

Office of the Clerk
VILLAGE OF WAPPINGERS FALLS

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The Village of Wappingers Falls realized the risks involved of not having regular site inspections of their public facilities. And because of the collaborative work relationship they have with PERMA, the Village was able to see the value of implementing a Safety Committee. The value that the safety committee has brought the Village has so far been immeasurable. The Village Board of Trustees implemented the Safety Committee in the beginning of 2019 because of their desire to promote safety as a top priority.

The Safety Committee of the Village of Wappingers Falls is chaired by its Clerk, John M. Karge. The committee is diverse and has representatives from various departments within the municipality. There are representatives from its administration, the highway department and the parks department. Including Karge, there are a total of five members on the committee.

Earlier this year, Mr. Karge and his team met numerous times to review the village's existing safety practices. With the assistance of the Village's PERMA consultant, Mr. Karge and his team were able to formulate a safety manual for the Village. Once they had a rubric in place the team was able to perform safety inspections of each building within the municipality. During the inspections, the team noted issues that arose and reported them to the Mayor and the Board of Trustees at a board meeting. Mayor Alexander and the Board were then able to have the issues addressed and remedied.

Some of the issues the team encountered and addressed with the Village Board were safety concerns for both residents and employees.

A site inspection of the Village Hall yielded some notable areas of concern. For example, exit routes had been encroached upon with boxes of files. Fire extinguishers needed to be more visible and have the inspections regularly marked. In one case the fire extinguisher had been blocked and had not been visible.

At the Village Police Station there had been areas of unmarked exits. In this case it posed a risk to anyone who may be in the building and needed to evacuate. Fire extinguishers were not mounted in each room making it hard to locate them in case of a fire. As well, it was cited that the fire extinguishers needed to be inspected monthly in accordance with the NYS Fire Code.

The Recreation Department had an issue with flammable liquids that were inappropriately stored. They were not marked correctly with warnings and needed to be relocated. Also, the electrical panel was obstructed and not easily accessible.

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During a site inspection this past fall, the Village Homestead had been cited for an electrical panel labeling issues. More specifically, the ‘artifact’ room had an electrical panel without labeling, making it impossible to address breakers in the case of an emergency. Also noted was the lack of a handrail that was in compliance with the building code of 1991. Being that there were more than 4 risers, the handrail would have needed to be 34 inches, which it was not. The committee and Village Board made the Homestead aware of this and restricted any persons from going upstairs until the handrail was remedied. As well, doorways and exits were not adequately marked that is a direct safety hazard in the case of an emergency.

Although those were not all the findings during the site inspections, this list encompasses some issues that could potentially cause significant harm to people. The inspections and system the committee implemented have brought a new way of addressing and handling safety issues within the Village. The format that the committee uses is a systematic approach for all facilities that allows the team to look for potential issues regardless of the use of the building. The Safety Committee is of the belief that all public buildings need to be as safe as they can be regardless of the number of occupants it has.

The changes the Safety Committee have implemented have been very well received by the Board of Trustees. As noted by Mayor Alexander, “Our Village prides itself on safety. Safety is paramount.” The system the committee put in place works well for all; the issues are clearly written, the board is notified, the work request is sent out and the issues get remedied.

Due to the great work the committee has done thus far, the Village Board decided that the Village Safety Committee will stay in place as a permanent committee and will continue to rotate facility inspections. This committee has been set to meet quarterly so that they can prepare an ongoing report to the Village Board.

John M. Karge, Village Clerk & Safety Committee Coordinator