

The Town of Hamilton 2013 Budget

The Hamilton Town Council has been working on our 2013 budget, with public workshops held on October 4 and 23 and a budget hearing on November 1. A final vote on the budget is scheduled for our regular November 8th Town Council meeting. The budget process goes beyond specific meetings and involves the Town Council all year long as we strive to find ways to keep costs down. The many improvements, modernizations, and efficiencies being implemented now will create enduring fiscal savings in the future. Of equal importance, the Town Council is committed to creating a transparent, "pay as you go" budget, where taxpayers can understand how their taxes are being spent and predictable revenue sources plus tax revenues equal actual annual expenses.

The Town Council and Highway Superintendent found a variety of savings, both long and short term. We've collaborated with other local municipalities on road repair and improvements. This year we joined with the Villages of Earlville and Hamilton to order fuel oil at lower prices. We implemented a schedule for replacing highway equipment before incurring costly repairs, which will save on maintenance and reduce down time without increasing our capital costs. The Town garage is also slated for a solar system installation that will save the taxpayers approximately \$2,000 per year in lowered energy costs, with a payback of 12-13 years.

In the office, we now share a codes enforcement officer with the Village of Hamilton, saving money for both municipalities and providing the town with full-time service. We hired an in-house bookkeeper to reduce costs and provide more timely and accurate records. In addition, our new assessor is working to keep assessments up to date, which will lessen the cost of future revaluations.

The proposed 2013 budget is transparent. All equipment purchases are part of our annual costs, and our fund balance is specifically allocated between capital reserves, emergency reserves (storm damage), and a reasonable sum to cover the Town's cash flow. This year's budget relies on taxes and predictable annual revenue to pay for our costs, rather than using fund balance to keep taxes artificially low.

Prior town budgets have not been sustainable. The 2011 budget reduced taxes by using \$250,000 from the excessive fund balance (as identified by the state comptroller's office audit). That one time use of funds to reduce taxes could not last. We are now in the second year of a three year phased increase in taxes to get us back to "a *pay as you go budget*". In 2013 our income from all sources, plus our taxes, will equal our actual expenses.

We have worked hard to minimize expenses to reduce the necessary tax increase. Despite steadily increasing costs, the accumulation of many small savings allowed us to hold 2013 expenses equal to the 2008 budget. Unfortunately the proposed 2013 tax increase will exceed the state mandated 2% tax cap. The necessary 17% increase in the 2013 tax rate will result in the addition of \$30 on a property assessed at \$100,000.

At the November 8th meeting we will vote to pass this budget and legally exceed the 2% property tax cap. We believe we are on the right track with this budget to keep the Town fiscally efficient and sound.

- Eve Ann Shwartz, Supervisor. Peter Darby, David Holcomb,
Chris Rossi, Carolyn Todd, Town Councilors.