

Overflowing crowd shuts down village meeting

Posted Wednesday, October 2, 2013 4:33 pm

A rescheduled Village of Bloomingburg Planning Board meeting that was to discuss a proposed private girls school Thursday was shut down again when the assembled crowd exceeded Village Hall's allowable 85-person limit and led to a brief act of violence. In an attempt to deal with the crowd that was well in excess of a 100 speakers were set up outside. But those outside complained that they were unable to hear the proceedings and the mood quickly turned to anger and complaints that the meeting was illegal and contrary to the state Open Meetings Law. Within a few minutes of the pledge of allegiance, protesters chanted, "Shut it down, shut it down," and a speaker was thrown through an open window. A man then climbed in that same window, knocked down two filing cabinets and shouted, "Your speakers don't work." At that time another young man, seeming to act in role of bodyguard, escorted the representative of the proposed private girls' school from the meeting area and police were called to the scene. The meeting was adjourned by 7:15 p.m. among further shouts and accusations including, "This meeting is illegal." One voice was heard saying, "No accommodations are made for us, but you accommodate those who want to make their presentations." Village residents were joined by those who live in Mamakating as well as taxpayers from the Pine Bush School District who want their voices heard in protest of not only the proposed private girls' school but the high density housing development on Winterton Road which includes 396 townhomes. Recent advertising has been seen according to FailedMessiah.com, "...in a 16-page insert in a Satmar-controlled Brooklyn Yiddish language newspaper as a Satmar-only hasidic village to be called Kiryas Yatev Lev," and was partially displayed on a protester's sign at the meeting. Planning Board President Russell Wood Jr. remained in the Village Hall following the meeting adjournment and was addressed by a number of attendees. John Kahrs was among the frustrated who later said, "I will continue to attend future meetings. The Town seems to be taking the wants of the minority at the expense of the majority." Kahrs continued, "I'm not saying they are lying, but they are telling half-truths and omitting what the public does not want to hear." Teddy Brebbia asked Wood why after the Town of Mamakating passed a resolution allowing the meeting to be held in the Town of Mamakating Hall, the location was not changed. Wood responded that he was advised by counsel the meeting may not be held outside of their municipality. Wood also stated that a letter requesting use of the Bloomingburg Fire House as a meeting place had been sent but he wondered if after the evening's events the fire district would want to host the next meeting. Addressing next steps Wood said, "We still have to have another meeting." New York State Police were called to the scene as well as a number of area police departments including the Town of Crawford. Troopers escorted Wood from the premises, questioned witnesses and waited for all to leave. The rescheduled meeting date is being determined.

By SHARON MacGREGOR