

TOWN OF DELHI
Public Hearing
February 12, 2024
5:35PM

**RESOLUTION NO. 002- Delaware County Request For Governmental Immunity
From Compliance With Town Of Delhi Local Regulations For Reconstruction Of
Bramley Mountain Fire Tower On NYC-Owned Bramley Mountain Trail**

Those present:

Councilmember's: Josh Morgan, Matt Krzyston, Margaret Baldwin and Christina Viafore.
Town residents: Mathew Burkert, Barbara Jones, Elizabeth Wawro, John Sandman,
Ann Roberti, Glenn Nealis, Elizabeth DeFalco – The Reporter

Supervisor Boukai called the public hearing to order at 5:33 pm.

Supervisor Boukai gave the floor to Glen Nealis of Delaware County Economic Development who stated that they were seeking the governmental immunity so that the county can move forward in a more facilitated fashion and by the town passing the resolution it will allow the county to move to the DEP for final approval for the land access permit as this is a requirement for us to have approved. It will still be required to be a sound structure, require a building permit and everything. It will be a county project start to finish other than the fact it happens to be located in the town, there is no town involvement or liability associated with the project.

Supervisor Boukai then opened the floor for comment.

Ann Roberti, President of Friends of Bramley Mountain Fire Tower which was specially formed for this project. She was here to speak to the benefits of approving this request for governmental immunity of the project. She wanted to stress the Friends of Bramley Mountain Fire Tower are providing all the funding for the construction of the tower, we are responsible for the ongoing maintenance and for volunteer staffing of the tower. As Glen said the county is taking full responsibility for the tower and of the liability and they have entered into an agreement with them for the distribution of responsibilities, the county has secured the means for taking down the tower in the very unlikely event that it should ever need to be. Similar towers are up around the country and have been up for over a hundred years and we think this one will be for a very long time. Granting governmental immunity will speed up the permitting process so that we can meet a June 2024 construction target date that we have with our contractor. The sooner we can restore the tower to Bramley Mountain the sooner the community can reap the economic benefits and the sooner the community can enjoy the recreation as a historical and cultural resource. We are returning the structure to the exact site it previously stood on, it's the exact same height that stood on the mountain in 1975. The footprint of the tower will be virtually unchanged. This project has tremendous support in the community, the county and beyond. The county has recognized the benefit of the

project and has given us a \$25,000 grant, we have received grants from other organizations such as O'Connor Foundation, the Muster (?) Fund, Livestock Foundation, Helfgot Renfro Foundation, Delaware County Historical Association, Catskill 3500 Club and more. We received over three hundred donations from individuals, businesses, the local community and from fire tower fans all over the country. We have raised over 95% of the funds to restore and reconstruct the tower from all of these supporters. The DEP has supported us in addition to allowing the tower on their property by improving the access road and building a big parking area at their expense. We have volunteers signing up to staff the tower and greet the visitors on weekends and holidays from opening day through Indigenous People's Day. The project has been covered in the media as far away as the Hudson Valley and in a national magazine. Bramley Mountain Fire Tower has almost 300 subscribers to our email list to over 800 followers on Facebook and 300 on Instagram; this reach will only continue to grow. This truly is a once in a lifetime opportunity, we can put the tower up again and reap the many benefits this year. The governmental immunity from zoning variance and site plan survey being requested by Delaware County will help ensure this can happen.

Barb Jones a Delhi resident and a member of the Friends of Bramley Mountain Fire Tower, the Catskill Mountain Club, and the Catskill 3500 Club. The fire tower will be an exciting recreational resource in our region and will help to motivate our local residents to improve their health by hiking. Many will make it a goal to be able to hike to the summit and climb the tower to enjoy the 360-degree view. The fire tower is a short distance from nearby villages and the trail itself is shorter and easier than most Catskill Mountain trails which climb the high peaks. Having a fire tower atop of a nearby trail is motivating, it will provide a clear enticement for residents and visitors who would like to improve their fitness. She stated she can attest to this personally; the first hikes she did were some of the easier ones and it really motivated her to keep hiking longer and harder trails and get more fit in the process. We believe that hiking the tower will inspire people to participate in more outdoor recreation which we know has many physical and health benefits. It's often noted in the Catskill Mountain Club trail registers that the Catskill Mountain's easier trails have inspired people to work their way up, more hiking trips and harder trails. Another major benefit is it will educate the hiking public through a volunteer steward program, an opportunity that she is excited because she is going to start training to be a steward later this spring. On weekends hikers will have the opportunity to interact with a knowledgeable steward; those stewards will make themselves available during the week to provide interested local schools with educational materials and about other nearby local hikes to recreate safely and responsibly. We will be working with schools that are interested in arranging school trips; the fire tower was a very popular school trip destination before it was decommissioned and now the field trips to the tower can begin again. Inspiring the next generation to be active in the outdoors and respect and protect our environment is a key goal of the project. The fire tower and its steward program will strengthen public pride in the historical assets of our area and provide an opportunity for our visitors to learn more about the history and ecology of our region. As already noted, the restored fire tower will be a multifaceted resource where children and adults can learn about the

outdoors, about the historical use of fire towers to protect our communities from forest fires and the history of the Catskills. Like our covered bridges the tower will be a living historical monument. I strongly urge the council to grant this project governmental immunity so that our community can begin to enjoy the recreational and educational benefits of the Bramley Mountain Fire Tower as soon as possible.

John Sandman spoke on behalf of Kathy Mario; who is on the board of the Friends of Bramley Mountain Fire Tower. She wished him to speak of the benefits the tower would provide for birders in our area. She has been a member of the Audubon Society for 50 years. In addition to the historical and recreational benefits the tower will provide for real citizen science measurable data can be gathered because the tower will rise well above the surrounding area making it possible to count migrating raptors and other birds on the Delaware Valley route and compare that to the data of the Franklin Mountain Hawk Watch along the Susquehanna. The tower will provide a very important educational function. Mr. Sandman then spoke for himself regarding the economic benefits that the tower will provide to our region. According to the most recent trail count the Bramley Mountain trail draws more than 3,300 hikers per year, once there is a fire tower on top of the mountain the number of hikers coming to Bramley Mountain trail will grow exponentially. Fire tower trails are a huge draw for tourists in the Catskills. Based on statistics from other Catskill fire tower trails we predict having a fire tower on Bramley Mountain could easily triple the current number of hikers, to about 10,000 per year. Many of these hikers will be from outside the area they will eat at local restaurants will buy gas and groceries; the ones coming from great distance will stay at motels and Airbnb's. According to the economic evaluation study for public lands in the central Catskills each hiker that travels to the Catskills spends an average of \$62.70 per visit. Based on these statistics and logical estimates the restored tower on Bramley Mountain could bring in over \$400,000 in additional visiting spending each year in Delaware County; over \$400,000. That is why both the Greater Delhi Chamber of Commerce, and the Delaware County Chamber of Commerce fully supported the Bramley Mountain Fire Tower from the very start. It is also why the project received \$25,000 tourism grant from the Delaware County Economic Development office in 2022. The fire tower will help to establish Delhi as a destination for tourists and when people travel here for other reasons to attend a wedding or visit the college a hike to the fire tower will enhance and possibly extend their visit; there is no doubt that the fire tower will significantly increase tourism and provide sizable economic benefits to business owners in Delhi. In addition to the economic benefits there is the public health and educational benefits that Barb mentioned in her statement. He strongly urged the town council to approve the request for governmental immunity so the people and businesses in our region start to reap all the many benefits of the Bramley Mountain Fire Tower this summer.

There being no further public comment, the public hearing was closed at 5:43pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

Laura Mills

Deputy Town Clerk