

Town of Johnsburg Newsletter

Supervisor's Report

Short Takes

2009 Town Taxes To Go Down

ORDA Lift Purchase

A significant compromise resulting from negotiations with ORDA and Senator Little will permit Gore to obtain necessary infrastructure assistance in the base lodge area while purchasing a triple chairlift that will ascend to the top of Little Gore rendering the long dreamed of interconnection of mountains a reality.

Farmer's Market

An organized meeting for those interested in the farmer's market occurred on October 23. If you are interested in this project, please contact Barbara Thomas at 251-5692.

Highway

Consolidation

An ad hoc committee of councilmen Gene Arsenault and Ron Vanselow have been working on the concept of merging our Parks and Waste Department into the Highway Department. The goal is to attempt to further reduce costs while providing effective service.

For the first time in many years the Town of Johnsburg's proposed budget shows a reduction in taxes. Though the reduction is a small one, 0.08%, the change marks a fundamental shift in the way government does business.

To secure this reduction, particularly in the current economic climate, the budget review process has literally been turned inside out with critical attention paid to each and every line. This budget is an aggressive one that contains spending, revamps various budget items and looks to create opportunity through consolidation.

With this year's budget I have drafted a narrative budget to better explain in words what the most significant changes are. This narrative budget will be a hand out at town board meetings and will also be available at Town Hall.

Here are a few of the highlights in the 09' budget that have been used as vehicles to contain governmental spending.

- * Significant reduction in town legal services by forcing developers to pay and moving to a hot and cold legal issues meeting schedule.
- * Creation of Tannery Pond revenue stream.
- * Movement of water district maintenance to private contract.
- * Centralization of departmental spending to control costs and honor budget restrictions.
- * Modification of retired employee health benefits.
- * Closure of red barn.
- * Readjustment of water district relationship with general fund.
- * Proposed merger of highway, parks and solid waste departments.

A complete itemization appears in the narrative budget available at Town Hall.

Finally, it is important to note that the budget process is very much a team project that began last Nov. Accounts Clerk Candace Lomax and assistant Don Greene worked hard on the document as we moved line by line debating almost every issue. A citizen's group also provided major support, not just meeting as a think tank but also by dividing into sub-groups to analyze items that particularly challenge the town's financial situation.

Thanks to all.

Town Justice Consolidation

On the ballot this November is the town's proposal to eliminate one of the two justice positions. Under the plan, Judge French would increase his hours and all duties would be merged into his position. While the judge pay would be increased, the town savings occurs from the elimination of the benefits package that accompanied the other position.

**Don't forget to vote
on Election Day,
Nov. 4
All voting takes
Place in Wevertown**

Amid Economic Crisis... Signs of Main Street Life

It is a time of great contradictions. As this article is being written, markets across the world are in turmoil. Johnsbury has established a community economic coalition which among other tasks will help monitor the needs of service organizations who provide assistance with food, heat and other essentials. Yet as we brace for winter amid such economic chaos there are increasing signs of vitality in the business community around town.

A look back over the last ten months shows about a dozen new businesses have opened or are in the development stages. Other Main Street mainstays are expanding and redefining themselves. Clearly, business owners are taking risks in a tough economy in anticipation of the Gore interconnect and those business risks ripple through our local economy in the form of jobs and cash.

The new businesses are diverse in nature and include such establishments as high end lodging, café style restaurants, a state-of-the-art wine bar and cellar, eclectic furniture store and a new outdoor sports shop. The interconnection of Gore and the Ski Bowl is really about connecting skiers to our business district and finally affording our Main Street the opportunity to take advantage of the throngs of skiers who visit Gore, but for the most part not town.

With the recent news that ORDA committed to the purchase of a new lift to replace the old large T-Bar next year, coupled with the current Burnt Ridge expansion, it seems that the interconnect will at long last become a reality. Certain projects associated with Gore and local growth generally have been very controversial and the subject of appropriate scrutiny. In this writer's opinion, what should not be controversial is the interconnect itself which affords access to spenders who now likely bypass our community via reopening of historic trails that existed here in the 1930s and 40s. The interconnect is a rare bird indeed; it promises economic vitality to a long suffering Upstate New York not by exploiting our resources, but rather by incorporating them in a project that is largely green and based on a fundamental recognition of our community's place in the history of skiing in North America.

County Budget Will Show Increase

Facing significant pressure from bonded debt service, inflation and fuel prices, the county budget will likely be up a few percentage points from last year.

As of this writing, the exact budget numbers are not finalized but significant progress has been made as supervisors have requested sweeping reductions from all departments.

Bonded expenses include the construction project now underway for a new Health & Human Services building located near the county municipal center.

The net impact on a taxpayer's bottom line will be reflected when the three taxes (town, county & fire) constituting your total bill are merged. Most likely the town tax decrease will help offset the larger county tax increase.

Turning Around an Ocean Liner

I remember learning in grade school that if a person fell off the deck of a large ocean liner, he or she would likely never be found because it would take three miles for the ship to turn around and change direction.

Such is the case with government spending—patterns of spending that have evolved over years and sometimes decades come to be viewed as the normal way of doing business. Changing that mindset is among the roughest challenges facing our small town government.

This challenge has been heightened in the Town of Johnsbury recently as spending has exceeded budget lines in several areas. Departments have been advised that for the present time no further expenditures will be approved unless they are of an emergency nature. While funds are available from other budget lines to cover these overages, had the situation continued, the ability to cover these costs would not have existed.

Entering the new budget cycle, oversight of specific budget lines from week to week must be pursued with vigilance. For example, a specific code in the highway department budget will in the future be monitored from week to week. The proposal will be for bi-weekly financial meetings between the new highway superintendent, the supervisor and financial staff. While the 09' budget numbers must be realistic ones to cover anticipated expenses, it is equally important that departments from highway to parks, understand that expenditures must be made within the particular limits of the budget and mindful that future unexpected expenses must be anticipated.