

# Town of Johnsburg Newsletter

## Supervisor's Report

### Recycling Revisited

How do you feel about the Town's elimination of curbside recycling?

The reduction in expenses created by eliminating this program coupled with other adjustments helped us stabilize and actually reduce taxes for a second straight year. On the other hand, many citizens have requested that the service be returned. Still others have suggested the return of recycling in a limited manner with the service being provided perhaps once a month.

We are interested in your opinion. If some limited recycling can be brought back creating a slight increase in taxes, do residents support or oppose the effort?

Also, in a separate article in this newsletter, it appears we are facing a significant challenge in next year's budget because the State of New York will require prevailing wage payments for our garbage service. Expenses associated with this contract change should also be considered when deciding where we are headed with recycling that has traditionally been handled by the Parks Department.

Please contact us with your opinion in any of the following manners, via U.S. mail, email at [mail@johnsburgny.com](mailto:mail@johnsburgny.com) or visit us on Facebook to leave a comment or participate in the discussion, or call the Town Hall at 251-2421.

### Town & County Face Early Budget Challenges

New York State's freefall has left counties across the state in crisis while locally, early pressures promise a challenging budget season.

At the county level supervisors are dealing primarily with uncertainty. The political crisis that has rendered Governor Patterson powerless leaves county officials to wonder when a state budget will be approved and what the contents of that budget will mean for counties. Already facing a shortfall and having made three series of cuts in the last budget cycle, further state cuts to the counties could create a massive budget gap.

In Albany County, as of late February, legislators estimated a short fall so grave that a county tax increase of 50% might prove necessary.

Warren County's budget committee has increased the frequency of its meetings to attempt to address the situation but at present, information is in short supply.

Last year the State unilaterally eliminated \$500,000 in funding for food stamps without warning to the counties while leaving the underlying mandate for that service in place. If the State seeks to balance its budget in the same manner, it merely shifts the burden to the counties. Frighteningly, if the state eliminates all mandates, the task of how to deal with those needing services is dumped in the laps of officials with limited dollars and strong pressures to control taxes.

At the Town level, two events create cause for alarm as we look at the budget for 2011.

*(Challenges, cont on next page)*

### Short Takes

#### Prevailing Wage Challenge

Town officials have been advised by New York State officials that our next solid waste pick up contract will be governed by prevailing wage requirements. While the exact impact has not been calculated it is thought the new requirement could be as much as double the Town's expense line for garbage hauling.

#### New Administrator

The Warren County Board of Supervisors has given the nod to County Attorney Paul Dusek to become the full time county administrator. The Board feels that Paul's institutional knowledge of county affairs and departments will help provide strong leadership as the County continues to struggle financially.

#### Baseball Effort

An effort to improve the Sodom & North Creek fields is continuing for this season. New dugouts and a vending area are planned for the season.

## Two Hats...One Headache

There are two types of supervisor's in Warren County.

The first are "at large" supervisors from the Town of Queensbury and the City of Glens Falls. These supervisors do not have direct town or city responsibilities but rather just serve as population based representatives on the county legislative board.

The second are town supervisors who manage government in their own municipalities and also serve as county legislators. These towns, including Johnsbury elect one official to serve both posts. Often lost in the day to day activities at Town Hall is just how significant county legislative decisions can be to town government.

Whichever hat a supervisor is wearing at any given moment, these days there is one overriding concern at both levels of government and that is finance.

This newsletter is filled with pressure points that ask the question of how do we continue to provide services with dwindling revenues? What services constitute priorities? What services can be reduced or eliminated? How do we strike the appropriate balance between services and tax burden?

What follows are several county issues that affect our town's people:

- \* As burn plant obligations conclude, what steps can be taken to better manage solid waste.
- \* With the County's bond rating diminished and the budget shortfall projected, should county officials move towards a sales tax increase as part of a reform strategy to assist with real property taxes.
- \* What social services programs are essential to county residents and must be funded, even if NYS eliminates funding for these programs.
- \* What cost cutting measures can be taken with regards to county road and bridge maintenance before we put our employees and residents at risk.
- \* Where is the appropriate balance in funding our sheriff's road patrol, particularly since call load drives coverage down county, leaving the north country more exposed if cuts occur.
- \* How does Warren County's tourism efforts position itself for the best possible ski industry promotion.
- \* What county occupancy tax dollars can be directed to the north country and specifically Johnsbury programming.

While town supervisors wear 2 hats, one very strongly impacts the other and in the current economic climate the common challenge with both functions is managing dwindling resources.

### (Challenge, cont)

First, the towns have been advised across New York State to budget for a significant additional town contribution to the state retirement system next year. The amount is unknown at this point.

Second, town officials have been advised that when the current garbage contract expires, the new contract must be written so as to pay employees of the contractor prevailing wage. The prevailing wage requirement could force the town to more than double its projected expense line for garbage and could lead to an entire re-thinking of how we handle solid waste.

Simply put, its too early to tell how dire the situation may become, but already apparent that things could get very bad.

Part of the County Supervisors' rationale for moving County Attorney Paul Dusek into the position of County Administrator is so we may hit the ground running with a person possessing significant knowledge of the County's employment structure, union status and fiscal condition. More significant layoffs and restructuring may prove necessary in coming months and officials will have to proceed with both speed and care.

Not to be lost in the balance is the fundamental question of government's purpose. There is a core nucleus of essential services that citizens depend upon each and every day, but even those may be threatened.

## Passing Thoughts on the Odd Winter of 2009/10

Last month during President's Week I received two calls, one from a newspaper and one from a TV station. Each reporter indicated that they were interested in doing a story on how our community was struggling given the lack of Feb. snow. Each reporter seemed to already have a story written in their minds about our business district struggling as Mother Nature refused to cooperate.

I invited both reporters to come to town but advised them that they should report on the reality of what they saw, rather than on a preconceived editorial notion about how our season was going. One reporter arrived the first Sunday of President's Week to find Gore packed, most rooms filled and Main Street bustling.

I am told when the reporter attempted to interview one business owner, she had to wait more than a half hour while the owner and several employees dealt with a line of customers.

Each reporter came to town to write about our demise but left with a story about a community thriving despite the weather.

The two reporters cause one to think about the Winter of 10/11. Imagine the interconnect lift opening in late December, a more typical snow-fall pattern and our national economy finally pulling out of the recession. It's a point of intersection that our community has worked for for generations. It means jobs, business growth and opportunity. I hope to see the same reporters here next year.

## Front Street Issues

The Town is working to resolve several issues that have evolved with the Front Street project. These include enforcement of a septic bonding requirement, developer replenishment of escrow accounts that pay the town's professional service fees and real property title issues at the project entrance. Slow progress is being made.

## Kellogg Property

A group of local residents from various not for profit, education and business groups is working on a management proposal that will continue to expand and enhance programming opportunities at this river front property. Currently this site is being used for the Farmer's Market and Riverfront Concert Series. More information will be provided as this progresses.