

Live & virtual commencement graduates 52 OESJ seniors

BY JOSHUA THOMAS
C-S-E Editor

ST. JOHNSVILLE — Friday evening, 52 Oppenheim-Ephratah-St. Johnsville Central School seniors graduated during the merged district's Seventh Annual Commencement, held as a combined live and virtual event in Soldiers and Sailors Park.

Students — seated on the Soldiers and Sailors baseball field in socially distanced seats with family members, while additional guests remained in their vehicles in semi-circles lining the field — wore OESJ logo-adorned masks throughout Friday's ceremony.

Friday's Seventh Annual Commencement featured pre-recorded speeches from Assemblyman Angelo Santabarbara, County Executive Matthew Ossenfort, High School Principal Theodore Kawryga, Superintendent of Schools Dr. Joseph Natale, BOE President Neil Clark, Salutatorian Isabella Masi, and Valedictorian Von Baker, with students walking to the stage to receive diplomas toward the



JOSHUA THOMAS/C-S-E EDITOR

Oppenheim-Ephratah-St. Johnsville High School Class of 2020 President Amethyst Scherer waves to her teachers during the senior parade at the Jr./Sr. High School on Friday, June 26.

event's conclusion.

Friday's event — preceded by a Senior Parade at the Jr./Sr. High School, during which educators lined up to cheer on grad-

uates — also featured a portion wherein members of the Class of 2020 provided a parent or loved one with a carnation, an act of appreciation for their continued

support.

Superintendent Dr. Joseph Natale first congratulated the

OESJ — See page 4

Vandals hit Fort Klock's school house

BY JOSHUA THOMAS
C-S-E Editor

ST. JOHNSVILLE — The Montgomery County Sheriff's Office is currently seeking information regarding a recent vandalism at Fort Klock, where the historic school house and a sign advertising an upcoming event were spray painted with graffiti sometime between Sunday evening and Monday morning.

The graffiti, painted on the side of the old Fort Klock school house, reads, "Big Boyz For Life," while the spray paint on the facility's event sign says, "BB4L."

Said Fort Klock Historic Restoration Board of Trust-

FORT — See page 2

THIS WEEK IN THE C-S-E



St. Johnsville VFD awards • PAGE 10

- Calendar9
- Church directory..... 15-16
- Classifieds..... 18-19
- Obituaries.....13
- Opinion.....11
- TV listings17



144th year – No. 27

Zoning updates aim to designate, protect village's commercial district

BY JOSHUA THOMAS
C-S-E Editor

CANAJOHARIE — The Village of Canajoharie Board of Trustees held several public hearings last Monday, the most significant detailing alterations and additions they'd like to make to the village's current zoning code, the changes being aimed at protecting the integrity of the village's commercial district.

A second public hearing focused on potential building

permit changes and additions, with the third banning tractor trailers from parking within village limits.

While the process of modernizing the village's zoning code — which hadn't been updated since the 1980's — began over two years ago with the Canajoharie Planning Board, a committee was formed within the last year to implement that body's suggestions, the committee consisting of Mayor Jeff Baker and the Ca-

najoharie Village Board, Canajoharie-Palatine Bridge Chamber of Commerce President Janet Stanley, Code Enforcement Officer Cliff Dorrough, Dunn and Dunn, PLLC, Planning Board Chairman Robert Wilson, ZBA Chair Holly Rieser, and Planning Board Member Francis Avery.

While the zoning updates are vast, being fully detailed in a 40-page public document, the main

ZONING — See page 2

Montgomery County stays in land bank

BY JASON SUBIK

For the C-S-E

The Montgomery County Legislature voted 8-0 on Tuesday to renew the county's membership in the Greater Mohawk Valley Land Bank through 2022.

Legislature Chairman Joe Isabel, District 8, abstained from voting on the resolution.

None of the legislators spoke about the resolution when it was passed.

The GMVLB was formed in 2016, part of an increase in the number of land banks in New York state that stemmed from a 2011 law that allowed local governments with the power to foreclose on property to form the nonprofit land banks in order to tap into millions of dollars in settlement money obtained by the New York State Attorney General's office.

Land banks obtain distressed, foreclosed properties and attempt to rehabilitate them and get them back onto tax rolls.

The city of Amsterdam belongs to the Capital Region Land Bank, but the rest of Montgomery County has belonged to the GMVLB since 2016.

The renewal resolution was discussed briefly during the June 16 meeting of the county's Economic Development and Planning committee, chaired by District 9 Legislator Robert Purtell.

Purtell provided legislators with a report from the GMVLB's Project Manager John Mazzarella III, summarizing the land bank's activities in Montgomery County over its three-year existence.

The report listed these accomplishments:

- ◆ \$375,000 in total property demolitions when the entity completes its last demo project by the end of the summer.

- ◆ \$246,196 spent on property rehabilitations and stabilizations, including hazmat surveys, land surveys and renovations as of June 11.

- ◆ 46 percent of the land bank projects in the county have "reached the disposition stage and are either not in GMVLB



JOSHUA THOMAS/C-S-E EDITOR

The former kitchen and bar of the old Stone Lodge at 132 W. Grand St., Palatine Bridge, was demolished recently by the GMVLB.

inventory, sold [with] sale pending, listed for sale, have offers in review, or have disposition plans in review."

The report also listed the sale of two formerly distressed properties the bank helped to rehab:

- ◆ 21 Lydius St., Fort Plain, which has some stabilization work still to be done, and title work delayed by the coronavirus pandemic.

"Buyer committed to invest between \$80,000 to \$100,000 within the next 12 months," reads the report.

- ◆ Canal Street lot, Fort Plain — subdivision completed and sale of four adjacent parcels to three neighbors completed February/March 2020.

During the June 16 committee meeting, District 3 Legislator John Thayer expressed concerns about how well the GMVLB has communicated with the county about its activities.

"Are we going to get a little

better reporting from the land bank, as time goes by?" Thayer asked.

Purtell said he's spoken with GMVLB Executive Director Tolga Morawski, GMVLB board member Karl Gustafson, who represents Montgomery County, and Mazzarella and they told him they would improve their reporting of information to the county.

SAVED MONEY

Purtell said membership in the land bank saved the county money on demolitions.

"The benefit to Montgomery County for staying in the land bank is that we're stabilizing properties with an organization that we know, and we're avoiding [so far \$375,000] worth of demolition and environmental remediation costs," he said. "The demolitions properties are the worst of the worst. The ones where somebody might pay

\$500 for them at a foreclosure auction, never do anything with, not pay any taxes, and then we get it back two years later. Then we're running in circles."

Officials said some of the completed GMVLB demolitions of properties that have not sold yet include: 11 Ann St., Fultonville; 110 Charleston St., Sprakers; and 15 E. Grand St., Palatine Bridge.

The three-year intermunicipal agreement that formed the GMVLB expired in 2019. Its original members included the counties of Herkimer, Montgomery, Otsego and Schoharie and the cities of Utica and Rome.

However, the Herkimer County Legislature pulled its county out of the land bank on June 10. The GMVLB has its headquarters at 500 East Main St. in Little Falls.

The resolution to renew Montgomery County's membership also included several amendments to the GMVLB's

intermunicipal agreement, including ending its requirement board members for the entity reside within the county they represent, and an amendment allowing the land bank to create limited liability corporations for the purpose of holding ownership of properties with significant environmental contamination.

Purtell said LLCs will help shield the rest of the GMVLB's property portfolio from any of the legal risk of owning properties requiring significant environmental cleanup.

"If they run across a contaminated site, they want to be able to run that through a separate LLC to have kind of a corporate veil so the environmental liability of the property doesn't contaminate, if you will, the rest of the processes [of the land bank]," Purtell said.

Geeks @ Site

GET YOUR COMPUTER FIXED IN THE COMFORT OF YOUR HOME

Remote Support for:

- Adware/spyware
- Speed up computer
- Install software
- Email issues
- Pop-ups
- Printer & scanner support

\$40 OFF
PLATE UNLIMITED SERVICE

Must mention code
86407
for promo price

Call Us Now at 844 245 3414

NEWS IN BRIEF

Food Pantry sets drive-thru pickup July 15 and 22

ST. JOHNSVILLE — The Helping Hands Food Pantry will be open the third and fourth Wednesday of each month, July 15 and 22, from 3:30-6 p.m. Food will be available at the D.H. Robbins building,

61 Monroe St., via drive-thru pick up.

Those picking up food should wait for a thumbs up before getting out of your vehicle. Remain six feet away from others. Do not break social distancing guidelines by transporting those not in your household, and wash your hands and sanitize products in food boxes when you return home.