE VOTE FOR INFORMED POSITIVE PROPOSALS RATHER THAN FOR CLUELESS NEGATIVE COMPLAINING.

PLEASE VOTE FOR JANET REAGON, SUPERVISOR.

PLEASE VOTE FOR VICKI DOYLE AND BOB RIEMER FOR TOWN BOARD.

NOBODY WILL EVER DEPRIVE THE AMERICAN PEOPLE OF THE RIGHT TO VOTE EXCEPT THE AMERICAN PEOPLE THEMSELVES — AND THE ONLY WAY THEY COULD DO THIS IS BY NOT VOTING.

-Franklin D. Roosevelt

ImagineAmenia
P O Box 169
Amenia, NY 12501

www.ImagineAmenia.org
Info@ImagineAmenia.org

Presorted Standard
ECR
US Postage
PAID
Poughkeepsie, NY
Permit # 43

POSTAL PATRON