

Hamilton County Express  
April 14, 2010

## Broadband, economy top Owens' visit

By PETE KLEIN, Staff Reporter

LAKE PLEASANT — The economy and the environment were the main topics when Representative William “Bill” Owens (D-23rd District) visited Hamilton County to meet with elected officials and some members of The Common Ground Alliance.

Local officials at the meeting Thursday afternoon, April 8, included Board of Supervisors Chairman William Farber, Indian Lake Supervisor Barry Hutchins, Lake Pleasant Supervisor Neil McGovern, Benson Supervisor Ermina Pincombe and Inlet Supervisor John Frey.

Others at the roundtable discussion were Adirondack North Country Association (promotes the economy) Executive Director Kate Fish; The Adirondack Council (environmental group) Executive Director Brian Houseal; Ross Whaley of the Adirondack Landowners Association (owners of large private properties) and a former executive director of the Adirondack Park Agency (regional zoning authority); and Speculator resident former Mayor Robert “Shorty” Hoffman.

First on the list of topics was expanding broadband, high-speed Internet connections.

United States Senator Charles E. Schumer has already pledged to throw his weight behind Community Broadband Network's (CBN) regional application for about \$22 million in federal stimulus funds to expand broadband coverage in the Adirondacks. Local officials want Owens to do the same.

Farber said, “Broadband is a priority with the [Adirondack] Common Ground Alliance and it is critical CBN Connect gets funding in the second round of stimulus money.”

Hamilton, Warren and Washington counties have joined in the effort to secure federal and state stimulus money to design and construct a high-speed broadband network. They are represented by CBN Connect, which is affiliated with the Research Foundation of State University of New York at Plattsburgh.

CBN is willing to submit a grant application to the U.S. Department of Commerce, Broadband Technology Opportunities Program, proposing to construct an open access fiber optic “middle mile” network to bring high speed broadband to key anchor institutions in the three counties at no cost to Hamilton County.

As part of the application the State of New York would have to commit to picking up part of the funding. Given the state's fiscal crisis, that is in doubt.

Owens said he has been told CBN meets the criteria for funding and has held discussions with Governor David Paterson on the need for the state to reinstate its share of funding for broadband.

Owens said, "They understand how important this is."

Fish noted broadband is necessary for all health care providers who are being required to connect medical records and billing electronically by using the Internet.

Owens did not shy away from the number one problem facing federal, state and local governments: money.

He said, "We are caught by debt. How much more can we have when we spend money to create jobs? How do we get the money?"

Speaking of the change from private enterprise to working as a congressman, Owens said, "I find the bureaucracy frustrating compared to private business."

Owens was chosen to represent New York's 23rd Congressional District in a special election in November 2009. Before that he was a managing partner at the Stafford, Owens law firm in Plattsburgh, where he specialized in business and tax law.

Houseal thanked Owens for his efforts to find funding for broadband. "Which the Council also supports," he added.

In addition, Houseal asked Owens to continue to support funding for efforts to curtail acid rain and the spread of invasive species in the Adirondacks.

"State funding is not sufficient," he said. "Any help from you is appreciated."

The new federally funded bridge on Big Brook Road over Lake Abanakee came up for discussion when Hutchins complained, "National Grid is holding up the bridge project.

"They have to move some power poles and now they are telling us it will be four weeks before they start and three weeks to do the work. The contractor on the project is ready to start, but is waiting on National Grid."

Owens replied, "Get me all the information and I will call them and their lobbyist to get things moving."

Fish told Owens about the Common Ground Alliance's proposed economic development program for rural areas of the state, where boosting small businesses can have a big impact on the economic health of towns, villages and hamlets.

She said over 70 CGA members signed a letter and sent it to the governor last month, asking him to establish a new rural economic development program as he carries out his plan to replace the Pataki Administration's Empire Zone program with a new "Excelsior Zone" program.

Fish provided Owens with a copy of the proposed Adirondack Excelsior Zone program.

Owens thanked the group for their time and their suggestions, and promised to work with them to better economic conditions in the Adirondacks.