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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

July 10, 2023

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Seven New and Revised Papers on Local Municipal Topics

Watertown, NY – Tug Hill Commission staff have been hard at work writing and updating technical and issue papers on several municipal topics. All of these can be accessed online at tughill.org/publications/technical-issue-papers/.

How to Write a ZBA Decision

Zoning boards of appeals (ZBAs) were created in the New York State planning statutes as a “safety valve” for the zoning process. Because zoning can limit the freedom of a property owner to develop their property in a way that they may desire, a mechanism is needed to review specific instances of hardship or improper classification of a property and give owners a vehicle to possibly effect change. The goal of the zoning board of appeals is to come to a well-reasoned decision in any case before them. While a written decision is not required, one way that the ZBA’s hard work on each case can be shown is via the written record and ultimately by a well written decision. This paper focuses on the skills and tools needed to develop a good decision.

Introduction to Municipal Websites

Although many towns and villages in New York State have municipal websites, there remain many that do not. While there is no law that requires a town or village to have a website, there are good reasons to consider one, primarily to keep the community informed of the services available to them, events, legislative updates, and more. This paper discusses legally required content as well as recommended content for municipal websites, and ways to manage a town or village website efficiently and effectively.

Municipal Insurance Coverage Annual Review

It is recommended to review municipal insurance coverages annually to assess changes in the municipality’s risk tolerance, to manage claims, and to anticipate future risk exposure. However, municipal insurance coverage is a topic that often flies under the radar during a time of the year when towns are inundated with budgeting and other year-end obligations. This

Helping local governments and citizens shape the future of the Tug Hill region.

paper

encourages early annual review of municipal insurance coverages and includes a one-page checklist.

Regulating Home-based Businesses

Home-based businesses, also known as home occupations, have long been operated on Tug Hill and across upstate New York. This type of business occurs where the occupant of a residential dwelling also use their property to provide some type of retail service or sales, typically from a space within the dwelling, but occasionally from an accessory structure. Advances in technology, and the availability of high-speed internet, have only increased the popularity of home-based businesses. Municipalities should plan for and regulate home based businesses in a way that allows and promotes them while being sensitive to their potential impacts on neighboring properties and the community. This paper explores the tools available to do so.

Use and Regulation of Drones for Municipalities

Drones are used widely for both public and private business purposes as well as for recreation. A drone is any aerial vehicle that receives remote commands from a pilot or relies on software for autonomous flight. Originally developed for the military and aerospace industries, drones have found their way into the mainstream because of the enhanced levels of safety and efficiency they bring. In New York State, as of February 2023 there were over 10,000 certificated Part 107 remote pilots. State agencies and counties are regularly using drones, and local municipal governments are beginning to find uses for them as well. This paper focuses on understanding requirements around drones and how they can be used for municipal purposes.

GIS Resources for Local Governments

This paper serves as an introduction to what a Geographic Information System is, why local governments may be interested in developing or using a GIS, and things to consider when considering a program.

Planning Considerations for Solar Facilities Issue Paper

The revisions to the commission's solar paper, done in cooperation with multiple organizations over the four-county area, builds upon the previous version, including more examples of solar facilities from the region, resources and policies for municipalities to reference, and sections for developers to better understand municipal concerns.

The New York State Tug Hill Commission is a non-regulatory state agency charged with helping local governments, organizations, and citizens shape the future of the region, especially its environment and economy. The commission uses a grassroots approach to build local capacity and provide technical assistance in land use planning, community development, and natural resource management.

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