

Adirondack Underground

Town of Long Lake
Clark J. Seaman, Supervisor
November/December, 2010

I started composing this letter in November and began by saying "It is that time of year. The leaves are gone and temperatures are slowly dropping and the Town Board has been busy working on next year's budget". Now as I'm finally completing it winter is upon us with temperatures in the teens and Christmas just around the corner. In any event, here is the latest news fit to print.

We knew this was going to be a particularly difficult budget year with anticipated significant increases in both retirement and health insurance costs as well as reduced revenues. Unfortunately, due to a decrease in assessment values we started the budget process with a deficit. If we adopted the 2010 budget for 2011 exactly as it was, we would have seen a 1.3% increase in the tax rate without changing anything.

We started the budget process anticipating that our retirement contribution was going to increase about 16%. It has actually increased by slightly over 20%. Our health insurance costs are increasing 9%. Add to this decreases in several high income revenue accounts and we have a budget that is challenging to say the least.

To compensate for these increases in appropriations and lost revenue, the board made some difficult decisions. Perhaps the most difficult decision was to hold all town employee salaries flat this year with a 0% cost of living adjustment. This was not an easy decision but one the majority of the Board felt appropriate given the current financial climate and the fact that many of our local residents are not getting a COLA in their pensions.

To further reduce expenses this year, the Board has taken steps to reduce the work force through attrition. First, when our seasonal transfer station attendant in Raquette retired this year we did not fill that vacancy. Rather, with the Board's support and assistance from the highway department, I adjusted the work schedule of our other Raquette employee to provide coverage at the transfer station with highway employees covering during his time off. This not only eliminated the salary of the seasonal employee but reduced the weekly overtime in Raquette from 4 hours per week to 2 hours per week. By adjusting this schedule again this fall we further reduced regular weekly overtime from 2 hours to 1 hour per week.

Second, I did similar "creative scheduling" here in Long Lake this spring at the transfer station and utilized our seasonal employee there to help with water system related projects, rather than hiring additional part time help. Again, our highway superintendent helped out by having some of his employees provide coverage at the transfer station when needed.

Finally, the Board agreed to take advantage of the early retirement incentive and offered it to two water department personnel. One of these individuals, Keith Wamback, has opted to take the early retirement which will reduce the water department work force in Long Lake from 3 full time employees to 2.

These actions have helped reduce expenses while still providing all the services you have come to expect from your local government. Additionally, we cut other areas of the budget wherever we could. For example, I reduced the supervisor's expense account by \$3,600, reducing the amount for registrations and food from \$1,300 to \$500 and travel and mileage from \$3,300 to \$500. It's not that I don't travel for the Town to conduct Town business ; I do. And I usually have a meal or two while I'm doing so. However, I won't submit for reimbursement for routine travel expenses and I don't expect the tax payers to pay for my meals. It's a personal choice that I've made. Consequently, we were able to reduce our general fund appropriations for 2011 by several thousand dollars.

Below I've included a table with 2010 to 2011 comparisons. As you can see, the primary increase was for individuals in the Long Lake water district. This increase is a direct result of the payments we must make on the bridge loans for the improvements we are making to our water system until we get our DWSRF financing. Absent those you can see that the Board basically held the budget flat even with all the increased costs and loss of revenue mentioned above.

	2010 Rate	2011 Rate	2010 per \$100,000	2011 per \$100,000	Difference 2011
Long Lake Water	3.799517	3.90334	\$379.95	\$390.33	+ \$10.38

Raquette Water	3.679023	3.61053	\$367.90	\$361.05	- \$6.85
Long Lake No Water	3.172443	3.17869	\$317.24	\$317.87	+ \$0.62
Raquette No Water	2.859378	2.86132	\$285.94	\$286.13	+ \$0.19

As I'm sure many of you are aware, the library recently requested the Town Board increase our 2011 annual support to the library with a onetime increase of \$12,000. I think I speak for all the Board members when I say this was a particularly challenging request given the two recent failed attempts by the library to secure funding via the propositions on the school ballot. The Board recognized that the voters have spoken not once but twice, plus we are making other difficult budgetary decisions such as no wage increases for our employees. And yet, all the Board members recognize the benefits of having our library and what an asset it is to our community. Consequently we faced a conundrum and as I told the Board when I presented my proposal to them, at the end of the day we will be criticized for our decision regardless of what we do.

Councilman Pohl had earlier suggested we offer to loan the library the additional funds they need for the coming year. I considered this to be a reasonable solution to our dilemma. However, I took Dean's suggestion and expanded on it by proposing that the Board loan the \$12,000 to the library with money from our fund balance which would result in no increase in taxes. Instead, it would be a wash to the taxpayers once the loan was repaid; this was of particular interest to the Raquette Lake community, who already support their own library. Additionally, I proposed that the library take steps under Education Law 255.1 to become a school district public library. This would allow the library to seek funding via proposition on the school ballot similar to the failed 259.1 propositions. Additionally, and perhaps equally important, 255.1 allows for the election of the library board of trustees (<http://www.nysl.nysed.gov/libdev/libs/pldtools/guide/1stppsd.htm>). This would create an autonomous library board elected by the people, independent of both the school and town boards, with secure funding for the future. Finally, I proposed that the library meet all reporting requirements as outlined in their charter and Education Law which includes filing an annual budget and financial report with the Town Board. While I realize this proposal will not satisfy everyone, I believe it is a compromise that most individuals on either side of this issue can accept.

With respect to our water project, and how can I write a newsletter without commenting on our water project, we now have two test/production wells up behind the County Highway garage adjacent to and on the Stanton Hill property. Preliminary pumping tests indicate these wells may each be capable of producing in the 60 – 75 gpm range. This is indeed very good news in that we have found water on land we already own and the 60 – 75 gpm yield per well will give us the estimated 115 gpm we need in addition to the Bissell Pit wells to meet our current needs for water.

Regarding the Schiffman property, the appraisal is complete and our surveyor is preparing a description with meets and bounds so we can move forward with the sale of this property. The Board has agreed to retain a small portion of the property, along the back, with a 10' right of way and 20' utility easement to the lake in the event the Town should ever desire to use Lake Eaton as a surface water source. Although this is an unlikely option at this time, no one knows what our needs may be in the future and this could prove to be a wise decision years from now.

And finally, our Highway Superintendent has asked me to remind everyone not to park in the snow removal right of way on Town roads during the winter months. This not only makes it difficult for our highway crews to remove snow and keep the roadways clear, but it creates a potentially hazardous situation as well for pedestrians and other motorists.

Until my next newsletter, have a very Merry Christmas, happy holiday season and a happy, healthy, prosperous new year.

And remember "When it comes to life, the critical thing is whether you take things for granted or take them with gratitude."

GK Chesterton

Sincerely,



Clark J. Seaman,
Town Supervisor