Investing in Bedford before problems arise

Posted Friday, September 18, 2026 5:46 pm

BY ELLEN CALVES

Infrastructure is easy to take for granted — until something doesn't work.

A road deteriorates, a water main fails, a neighborhood loses connectivity, or a public facility reaches the end of its useful life. Keeping Bedford functioning well requires planning ahead and making investments before problems become emergencies.

That is why strengthening our infrastructure has been a priority for me and my fellow Bedford Town Board members.

One example is wireless connectivity. Bedford has long had inadequate wireless service. After extensive review, we approved a new cellular facility behind the Bedford Post Inn, rather than the more intrusive alternatives proposed for Indian Hill Park, Stone Hill Road and Hickory Lane. More recently, we have enabled a location for a facility on DEP land, rather than the more intrusive alternative next to the Katonah Museum of Art. We also updated the town's wireless facilities law to establish better location priorities, minimize the number of facilities needed, and maximize coverage. We continue to advocate for less intrusive solutions for remaining gaps.

Water and wastewater infrastructure are equally important. We completed Phase II of the sewer project in Katonah and Bedford Hills, funded almost entirely by a $13 million grant from the New York City Department of Environmental Protection. Bedford also secured a $840,000 matching grant from the Environmental Facilities Corporation for a $1 million project to drill new wells and upgrade the water supply in Bedford Village, helping ensure a reliable supply of clean water for residents and businesses. A new pump station on Green Lane, connected to the Mount Kisco water supply, provides an important backup to ensure adequate water when it is needed. Looking ahead, we are exploring opportunities for grants to bring sewers to the 117 commercial district for enhanced services and new uses.

Transportation infrastructure is another priority. We secured $650,000 in federal funding to redesign the Harris Road and Babbitt Road intersection and add sidewalks, $100,000 in state funds to upgrade the sidewalk on Huntville and $100,000 grants to purchase police vehicles and a wheelchair accessible activity bus. We are currently working with the NYSDOT and the DPW on a designed solution for safety and walkability entering the Historic District on Route 22. With a $50,000 Hudson River Valley Greenway grant, Bedford completed engineering and design to improve the walk/bike path along Route 117, and we have applied for significant grant funding to move forward with these improvements. Other projects involving the Department of Public Works and Bedford Police Department have improved traffic and pedestrian safety.

Parks and facilities also require constant improvement. With thoughtful capital investment and grant funding, Bedford Hills playground was overhauled, pickleball courts installed, and this fall the 30+ year old Katonah playground will be replaced. The office building at 425 Cherry St. has a new, efficient HVAC system and thanks to a Clean Energy Communities grant funding, we will upgrade equipment and energy efficiency in the 100 year old Town House.

Infrastructure is not limited to pipes, pavement and buildings. It includes the public spaces that connect our neighborhoods and beautify our hamlets. We fought successfully to restore public greenway access and recently restored steps connecting a neighborhood to the park.

Our roads, buildings and equipment require ongoing investment. We have developed a 10-year capital plan covering road rehabilitation, water main replacements, culvert improvements, cemetery improvements, pools, a new Highway Department garage, and replacement of vehicles and equipment as needed. We are working to move road rehabilitation into the operating budget where appropriate, reducing the town's reliance on borrowing for routine infrastructure needs. Constantly making improvements to our information technology systems, we invest in new servers, cybersecurity, automation and digitization; and our Police Department has a new fiber communications system with updated equipment.

Of course, where we are not able to take on projects ourselves, we advocate for improvements to those who are in a position to allocate funds or make improvements where needed. This includes our constant advocacy with respect to state roads, the power grid, wi-fi services, bridges and other assets owned and operated by outside entities.

Good infrastructure planning is ultimately about stewardship. We cannot address every need at once, but we can establish priorities, pursue outside funding aggressively, advocate, and make thoughtful investments that serve residents for decades.

That is the approach we are taking in Bedford: addressing long-standing needs, preparing for future demands, and protecting the quality of life that makes our town a place our residents and families are proud to call home.

Ellen Calves is Supervisor of the Town of Bedford and is a candidate for re-election.

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