

## MAYOR'S NOTES

### NO VILLAGE TAX INCREASE FOR SEVENTH YEAR

At its April 5, 2016 meeting, after a public hearing, the Board of Trustees approved the 2016-17 Village budget. The decision is a culmination of discussions in three public workshops in March to review department budget proposals and Village economic issues. The approved budget contains no increase in Village resident taxes for the seventh year in a row. The Village property tax rate fully meets the tax cap restriction enacted by Governor Cuomo, and the Village will continue its collaboration in a County-wide efficiency cost savings plan instituted last year.

I am pleased to report that the Board was able to implement a 2 % cost of living increase for all staff, address inequities in salaries of some employees in the Public Works department, provide wireless access to the police vehicles, allow for holiday pay of time and one half for police work on Thanksgiving, Christmas and Easter, all while keeping a healthy fund balance, and staying under an historically low tax cap. It is impressive for our Board to have accomplished this fiscally responsible work year after year.

The budget plan is to raise \$286,491 in property tax revenue, five thousand more than last year, but assessing properties at \$2.7339 per thousand of property evaluation . The prior year's tax rate was \$2.8017 per thousand of property valuation. The full 2016 tax rate is over seven cents per thousand less than last year.

In recent years, the Board has struggled to maintain a fiscal restraint philosophy while trying to provide staff with cost of living increases. As last year, because of the continued efforts to contain costs and implement cost efficiency and shared services agreements, the Village Board was able to increase salaries for all staff by 2 %, while not increasing tax revenue. We value all our employees and wish to see them continue in service here to support the Board's initiatives and efforts to improve services to our tax payers. In addition, the Board was able to increase the reserve amounts by \$57,000 for the capital reserve accounts for the eventual plans to purchase new fire vehicles. We are committed to work with our volunteer firefighters to help update their inventory replenishment plans that reflect sound budget practices, and study alternative methods of financing or leasing new vehicles.

We are engaged in several projects with our archive staff. In addition to the continuation of the outstanding projects undertaken periodically by museum and archives staff, we have embarked on an exciting project to memorialize several historical locations in the Village as part of a *Museum in the Streets* project. We appreciate the assistance of our legislators, Assemblywoman Patricia Fahy and Senator George Amedore, who have seen fit to support our efforts with grants to support road work and cultural projects, and will continue to work with them to support our efforts for next year.

Economic factors that affected the deliberations included: a small increase in county tax funds, decrease in electricity costs, incorporating a larger increase in the fire department

budget for equipment reserves, and smart cost cutting by the superintendent of public works.. The following are significant actions the Board approved:

- an increase in property tax revenue related to newly annexed property, not higher taxes
- 2% increase in Cost of Living adjustments for staff
- \$16,000 increase in base salaries for three DPW staff to achieve a more competitive and equitable salary scale
- Over \$20,00 in electricity savings

Although it appears like a small amount, the budget cost cutting decisions did not come easily. Altamont, like other communities, struggles to maintain essential services and the quality of life that its residents expect. Although we still suffer from no large increases in county tax revenue due to the Village's small population decline in relation to the County and Town as a whole, we are hopeful that we will continue to get more sales tax revenue because of the continued improvement in the economy's health. We also realized a slight increase in property tax revenue next year as a result of the recent annexation of town property to the Village and the construction of one property in the Village.

The state budget implements measures to cap property taxes while requiring municipalities to come up with cost saving consolidations, or sharing of resources. Although it has been difficult for us, we have kept within the tax cap for all the years since the law was enacted, and have instituted cost-savings measures in a timely manner.

Last year, residents received a small rebate because the Guilderland school district kept within its cap. This year, savings from all levels of government - county, town, village, fire and ambulance districts - will be rebated if each entity keeps within its tax cap and enacts efficiencies as we have. We estimate that Village property owners will receive approximately \$3 in a tax rebate check from the Governor as a result of the Village's actions.

The Board of Trustees crafted a lean budget that will not unfairly burden our residents while seeking fiscal solutions other than just raising Village taxes. The fact is Altamont has a limited tax base which is not growing like larger municipalities because of our physical size, so we face an unusually tough road to stay lean but efficient. We are encouraged that there are new proposals forthcoming that may increase our tax base which we would welcome. As I have mentioned before, the Village has to tax homeowners at a rate 30 times more than the Town to raise the same amount of funds. Restraints such as the Governor's initiatives add additional burden to efficiently operate Villages like Altamont.

Regardless of the external restraints, and because of the Board of Trustee's vigilance, they again have been able to cut costs and maintain services, without raising taxes, and with little outside help. The Board is committed to monitor the Village finances throughout the year to ensure your tax dollars are spent wisely.

If you want to read this or past Mayor's Notes, you can find them on the Village website: <http://altamontvillage.org/>. You also may call me at Village office at 861-8554 (X 10) or e-mail me at [altamontmayor@aol.com](mailto:altamontmayor@aol.com).

-- end --