



The Chairman's Corner

by

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NEW DPW COMMISSIONER

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To start off 2022, Ray Jurkowski stepped into the role of commissioner of the Columbia County Department of Public Works, a position that oversees the Highway Department, Engineering, Solid Waste, Facilities, and the Columbia County Airport.

Born in Ossining, Jurkowski's parents moved to Livingston when he was young. These days, he and wife, Laurel, and their teenage son live in Livingston, in a house that had once belonged to Laurel's great-grandparents but had since gotten out of the family until they came along. "I married the girl next door," he says.

Jurkowski is a graduate of Boston's Wentworth Institute of Technology who thereafter, in 1991, went immediately into the municipal consulting business with Morris Associates, becoming senior partner in 2003. Jurkowski remained in that field until coming over to Columbia County this January 3.

"I've always enjoyed working with municipalities, helping them reach their goals, whether they're planning items or capital projects, things of that nature," Jurkowski said. He estimates that over the years he has worked with "close to 70 percent of the communities in Columbia County as a consulting engineer. I'm very familiar with the county."

As the COVID-19 pandemic wore on, Jurkowski said he engaged in some "soul searching," not unusual for many at that time. "Part of me asked, what am I doing? I'm out at a couple or three night meetings a week while I have a 16-year-old son with a few years left before he goes off to college. I thought to myself, maybe it's time for a change that allows me to spend more time at home with loved ones."

Overall, as a Registered Professional Engineer, Jurkowski said he aims to provide greater in-house engineering and construction administration services on some of the county's smaller culvert, building, and infrastructure projects, rather than having to utilize outside consultants, which ultimate saves county taxpayers at tax time.

Looking ahead as DPW commissioner, Jurkowski has some specific goals in mind.

Noting that Columbia County houses its departments in a number of buildings, he said, "One of the primary items would be creating a long-term capital plan as it pertains to the various buildings. That's not only the maintenance but also looking at the long-term capital improvements, whether it involves consolidating buildings, new buildings, but basically coming up with a plan."

"One of the big ones right now is the Office of the Aging and the kitchen facility, and recognizing the need to do something with that. It's an opportunity to consolidate not only the kitchen but also have the staff in the same building to increase efficiency," Jurkowski said.

Further, Jurkowski has his eye on keeping up with county bridges: "The county has a significant number of bridges that continue to age, and we continue to need to make major improvements, whether improvements or replacements, but we're behind on trying to get some of those done. One of my goals is to continue the program Dean Knox took on, and continue working with New York State and the feds as far as obtaining grants."

Last but certainly not least, Jurkowski said, another long-term goal is making increased use of GPS services in relation to county infrastructure. This would, for instance, a highway department road foreman out in the field to more quickly address an issue.

The county Board of Supervisors and I welcome Ray aboard!