

VILLAGE OF TUXEDO PARK - OUR TAX REALITY

As we are still in the throes of this bleak and frigid winter, I would like to address some of the issues regarding the Village budget.

If any resident has questions, please come to us in the Village Office for answers. It is difficult for those, even well intentioned, to have all the information and the working knowledge of the various departments and their resources.

We will be having our Budget Workshop on March 10th following the public hearings on Local Law Introductory No. and No. 3. The hearings begin at 7 p.m.

Firstly, let me explain why we are after relief from the 2 percent tax cap: If the VTP does not do this, we are bound by the cap, and last year we barely managed to stay within the 2%.

I have said before and will say again now, we will make every effort to stay within the 2% cap. Last year, and over the years, budgeted amounts, that were unspent and carried over to subsequent budget years, were used to manage the impact of increased expenditures. These amounts are referred to as "unappropriated funds," and the availability of these funds, enabled us to stay within last year's cap amount. Some administrations, in the past, have chosen not to use these funds, but, instead chose to raise taxes significantly.

These funds are primarily meant to act as a reserve fund to cover unexpected expenditures that invariably arise every year. The amount of our fiscal reserve is currently low, and it will be very difficult going forward to rely on this budgeting methodology to cover our costs.

All of our costs keep rising and the funds in the "safety net" are meant for use in the event of an immediate emergency, not for routine operating expenses.

I would like to review some of the many issues facing the Village, such as our aging infrastructure and other costs that are simply beyond our control.

Many of you who are new to the Park may not be aware, but we have fewer than 800 residents, whose taxes need to cover costs for our aging infrastructure.

The DPW oversees a sewer plant, water treatment plant, 26 miles of roads, several Village properties, some historic, along with the TP Police Department headquarters, 3 dams, 6 bridges and 3 lakes, one being our reservoir. It is a vast amount of items to keep running and maintain. It is a monumental task, one that we all take very seriously.

The Village Infrastructure Committee has been brought back to help charter these difficult waters. We meet with our Village attorney, the engineers, John Ledwith, Jeff Voss, DPW head and Trustee Goodfellow to insure that we are doing all that we can to keep projects moving forward and in a fiscally responsible manner. This is far from easy.

For example, the Wee Wah dam has been in need of replacement for years, after having many "Band-Aid" repairs. We are now pushing this major project along for the reconstruction.

The East Village Water line replacement project should be ready to go out to bid this spring. This line provides the water to the 1,100 residents in the town that we are responsible for.

The cost for asphalt climbs yearly, and the price of road salt has spiked higher this year, and will likely surge higher still next year, due to the recent spate of increasingly harsh winter seasons. It is a continuous, labor intensive struggle to keep our roadways safe all year long.

Employee benefits comprise almost a quarter of our total budget, and this, too, increases at an alarming rate each year. From 2000 to 2012 healthcare premiums have gone up 200%. We have no control over these escalating costs.

Legal fees are a component of the budget, as well. However, these costs are being driven by the result of legal actions being brought against the Village and not our initiating them -- let's be very clear on this point.

Tuxedo Lake is another vitally important resource that needs study, yearly testing and maintenance against threats including Eurasian milfoil, which needs to be hand pulled from the lakes, algae and outside, upstream threats require our annual investment. It is not trite to say that the lakes are our most important resource, we team up with resident volunteers, biologists and Aquatic Invasive Management to help insure our drinking water is safe and the lakes are healthy.

The costs of all of the above continue to climb and we are often faced with the difficult choice of putting off needed work that we simply cannot afford to take on.

As time goes forward and various employment contracts expire, we will have the ability to take a hard look at them and see where we might be able to achieve savings through various restructurings and staffing levels.

But there is a question to ask: Do residents want to have some of their services scaled back? We will put these questions to the community as they come up.

To sum up, this is a very difficult process, one that requires a working knowledge of Village operations to review and balance department expenditures with the fiscal reality of a heavily taxed population. We are very cognizant of our responsibility to ensure the adequate and safe operation of the Village's many resources, while holding down taxes as much as possible.