

# Public Domain

by Steve Krulick, Village of Ellenville Trustee

## Ideas Whose Time Had Come

*"Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot, nothing is going to get better. It's not". — Dr. Seuss, author and illustrator (1904-1991)*

Sometimes, all one can do is plant a seed, water it, and wait. An idea obvious to one (or a few) may need some incubation, or changed conditions, before others warm to it. As Victor Hugo *didn't* say (another close but misquoted attribution), "Nothing is more powerful than an idea whose time has come."

So, to conclude this extended intro, let's set some ground rules on how we'll categorize the suggestions to come. First, we can separate them by their scope: individual, family, neighborhood, municipality, region/state, national, global. Sometimes, in a given week, I'll try to have a nice mix, or maybe I'll focus on one level at a time.

Second, to what extent are they necessary, as opposed to just nice, characterized in three ways:

- 1) *It's totally broke'; fix it!*
- 2) *It's working, but poorly; it could use new parts or maintenance.*
- 3) *It works OK, but could be snazzed up and polished.*

For each way, I'll use a suggestion that got approved at the municipal (Village of Ellenville) level, albeit with differing degrees of receptivity.

1) The Village Hall has been broken for over a decade: it's been out of compliance with mandates for handicapped accessibility; it's too cramped and cluttered for efficient use; and it's too costly to heat and cool, among other deficiencies. Sequential Boards have tried to deal with this over the years. Fixing and upgrading the present building was considered, and repeatedly rejected as being inadequate in some ways and throwing good money after bad in others. No viable existing building presented itself as an alternative when a previous administration settled on buying several plots on Center Street to construct a new building.

This was the only plausible option for some time, and the thought of being able to design a modern, 21<sup>st</sup> century "green" building, with solar panels, radiant heating, non-toxic local materials, energy efficiency, natural lighting, etc., was something I looked forward to. But when the Provident Bank building went on the market, the thought of being able to use an existing and relatively-new building was something I couldn't resist putting on the table. My argument to the Board and community, laid out first in an editorial in *Wawarsing.Net*, was: it would be less costly to buy and modify an existing building than to build from scratch; this would also eliminate the hidden delays and costs as plagued the Ulster County Jail, as we'd

know what was there, and interior work could be done even in the dead of winter; it would take less time, so we could move in sooner; retrofits would still allow for solar and radiant and other energy/environmental improvements; the Town could move in with us, further bringing down costs, and allowing for increased communication/cooperation/consolidation; there'd be more parking available than on Center Street; it's in a pre-existing civic campus area (particularly if we also used the grassy section next to it as a village park), whereas the Center Street property could be resold so new retail buildings could more logically go there, in the business district.

Many in the community thought all this made sense, but some official resistance and delays, at the village and town level, led to this idea being relegated to less than back-burner status, though I kept bringing it up, as at least "Plan B" should the voters reject "Plan A." Only when the delays led to the realtor dropping the price to an even million (from \$1.75 million, and including the furniture and more parking spaces) did even the holdouts admit it was an offer that couldn't be refused. So now, my suggestion will likely come to complete fruition by mid-2007.

2) Village elections are normally held every year in March or June in New York State, with alternating two-year terms. Annual March elections in Ellenville never made sense to me: door-to-door campaigning in winter weather is awful (not to mention trying to plant signs in frozen ground!), turnout is low (bad weather and people forgetting there even IS an election!); candidates can't run alongside town and county hopefuls; extra elections increase the village costs each year, while four-year terms would halve the candidates' costs to run. So, although there was no requirement to change things, my suggestion to move the village elections to November in odd years would clearly save money and solve several shortcomings with one swoop, so it was adopted rather quickly.

3) On a trip to Europe, I noticed the use of small metal or plastic trash cans affixed off the ground on street signs or light poles, noticeable but not obtrusive, and placed at close intervals so there was no excuse to drop trash on the ground. They look good, they work fine, they are easy to empty and maintain. I took pictures to show the Board, resulting in several similar-sized containers being installed, with positive results; the Board has since ordered additional containers, to be added soon. A simple idea, not a major undertaking, but it makes things nicer. And that's only the beginning.

To be continued.

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