

From the Supervisor's Desk

When instructing the jury at the close of a criminal trial, a judge often tells the jurors that they cannot refuse to render a verdict of guilty, just because they want to avoid a “disagreeable duty”.

That phrase, “disagreeable duty”, came to mind as I reflected after the June Town Board meeting. For several months the Town Board had postponed making final decisions on whether to cancel popular summer programs, but by June 11 those decisions could not be avoided anymore, and the Town Board voted to cancel the Summer Day Camp and the Summer Music Program. Additionally, we agreed that the Copake Park would remain closed for the time being.

With those votes, two very popular, successful Copake programs fell victim to the virus which has changed our lives and the lives of Americans across the country. The fact that all of the votes on Thursday night were unanimous did not make them any less disagreeable.

The history of the camp situation started a couple of months ago when Matt Murell, the Chair of the Columbia County Board of Supervisors; Rob Lagonia, chair of the County Committee on Health and Human Services; and Jack Mabb, the director of the Columbia Department of Health issued a “strong recommendation” that towns not open day camps. Even after Governor Cuomo announced in early June that day camps could open, the leaders of Columbia County reiterated their strong recommendation to keep the camps closed.

Trying to resolve the camp issue, the Town Board also looked to the ad hoc Public Health Emergency Task Force, which the board appointed in March. This task force is comprised of Rus Davis, a pharmacist who owned the Copake Pharmacy and is a Commissioner of the Copake Fire District and President of the Board of Directors of the Copake Community Rescue Squad; Janet Mackin, who is a nurse with extensive experience in both hospital nursing and education; and Dave Proper, who has deep experience in public safety as a deputy with the Columbia County Sheriff's Department and former Chief of the Copake Fire Company. These professionals were unanimous in their advice that in the face of the recommendation from the Department of Health, it would be wrong to try to open the camp.

All of this was considered in view of current state guidelines. An Executive Order prohibits gatherings of more than 10 people. State guidelines prohibit athletics where people come in contact with one another. Playgrounds are closed. When the guidelines for camps were issued, just last week, they were so stringent that a camp seemed impossible.

For all these reasons the camp was cancelled. The Summer Music Program was likewise cancelled, not only because groups of more than ten are disallowed, but also because it seemed inappropriate to ask the same businesses which have been closed for months, to help fund a town activity. The Town Board discussed whether, if conditions allow, a concert might be scheduled for late in the summer. Further discussion of that and whether the Copake Park might be opened to the public will be on the July agenda.

In more positive decisions, the Town Board voted to open the Town Hall for business on Monday, June 15. Entry into the Town Hall will be by appointment only, and all visitors must wear a face covering and provide contact information. The protocol for the opening of Town Hall can be read [here](#).

In other business on Thursday night, the Town Board appointed a seven-member committee to address economic revitalization in Copake. We also set up a Repair Reserve Fund and agreed to transfer money into that fund, as well as our existing Capital Improvements Reserve Fund. The capital improvement fund, which was created in 2016, is meant to finance improvements to the Copake Hamlet when the County Highway Department reconstructs the roads through the hamlet. Columbia County is about to hire a design consultant on that project. The construction phase may not be until 2023, but because the town has planned ahead, we will be prepared to add park benches, streetlights and other amenities.

All of these projects, especially a road project which will not materialize until 2023, may be cold comfort to the children and parents who wanted to see a summer camp in Copake. For all those who loved being able to hear live music in the park every Saturday, it is demoralizing to hear that it is cancelled. It is unsettling for sure, when the activities we rely on and which define our lives are upended by a virus which we cannot see but which deprives us not only of daily companionship and community, but in some cases, people we know and love.

As of Friday, June 12, there were 21 positive COVID-19 cases in Copake. As of June 14 there have been 418 positive cases and 37 deaths in Columbia County due to the virus. For daily reports to to: <https://www.facebook.com/Columbia-County-Department-of-Health->

On Thursday we closed our meeting with a moment of silence for all of those who have died from this horrible disease.

Jeanne E. Mettler

