

From the Mayor's Desk – March 30, 2014

Before I get to my promised write up about the release of the Village's Tentative Budget, I have some encouraging news to report. We have been informed of a significant breakthrough as a result of Con Edison's increased efforts to locate the source of a persistent gas smell in the Main Street downtown area. On Thursday, work crews located a gas service line in the vicinity of Cottenet Street that was leaking directly into a Village storm drain at a crossing point. The gas service line was temporarily repaired and there has been no detectable gas in that area.

While we will continue to monitor the situation, we are hopeful that this is the permanent solution sought by our Village officials and Con Edison. Regardless, I'd like to personally thank the officials at Con Edison for devoting the resources necessary to solve this problem and for the diligent efforts of Irvington's emergency service personnel, public works department, and Con Edison's field crews.

2014-15 Tentative Budget

The Tentative Budget for 2014-15 reflects a tax rate of **\$287.58** per thousand of assessed valuation, an increase of **\$5.61** per thousand, up **1.99%** over last year. For a property owner with an assessed valuation of \$20,000 (considered the average), the Tentative Budget represents an increase in Village taxes of approximately \$112. I have often stated my goal is to keep tax rate increases roughly in line with inflation and I am very happy we achieved that goal once again.

It is now the third year of the NYS Tax Levy Cap legislation and the third time that the Village has offered budgets significantly below the allowable cap. It is important to note that this year the cap was only 1.48% (the actual rate of inflation per New York State), not 2% as in previous years. In dollar terms, this year's tax levy is almost \$286,000 below the allowable cap, bringing the total unused tax levy cap space over the past three years to nearly \$650,000. As I have said in the past, we work to present budgets that we believe offer the best value to Irvington residents, weighing services and costs; that is what we have done again this year, not looking to spend some arbitrary amount that Albany says we can spend. We do this fully knowing that this year's prudence will make it more difficult to be in compliance with the cap next year but that is what I believe our fiduciary duty demands of the Board of Trustees.

In total, expenditures are up \$295,203 (1.85%). Of this, increases in New York State Retirement contributions, workers compensation, health insurance, and liability insurance comprise approximately \$170,000. There are also provisions of \$150,000 for projected increases in union and non-union salaries. Other increases include \$30,500 for expenses associated with Senior Center building operations, \$27,000 associated with the hiring of a new Theater Manager and an additional \$95,000 in various areas including the replacement of a police vehicle, building repairs, and information technology costs. Offsetting these costs is an anticipated savings of (\$22,000) in organic waste removal, elimination of a vacant mechanic position (\$50,000) and a decrease in unemployment insurance (\$10,000).

In an effort to free up valuable resources in our Department of Public Works, the budget contemplates the elimination of curbside pickup of loose leaves during the fall season. Only bagged leaves will be picked up, saving approximately \$30,000 in overtime costs. My colleagues and I feel strongly that, over time, a combination of bagged leaf pickup and increased homeowner mulching of leaves will greatly reduce costs and benefit the environment by reducing the volume of leaves hauled to out-of-state processing facilities.

Revenues have increased \$105,000 (3.61%) reflecting this year's growth of sales tax, utility taxes, mortgage tax, and Recreation program fees. The use of fund balance (i.e. our contingency fund balance comprised of previous years' taxes that were not spent) has been reduced by nearly \$40,000 to \$125,550 for the upcoming year, the lowest amount since the 2008-2009 budget.

Unfortunately the Village's costs for water continue to rise from our wholesale supplier, New York City, who is proposing to increase certain rates in July 2014 by 5.8% to 7.8%. The impact will result in an increase in water and sewer rates by approximately 3.25%.

The budget process has focused on meeting unavoidable cost increases, revenue growth, and compliance with the mandated tax cap. With the cooperation of our Department Heads, I feel that this Tentative Budget, once again, is fiscally responsible and sustainable long-term. I would like to thank Clerk Treasurer Brenda Jeselnik for all of her help preparing this budget and for all that she does every day monitoring costs and providing the Board of Trustees with the reports we need to make informed decisions.

The Tentative Budget can be downloaded at: <http://irvingtonny.gov/CivicAlerts.aspx?AID=900>

A public budget hearing will be held Monday, April 7, 2014 at 7 p.m. in Village Hall. Residents are encouraged to attend. Comments may also be submitted by letter addressed to Lawrence Schopfer, Village Administrator, 85 Main Street, Irvington, NY or by email to lschopfer@irvingtonny.gov.

Additional thoughts on the elimination of curbside loose-leaf pickup

While the \$30,000+ of savings in eliminating curbside pickup of loose leaves is certainly meaningful, the Board of Trustees and I feel the change is about more than just cost savings. There are very few instances where mulching leaves in place is not possible and this is certainly the most preferable outcome for the leaves in our Village. As I mentioned above, not having to cart the leaves to a weigh station, only to have them picked up again and carted away by Westchester County, makes not only environmental sense but common sense. Additionally, the mulched leaves serve as a natural fertilizer, reducing or even eliminating the need to use chemicals on our lawns. A wonderful example of how successful mulching in place can be is the condition of the fields at Memorial Park. I have personally mulched in place for years, originally because I simply did not want to bother to rake my leaves! If it is easier, cheaper and good for the environment to eliminate curbside pickup of leaves, it certainly seems worth giving this idea a try.

I know there are some of you who will not like the elimination of loose leaf pickup. I hope you will come to our budget hearing on April 7th or send us a letter or e-mail explaining why.

Enjoy the warmer but wetter weekend ahead.

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