



Mayor: Robert Allen
Deputy Mayor: Robert Ryan

Trustees: Deb Alter, Rober Decker, Kevin O'Malley,
Dan Schuttig, and Doug Sauer

July 28th, 2023

To: Rich Crist, Director of Operations, Rensselaer County
From: Robert Allen, Mayor, Village of Hoosick Falls,
and the Village of Hoosick Falls Board of Trustees
Re: Relocation of the Senior Center

We are writing to you as a full Board of Trustees of the Village of Hoosick Falls to express strong concern over the recent announcement made by Rensselaer County on Wednesday, July 26th to purchase the former Dollar Tree with the goal of renovating it to become the new Senior Center, DMV satellite service and Mental Health counseling service location.

Each member of the Board of Trustees has had numerous individual and group conversations with dozens of our constituents on this topic, listening to concerns, and talking through the various pros and cons of this proposed plan. While we all see the value in improving the facilities and the positives of a newer building, we have larger concerns over the major negative effects this move would have on the Village and the constituents who rely on these essential services.

This letter serves several purposes. First, we want to highlight and elevate the concerns of our local government, our Village residents, and our local business owners. Secondly, we would like to ask that we be included in the discussion (which can include direct conversations with Village Government officials, a review of the information and data on the Murphy Building with the Village, and a public meeting where Village and County officials can attend and hear the concerns of residents). Finally, we are asking the Legislature not to act on this plan at the August Regular Meeting, allowing for more thorough discussions and further planning to be completed regarding this potential move.

When you called the Mayor on July 25th to formally announce the plan (ahead of the July 26th press release) you presented various aspects and concerns regarding the plan and included the possibility of a bus service to the new location and a commitment to work with the Village to leave the building in good shape, especially if the Village was interested in the space. Even though it was an appreciated gesture and a good conversation, the Village Board of Trustees was exceedingly frustrated to hear such a significant decision for the Village and County had been planned and set in motion without any other direct consultation or discussions than this phone call a day before the announcement.

The positives of this plan are obvious but still worth noting. The county-owned and operated John A. Murphy Building is well known for its deteriorating condition and has needed modernization for years, as noted by some of the quotes in the press release. There is no question that improved facilities, along with better parking, would benefit our seniors and everyone else who uses that building, and this sentiment has been relayed to the Village Board by several people who regularly use the current building and have a working knowledge of the current condition of the Murphy Building.

Unfortunately, the negatives of this proposed plan far outweigh the positives in the Board's view. One of the biggest questions we have received relates to the cost of the project, with the \$575,000 purchase price and the needed renovations (along with the rumored concerns over the septic situation at the new location). With a very legitimate possibility of the total project costing nearly \$1 million, why is the County choosing to vacate the building and spend those monies on a new location instead of improving the current location in the heart of the Village?

The timing of this decision is also something we do not understand. When the Woods Brook flooding occurred in June of 2017 and the basement area of the Senior Center was damaged by floodwaters, there was talk of the building closing down. Fortunately, the Village breathed a sigh of relief when the County invested in repairing that building and investing in its future. In the years since, the Village and Town of Hoosick have made significant improvements to the cause of the 2017 flood, so much so that the recent heavy storms didn't even hint at the possibility of flooding. The improvements were the center of two recent Times Union articles¹, with one Editorial stating "If you want to know what smart planning for storms looks like, consider Hoosick Falls."² With these significant improvements made to the building and the flood plain since 2017, why is the County considering leaving the building now?

There is a lot to discuss regarding pedestrian accessibility to the current location. One Trustee shared that over 50 Senior Apartments are within a block of the Senior Center in the Murphy Building. While we have been told that data suggests most senior center users drive to the location, we feel like it is not accurate to assume this trend will continue. A short drive on Village streets to the current location will be different than a longer drive that includes a railroad crossing, a bridge, additional intersections, and two speed changes, especially for seniors.

One additional point to consider regarding local access is the fact that an updated facility at the current location (or local to the center of the Village) will likely draw more patrons, including and especially with seniors. This approach would be in line with the current trend many municipalities are taking to increase walkability in their communities. As former Deputy Mayor

¹ Karlin, Rick (2023, July 16). 'Recent Hudson Valley flooding could spark call to buy out flood prone homes' Albany Times Union. <https://www.timesunion.com/business/article/recent-hudson-valley-flooding-spark-call-buy-18196812.php>

² Times Union Editorial Board (2023, July 21). 'Editorial: Holding back the tide.' Albany Times Union. <https://www.timesunion.com/opinion/article/editorial-way-stop-floods-18211212.php>

Ric DiDonato eloquently summarized on Facebook, “Walkable communities are the best communities. People keep talking about rides being offered, but that misses the point entirely...Why would we want to isolate our seniors to a remote location. They should be able to mingle with us all. We love our seniors. Isolation is the worst thing for them.”

An additional concern about the loss of walk-in convenience relates to the Mental Health services provided, of which many of us have been told receives a lot of walk-in visits. It cannot be understated that with rising costs and inflation, the many effects of the pandemic, and discussions at the Federal level about lessening or removing services, everyone is feeling significant stress. The access to Mental Health services is of paramount importance to our community, including some chronically mentally ill clients who don't have access to transportation. The Village and most of its residents remain deeply concerned about the loss of walk-in availability for Seniors and for Mental Health services – much more concerned than the Mayor had assumed would be the case during the initial July 25th call with the Director of Operations.

A final essential concern is the possibility of an empty storefront, especially one that is knowingly in bad shape. It is hard to capture in words the energy and vibrance that currently exists in Hoosick Falls and the investments improvements made since the PFOA crisis began in 2015. Buildings have been purchased and renovated. New businesses (Iron Coffee, Byte, and Hoosick Provisions, to name a few) have opened their doors and made a phenomenal impact, while others have enlarged (Cumberland Farms) or seen more opportunities and services offered (such as pickleball at the Armory). Empty storefronts long dormant have become bustling and successful businesses again. Zoning and laws have been updated, plans for parking improvements are in the works, and multiple unsafe structures have been addressed. An extremely successful partnership between local government and business owners even saw a strong effort in a grant application for the New York State Downtown Revitalization Initiative/New York Forward program, something that is already being prepared for a second attempt at the multi-million-dollar opportunity.

Suffice it to say, many initiatives and forces have been moving steadily in the right direction in our Village for quite some time. That is why the loss of the Murphy Building and the addition of an empty store front, one well known for its deteriorating condition, would be a sucker punch to so many who have invested so much of their time, money, and resources into the Village. Our local business owners can speak more about the losses they would anticipate should the Murphy Building services move outside the Village.

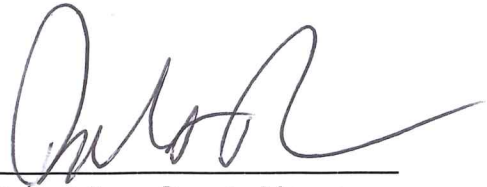
We have long enjoyed a good working relationship with Rensselaer County, most recently with assistance from the County on the Village's Woods Brook Home Buyout and Drainage Improvement projects, the constant communication between the Mayor and the County Director of Operations throughout the pandemic, and assistance with tree removal in Wood Park through shared services. We hope that you see this letter as the representative views and

concerns of Village residents and leadership as well as the start of an important but necessary discussion that will lead to the best possible outcome for the County and the Village of Hoosick Falls. As this proposal currently stands, with its questions and concerns unaddressed, the Village of Hoosick Falls Board of Trustees cannot, in good conscience, support this plan.

At this time, the Village Board is against moving forward with the purchase of the old Dollar Tree until a larger discussion and plan can be made. We look forward to further discussing the matter with the County and working together for the best possible outcome for the County, for the Village of Hoosick Falls, and for the people who benefit from the services provided by the John A. Murphy Building.



Robert J. Allen, Mayor
Village of Hoosick Falls



Robert Ryan, Deputy Mayor
Village of Hoosick Falls



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Village of Hoosick Falls



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Doug Sauer, Trustee
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cc: Steven McLaughlin, Rensselaer County Executive
Jeff Wysocki, Rensselaer County Legislature, District Five
Bruce Patire, Rensselaer County Legislature, District Five
Kelly Hoffman, Rensselaer County Legislature Majority Leader
Peter D. Grimm, Rensselaer County Legislature Minority Leader
Mark Surdam, Town of Hoosick Supervisor