

**VILLAGE OF HASTINGS-ON-HUDSON, NEW YORK**  
**BOARD OF TRUSTEES**  
**PUBLIC HEARING**  
**APRIL 12, 2011**

A Public Hearing was held by the Board of Trustees on Tuesday, April 12, 2011 at 7:30 p.m. in the Meeting Room, Municipal Building, 7 Maple Avenue.

**PRESENT:** Mayor Peter Swiderski, Trustee Jeremiah Quinlan, Trustee Meg Walker, Trustee Nicola Armacost, Village Manager Francis A. Frobel, and Deputy Village Treasurer Rafael Zaratzian.

**ABSENT:** Trustee Bruce Jennings

Mayor Swiderski declared the Board in session for the purpose of conducting a Public Hearing in accordance with the legal notice that appeared in the April 1, 2011 issue of *The Rivertowns Enterprise* to consider the Proposed Budget for the Village of Hastings-on-Hudson, New York for the fiscal year beginning June 1, 2011 and ending on May 31, 2012.

**Mayor Swiderski:** This meeting is intended for the public to express any sentiments about the budget. Is there anyone here who would like to speak?

**Roger Sheiber, 104 Overlook Road:** I looked through the budget briefly, and have not studied it much in detail. But I know generally that what is going on in the world, in the country, in New York State, and in all other municipalities is, of course, the costs of public employees, especially the benefit costs; the pensions and the health care is a big issue in New York State. There has been a lot of pushback, and it has been a very controversial issue. But we have to come to some sort of agreements with our employees that the system does not work anymore, especially with benefits. Have we, in the Village, gone to the employees, have we worked with them, have we made an attempt to see how they can participate in the economic downturn with the Village in order for us to balance our budget?

**Village Manager Frobel:** Thank you for that comment. The police officers, their union does participate in sharing in the health care costs. It depends upon when they were hired, but the vast majority of police department employees do contribute toward health care. We are in negotiations right now with our public works employees, and I can tell you it is a topic for negotiations.

**Mayor Swiderski:** Is there anything regarding the non-union employees?

**Village Manager Frobel:** Not as of yet, Mayor, no.

**Ted Mason, 26 Circle Drive:** I do not know how to go through all these things. I am not sure this is a format that works very well. There is a comment in the budget text which was

the same comment last year: relief will come when the economic turnaround arrives. We have to take into consideration that you are not going to get much of an economic turnaround, at least as a working assumption. This idea that somehow or other we can just keep putting tax increases through on the premise that things are going to get better is a pretty weak argument.

I want to make a comment on what Roger just said. I notice there are some things in here about three 4-wheel drive vehicles. Do we really need three 4-wheel drive vehicles, new, on top of whatever else you may be buying? But the fringe benefit consideration is really something to behold. Fringe benefits are 57.4 percent of your personnel cost. That is a huge number. You will not find that anywhere else on the face of this earth, other than maybe other places in New York State. You really need to do something about it. I notice a contingency for \$125,000. Seems to me that is a fairly generous contingency amount. I see a significant number of instances where you are comparing budget to budget and it shows no increase. But if you compare it to actual expenditures in the current year, it is an increase, and in some cases, that number is like \$100,000. You ought to look at the actual expenditures and compare that to what you really need, and set the budget that way. Not budget-over-budget, budget over actual. They did the same thing with the school budget. By the way, the school budget is zero increase, and the tax increase is negative 1 percent. So it can be done.

Again, this is not a great format. I did not have time to go through and make a detailed listing. I have got comments through here, but those are just a few. But the fringe benefit is terrible, absolutely terrible. It is out of control. I got a promise from some of you people on the Board last year that you were going to merge services in some way in order to control the budget. Does not seem to be that it has happened.

**John Gonder, 153 James Street:** I would like to apologize to the Village Manager with my remarks at the last meeting about the budget. I made a joke because it was in the April Fool's edition of the paper. Later on in that meeting Trustee Jeremiah Quinlan said, Mr. Frobel, you did exactly what the Board wanted. You came in less than 4.5 percent. I am thinking to myself, did I hear something, am I right? I went home, I said I owe Mr. Frobel an apology. He did what the Board wanted him to do.

I run budgets every year, and they are tough. I would thought the Board would have said, Give me a budget, Mr. Frobel, of zero percent; give me one at 1 percent; give me one at 2 percent; give me one at 3 percent; 4 percent, et cetera, and then we will see because you are the expert, Mr. Frobel. And you can say this is what we are going to lose: paper clips, toilet paper, blacktop, gasoline, whatever. He knows the nitty-gritty of the Village expenditures. I was very disappointed when the Board tells him to come in with that number rather than several, and then you could make the final choice. So with that, I apologize publicly to Mr.

Frobel. I hope that you consider not only old people that are on fixed incomes like myself and other people here, but also that we have lost our enhanced star which was maybe the biggest in the state, for Hastings, because we are overtaxed. It was like two or three years ago, \$1,100 check we got. That is gone. Gasoline prices, food prices, everything goes up except our income. And then we see our young people. We see the homes all over the place for sale. These young people are trying to hang on to jobs, and they have not had increases in many years. I hope you take that into consideration because you are running people out of the Village.

**Susan Cooper, 378 Warburton Avenue:** A main concern of mine is that Hastings is becoming more and more monolithic in nature, and that our tax increases over the last decade being doubled are driving middle- and lower-income people out of the Village, which precludes keeping a diverse community. Taxation, of course, is necessary. I believe in paying taxes to maintain a society. But increases should be commensurate with what the residents, including retirees, people on fixed incomes, people who are paying out of pocket their entire cost for health care, who do not have pensions to the degree, that the pensions for many of the public workers are luxurious compared to people in the private sector. So I think that the demands on a community to support these should be commensurate with the ability of the overall population. That would include people who do not have the funding to maintain their homes and to stay here. When I moved here Hastings was a community where many different kinds of people could live. Creative people could maintain a footing here. It is becoming less and less so; they are less able to do that. It is a loss, it is a big loss, for a community that has a reputation, or has had in the past, of being such.

I glanced at the budget and I am struck by the fact that the 24 percent of the general fund is going towards pension and health care. It is a huge number. I believe it said also in the budget that the health insurance costs were outpacing the cost of living. Well, that is true for most of us. But I have feelings about paying for my own and then also footing the bill where I am still unclear as to what the contributions are that the public employees make. I am not clear on what those contributions are, and that that would be helpful in the future. Maybe I am missing some fine print somewhere, but I do not think so. And I think that that would be helpful for all in the community who are here and voting.

**David Zung, 378 Warburton Avenue :** That was my wife who spoke, so a lot of what I have to say is in agreement with what she has to say. I am also building on what the other speakers had to say I am certainly in agreement with. So that territory has been covered. I would like to bring this to a level where it is how it affects somebody in the community. In our case, we have been here 13 years. And, as she said, our taxes have doubled. Essentially, that means we are carrying a second mortgage in taxes now, and that is in 13 years. So how do we project that out in another 13 years, when we are in our mid-sixties? There are people

here who have houses and they cannot afford the taxes, and they cannot sell their houses because the taxes are too high. So are we in a position, then, are we making plans now? Do we have to leave the community in a year or two so that we know we can sell the house while the taxes are still somewhat coherent to what a basically middle-income family can pay? I am using ourselves as an example because I know there are a lot of people in the same position. We are in the creative arts, and this town supports that. Certainly, there is the Arts Council exhibition here, and the ongoing Friday Night Live. All of you have been supportive of it, and we love that. The question is, like my wife said, can that continue to be a part of the sustained quality of this area?

Again, who can afford this? Who can afford these sorts of increases? I am certainly not anti-union. I have voted labor my whole life. I teach at NYU adjunct. I am in the AFL-CIO, so I certainly support collective bargaining. Again, I think the word is "commensurate": benefits commensurate to what the community can support. Simply put, we should all be in this together. We want the ultimate outcome to be a healthy, sustainable community. Another word that is used a lot, "sustainable." Not just ecologically and green and energy-sustainable, but economically sustainable. I know there is a push in this area to put in affordable housing, and that is something that is mandated. And there is a lot of push in the community to find spaces. We live on Warburton, there is a lot of affordable housing there. But again, as the budget increases what you might consider our affordable housing is becoming unaffordable. So it is a paradox here. Can we keep the housing stock here that is available now, that we are living in, affordable? As this gentleman said, the young people. Where are they going to live? How can they buy into this? There is a message here, in a way. If you want to live in Hastings you are going to have to have a lot of money. That is really what it comes down to. It is get rich or get lost. I do not think that is the community we want to live in.

**Mayor Swiderski:** Thank you. Anyone else?

Before I close the hearing, I want to describe the budget process as we ran it this year and through to conclusion. It might explain some of what people have heard here so they understand the context of how we run this.

What we did differently from the past was indicate, as far back as November, what a cap would be on an increase in the spending, in the tax amount. This was because in prior years, without some indication from the Board, especially in these tough times when the paradox is we get slammed with ridiculous increases out of the state to cover pension shortfalls, we wanted to give some sense that the extent of that increase could not be passed on in full, that we wanted to cap it so that we would not have to go through a prolonged period of adjusting the budget simply because it was unacceptably high. So we gave that indication. What

happens is, starting in December, Fran begins to sit down with the staff and work through budgets, both budgeted and actual. Once he has completed that, he passes to us or, more accurately Raf, who works with him, passes to us a set of detailed spread sheets that display the budgeted versus actual. We enhance that spread sheet, again more accurately Niki did, so it has a couple of years' more of actuals heading back. Then we color-code it to identify where the budget is significantly out of line with the actual, either up or down, so when the Board is reviewing these numbers we are working against actuals.

What we did this year, which differs from previous years, was, the Board members individually submitted questions to the Village Manager that will help him determine, and prepare the various departments when they show up on Thursday when we go through this budget, where the Board collectively has questions and also determine how much time to spend with each department. In the past, it was a half-hour for each department, and some of these departments had budgets that were so tight we did not have many questions and others were more questions. What it did was help the Manager time how much time we will need with each department. So when we meet on Thursday, we will be able to have the time we need to focus efficiently with the departments where there are the greatest concerns.

The observations about benefits are noted. This is public comment, and we are not here to respond to each individual point made. But I do want to acknowledge that it is hard not to note the extent of the obligation those benefits pose for the Village, especially since most of our increases are in that area. Those increases are not set until later on in the year when we are given an indication by the state of an approximate ceiling of what that increase is likely to be. For example, using the pension fund, there is an indication based on a shortfall due to bad markets that have to be made up by the communities that all participate in the pension system. The state indicates roughly how much they expect our increased obligation to be, and then that number can be adjusted quite a bit downwards. It typically is adjusted downwards; it is rarely adjusted up. But sometimes it is not; sometimes it stays steady. So we are presented with these numbers and we have to contend with them, and it is eye-opening. I do not want to respond anymore. It is premature for us to do. That is what Thursday is for. But I have to concur that it is a burden.

**Trustee Armacost:** The mention of the 4-wheel vehicle, that came in a section on capital costs. It should be made clear that those are not in the budget itself. Those are part of a prospective bond issue which is a separate discussion.

**Mayor Swiderski:** As part of the planning for the next year, the Village Manager lays out expected capital expenses so we have some idea. But what we go through over the next month is the operating budget and the increase necessary to support that operating budget.

**Trustee Quinlan:** Usually we sit here and listen to public comment, and I know it is frustrating sometimes when we sit here and look like stone trustees and do not respond. That is something that we are trying to change to a certain extent. But this is an important topic. And since there are not a lot of people here, we have the time to make some general comments about what we have heard tonight.

I did not prepare this at all, so I am going to jump around a little bit. Like Mr. Mason says, it is very difficult to figure this out. And in a short period of time it is very difficult for the public. I know that the Village Trustees, especially Trustee Armacost, spent most of her weekend on this. The rest of us have spent countless hours trying to figure it out. It is not that easy. I know our taxes are high, but people have to understand that, relatively speaking, about 20 percent of our taxes are Village and 80 percent are school. That is a rough number. It might be a little bit higher or a little bit lower. Our budget is \$13 million, and the school's is over \$40 million. I am for strong schools, but that is a point that has to be made when it comes to computing where your tax money is going.

There are 59 employees employed by the Village. Twenty-two of them are police officers. So we do not have a very large staff, and we are trying to do the best we can. We are all taxpayers, each and every one of us sitting up here. We pay the same taxes, and feel the same way you do about higher taxes. But when you are faced with the struggles of coming up with a budget, it is not easy. The unions, which are DPW and the police, we are kind of in a bind because when we go to negotiate the new contracts the mediator, if it comes to that, looks at the surrounding communities, what are they being paid, what are their benefits, and everything else like that. And if the surrounding communities are doing the same thing that we have done over the past years, it is a losing battle when it comes to the benefits. There is no way to reduce the benefits, believe me. It is true that we do get some contributions for health care from the unions. But quite honestly, that contribution is minimal. And so is it for the surrounding communities. So we are kind of in a bind there, but we are trying.

As to the contingency fund, that is a matter that is philosophical. There are members of the Board that would like to reduce the contingency fund, and there are members of the Board that think we should keep \$125,000 in the contingency fund, including myself, because I am a saver and I do not believe in debt, and I think that we ought to have some money for a rainy day. If it is not spent, it does not disappear. It gets carried over. So I am for a strong contingency fund.

The comment that you made about get rich or get out, unfortunately there is a lot of truth in that. That is what is happening in Hastings because of economic concerns that we cannot control. The prices of houses, the school budget, there are a lot of pressures on us that are changing Hastings in ways that I do not like to see either. I have been here 30 years. My

taxes have more than tripled in 30 years. It is something that is easy to complain about, but when you sit up here and look at these lines and lines of the budget it becomes very difficult to figure out where you could cut and where you cannot cut. Interestingly enough, when the departments come before us quite understandably they do not want to see too many cuts. They are not wild about coming to us and saying, yes, you are right, Trustee Quinlan, we need to cut this and we need to cut that. They feel, it is human nature and to a certain extent very true, they are cut at the bone. I will say to you, except for some of the higher-paid members of the Village staff, the salaries are fairly mediocre. Most of the employees of Hastings do not make a lot of money, in my opinion, for living in New York. They are struggling, and a lot of them do not live in Hastings because they cannot afford to. So we are in a real bind there. I do not want to take up too much time, but to get the actuals is something that this Board has been struggling with for at least the last year. It is new to this Board. They have done a tremendous amount of effort to get the government to think about what an actual is. So this is something that we are working very hard on. It is not easy to do, but it is something that is our top priority. Thanks to Trustee Armacost, and to all of us, we are now looking at actuals in response to what we are actually going to spend. It is something we are comparing very carefully. Those are my comments, and take them for what they are worth. But it is a difficult struggle up here, and we are spending a lot of time doing it.

**Trustee Walker:** The other constraint that we are under is the decrease in revenues compared to a few years ago. This has been, of course, going on since the beginning of the recession. But sales tax is way down, mortgage tax is way down, and certiorari proceedings or grievances are way up. A lot of commercial and residential property owners are coming to the Village and asking for their taxes to be decreased. And often they are because they can make a good argument. That means that the burden then is back on the rest of us; the same amount of tax has to be paid by fewer people. That is the big shift that we have been seeing in the last two to three years, which has been very painful.

But all of us have been looking at this budget literally line by line. We are looking at here we can save a couple thousand, there we might be able to save a couple thousand without impacting your services in a negative way. That is the really hard part. We are trying to preserve services, and look at all of the places where it will not be cut to the bone, where it will not be painful. Granted, as Jerry was saying, the benefits are something that are really hard to change, because we have got these state mandates. We have got the state cutting a lot of the aid that they have given us in the past. And in addition, they have these laws, whether it is about negotiating with a union or binding arbitration, that make it very difficult. Or the comparables that Jerry was talking about, you have to compare it to all the neighboring communities and we are really stuck. There is a lot that one could do to change the way local governments pay these benefits and negotiate with the unions, but it has to be done at the state level. It cannot be done at the local level, unfortunately. We all have to write to

Albany and change some of these regulations because they are really constricting. They are making it very difficult for us. They do not give us much room to negotiate.

It has been a real eye-opener trying to figure out how to reduce this budget. But at the same time, we have got to be creative. If there are ideas out there that you all have. Ted, if you have something you want to write down and send to us.

**Mr. Mason:** Yes, I will. Addressing the state, you may not be aware of this. Myself and some others have been working with the school board, for or against, whatever. But we got the budget down. But we have also attended a lot of different meetings around Westchester. One of the things that at least school boards are doing is the Putnam-Westchester Association of School Boards have taken strong positions on about five different things: the Taylor Law, pensions, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. What has this Board done? Do you have an association of town boards to collectively to bring together your feelings and get them projected to Albany? In addition to that, some of us are going up to Chappaqua every three weeks and we are meeting with 15 other towns; actually, representatives citizens, representatives of school boards, townspeople, town officials. We are syndicating every town in Westchester if we can, every school board in Westchester if we can in the whole state to try to bring change. So we cannot use this as an excuse. That is inexcusable. I will provide written comment on the rest of the budget. I cannot do it standing here.

**Mayor Swiderski:** There are two different venues we have to express our sentiments to the state. All municipalities our size belong to the New York Council of Municipalities, NYCOM, which has a legislative unit that seeks to work on laws that restrict or damage localities. Also through an informal, but highly effective, local group of villages under Greenburgh, we have collectively written and submitted letters, specifically recently complaining about the mandates that are imposed upon us up to both the governor and our legislative representatives. I hear you about participation. I am not sure how to do that effectively. We have expressed our sentiments, or at least I certainly have, to the legislative representatives. I cannot say it has been any more organized than what you have heard.

**Trustee Armacost:** There is a certain amount of things we can do collectively. But I think we have responsibility to act individually here, and we have to lead by our own example. One of the things we did, which we were not seeing in other municipalities which we initiated last year and which was, I think, quite painful a process for the Village employees to deal with, was budgeting against actuals. It is literally a line item by line item process. We did an analysis of where, consistently over the last three years, line items were smaller than the amount budgeted. We have highlighted those figures. This is in the budget that we have received that you have also looked at. We have handed those figures to the Village Manager for him to discuss with department heads. The goal is to look at that set of expenses to see



what can realistically be cut. Some of them are very small items which add up to a considerable amount of money when you put them all together. So that is one of the things that we have been doing which we think could be very helpful long-term as a way, consistently, of budgeting in the future. One of the other things that I think was not mentioned was the experience we just had with our auditors. Do you want to talk about that?

**Mayor Swiderski:** I can. Fran, you might be able to get it all correct without me fudging it. It is a required compliance with the new auditing regulations.

**Village Manager Frobel:** Essentially, what the auditors have ruled is that our unreserved fund balance, the amount of money that we have in our accounts, be used as a security, if you will, against capital projects that were not fully funded for the pool fund and the library fund. In other words, any outstanding expense we have can no longer be carried without a security behind it. What they have done is effectively removed from your discretion the fund balance that we had been building up over the past several years. What that does is further complicate, I believe, our efforts if we were to go to the bond market to borrow money for some of those capital projects that I have identified in my message are necessary. So it has put us in a very precarious situation. Just when we were starting to build up that reserve, the government standards have now required that it be set aside. It is no longer fully available to you for discretionary spending.

**Mayor Swiderski:** Essentially wiping out what was a \$300,000 reserve fund, applied against existing liability. So we are down to zero. The recommended amount for a village our size is \$900,000. While our bond rating is still in the category of excellent, Moody's did downgrade us one notch within that excellent category because, at \$300,000, we were still \$600,000 short of where they thought our reserve fund should be. Now, I am hoping their grading requirements will shift as a result of the new accounting standards.

**Trustee Armacost:** I would not count on that.

**Mayor Swiderski:** I am not counting on it. So it is a bind.

**Village Manager Frobel:** One additional point I would raise, Mayor, on that same theme. I realize the 4.5 percent tax increase the budget requires is far more than any of us would have liked. But we need to keep in mind that due to some extenuating circumstances beyond your immediate control, this budget that rests before you this evening requires a 2.8 percent increase in expenditures. What you have lost in assessed values is about \$106,000 of real cash that you had last year to raise that you do not have tomorrow. We have presented a budget to you that comes in at about 2.8 percent on expenditures. That is despite the cost for the pension, the health care you have heard about, the cost of energy, utilities, and all the

other items that, again, you do not have immediate control over. There is more work to be done on this budget, and we are prepared for that. But I do think that we need to just heighten our awareness that you have lost 1.1 percent of your values, as I think Trustees Walker and Quinlan mentioned, right off the bat.

**Trustee Quinlan:** When we talk about the benefits of living in Hastings I, for one, want a library. I want a pool. Not everyone wants a library and wants a pool, but a lot of people do. And it is a constant balancing act between the taxes that we pay and the services that we get. I think we get a lot of services in Hastings, but you would be surprised over the course of a year how many e-mails I get complaining about the services, that we need more services, and that we need more of this and we need more of that. So it is a real balancing act: we cannot give you much more, but we are trying to do what we can with the money we have. Our infrastructure is crumbling because of its age, no one's fault. And we are trying to find the money to figure that out. It is a very difficult process, so we understand and have the same frustrations as everyone else. But it is a real balancing act.

**Mr. Gonder:** Me and my wife, years ago, decided that we are going to stay in Hastings. We knew we could go to Florida or Myrtle Beach, Virginia Beach, Flagstaff, Arizona and our taxes would be way down and we would get a lot more for the dollar. But we decided our families were raised here, and my wife's family went back prior to the Revolutionary War here, and we raised kids here. We all went through the K through seniors on Hastings, and we made that decision to stay here. There were ups and downs, but boards had to cut stuff, too. They had to make tough decisions, and I am afraid you people do not have the guts to make those decisions. Our food budget goes up all the time, and some of us cannot afford it. They have to get other relief. They have to get relief maybe from their children, or they have to move from Hastings. And that is a bad thing. When you want to stay in a village, you should look out for all the people.

I talked about the pool many times to this Board. I think it should be free for every kid in the school system, whether they live up in the Greenburgh district and they go to our school. But yet, you people go outside to get people to come in to pay for the pool. That is erroneous. You are better off if the children can go free and the parents in this community should pay if they want to use the pool. We should not have to go outside. And maybe you have to cut some things. Maybe you have to cut services. Maybe you have to cut, I hate to say, the library. But maybe you have to cut two hours a day off the library, or some other things. The federal government just recently cut billions. New York State cut some billions. You people cannot cut a few hundreds, thousands. Something is wrong with you people. You are not there to make the tough decisions, and we should have people that say I love this town, but can we afford this, can we afford that? Maybe we cannot afford everything. Maybe recreation we have to cut 5 percent. Maybe DPW you have to cut more. I do not

know, but you have to get in line. What if Cuomo's two percent tax went in prior to the budget? What would you do then? Figure that out. Why don't you look at that position? What would you have done then?

**Ms. Cooper:** I understand that the DPW is going to make some effort to consolidate with Dobbs Ferry in terms of where the garbage ends up. So that is a good example of a move towards consolidating. I believe a few years ago there was an effort to consolidate the police dispatching with Dobbs Ferry and Hastings, and it was voted down. So my question is, in terms of when we talk about comparables and other people saying they are getting this and this is the cost of this, how does that factor in? How can there be a push towards consolidating, which would be a wonderful way to conserve funds? These very small towns are very small and we could consolidate without a great loss of services.

One other point I had about union demands. I support unions. I am not anti-union. But I do think that unions are there to serve their members. The union members are really here to serve the community. I understand that institutions and humans will act in their own self interest, but it seems to me that union members, public workers, could actually go, a novel idea, to their union leaders and say we understand that these are great stressors on people that we serve, so why do we not come back to the negotiating table. I do not think that is such an abstract concept.

**Mayor Swiderski:** Again, I do not want it to be a point-for-point conversation back and forth. I do want to make a point about services and what the Village provides, and where there is room or discretion or sense to cut. There are, effectively, five units here in the Village government. You have got the police, which right now by any definition are staffed to the point that we have a single car at night. We have two cars during the day. If you cut personnel further you run into overtime situations which wipe out the benefit of having fewer people. So we do not have the discretion to cut further without heading into not just reducing the marginal expense of that cut, but you have increased costs that come from the overtime. So there is no room there. The same thing in the DPW. We are operating now with three short in the DPW, and there is not room to cut further. We are looking for work rule adjustments in the current contract negotiations so we can sort things out and get more time for the money. But there really is not room for cutting before we get into fundamental, basic services getting cut. People want safety and people want their garbage picked up because that is the bare minimum we should be doing. We have come at it in a number of ways, and in the current structure neither one of those departments have, at least in our analysis, much room for cutting.

Effectively the Rec part of Parks and Rec is self-funded through the fees imposed on people who participate in programs. The park portion is quite minimal an expense. And again,

without it the fundamental nature of the Village decays very quickly. The library is not self-funded. It depends upon our largesse. In tight times, people use libraries more because they do not buy books. They do not have Internet connection, they cannot afford programs. If you look at library usage over the last three years, it has increased dramatically without any new personnel and increased dramatically with no increase in salaries and no increase in number of personnel. To me, a library is more than a want, it is a need. And cutting that would result in hitting people who rely on it in a way that is more than just trivial. It is sometimes what they need to hunt for new jobs, or the only entertainment they are getting in their lives right now. I consider it a basic standard of civilized decency to provide those services.

Then we have the fire department. The fire department has borne quite a bit of the brunt of the cuts. It is a volunteer department. It is fair to say that it is the biggest bargain we have in terms of value delivered for the dollar. It also partly funds itself by contract work it does for a section of Greenburgh that it provides services to, as well. You cannot just blithely say we do not need four houses for the fire department, we can do with two, because we would not be able to provide those services outside the Village that yield funds. It is a level of service that you cannot mess with, either. We have 650 ambulance calls a year in this village.

When we go through this budget, it is 59 people and we can account for every one of them. We have gotten rid, through attrition and otherwise, those that were non-essential, in that federal term. Those people who are left are often doing a couple of jobs that used to be done by more than one. We can blithely say let us cut services. I do not know what I would have left to cut without cutting into stuff that would make a material difference to people. And I am not going to do that. At the point that you do not have a police car to respond when you need it, or a fire truck, or a DPW truck in a snowstorm to save two percent on a budget because we cut that person or two, you are then not getting value for your dollar. The fact is, we are down to a force structure that is tight and it is where it is.

I am not entirely fatalistic. We continue to find places to gut, but there is a difference between cut and gut. It is not just one letter. We are at that edge and I am not willing to make that jump myself.

**Trustee Armacost:** I want to be not aligned with you for a minute, if you do not mind, on this particular topic.

**Mayor Swiderski:** It is never unanimous up here.

**Trustee Armacost:** I feel quite strongly about this issue. I would like to commend the Village Manager on having reduced the request from his team from by \$500,000. But I feel quite strongly that there is still room for a lot more cutting. I know you think it is very tight,

and I have done an analysis which shows me that it is perhaps a little less tight than you think it is. Now is the time to be rigorous on these things. Several people have asked us to be rigorous. I have not heard one person in the room so far stand up and say please increase it more.

**Mayor Swiderski:** Well, that never happens.

**Trustee Armacost:** I feel very strongly about the issue of the Village being affordable for all people who live in it and who we want to see in it. My husband is a musician and if he was not married to me it would be impossible for him to live here. As a musician, it is a very expensive town to be in if you do not have some other force to allow you to cover those costs. Now is the time to be hardcore. Now is when we are in a recession, and now is when we have to open our eyes and acknowledge we are in a deep, deep recession. We are not coming out of it. The income is not going to increase. If anything, it is going to do down. And we need to be moving in that direction. Everyone needs to chip in a little bit. All of the departments need to look and see, omigosh, you are right. It is a small item, it is only \$100. But reality is, I only spent \$10 last year, I only spent \$10 the year before, I only spent \$16 the year before. Maybe that line item should be \$25 or \$50. That can be done on so many line items.

You have seen the analysis that I provided, and that is the request that I make. I do not want to go down line item by line item in the public with each of the department heads. I think that is an inappropriate role for the Board. The Board should be making policy decisions like what on earth do we do now that our reserve fund has been wiped out. Those are the kinds of decisions that the Board should be making. But the Board cannot make those decisions if we are forced to go line item by line item because that has not already been done. That is the plea that I make in support of what people here are saying, because that is what I am hearing people say. I think, as Trustees, if we can support that now we will be doing our village a favor and we will be doing future Trustees a favor. We cannot pass that down to other Trustees in the future. It is irresponsible. You know that I support you on so many things. On this, I would like to stand a little apart.

**Mayor Swiderski:** I understand that. I am not reacting to further cuts. I am reacting to cuts in personnel in the current force structure. Ultimately, the only way to get further reductions, to get reductions in personnel, is through consolidations down the road. There is not room in the current structure to do that. Yes, indeed, we have begun discussions on, first, consolidations of facilities with Dobbs Ferry. Ultimately, we would look at the actual departments. But sadly, like everything else in government, it does not happen overnight because it has got to happen at its own pace. You have to look at it, you have to understand it, you have to analyze what is involved; build out to have that happen; ensure that it is done

legally and correctly, and does not leave you exposed with the unions or the law. That is a process. The long-term trajectory to me is pretty clear. The glide path we are on long-term is, not overusing the term, sustainable. And both changes at the state level, and consolidation, are probably the only ways to break that glide path. But in that interim, it cannot be at the loss of basic services. I agree with you. There is room for cuts, as long as it does not affect fundamental services. I think we can square the circle of coming to some agreement between the two of us in saying that. There is room for cuts, but I cannot say we can do away with police or DPW staff and not see that bounce back at us in all sorts of ways. So we look at openings, and you have identified a number of them.

**Trustee Walker:** It does not fall into the budgeting process but in our comprehensive plan we have identified some areas where we might be able to raise revenues. We need to speed up that process and start to look at ways, for example, if we could redevelop the Zinsser parking lot, as an example, that is owned by the Village. We have talked about the property that the DPW sits on. If the DPW were to be consolidated with Dobbs Ferry, there is the potential for that to be developed. Again, this takes a long time. It is going to take a lot of discussion, a lot of scrutiny. But it is something we could get the ball moving on, maybe this year in fact in terms of a planning process. So there are other ways that we can start to make these things happen.

**Mayor Swiderski:** The revenue side is always the ideal. And again, we are probably having more of a candid discussion than we perhaps expected in what was supposed to be a public hearing. We are a fully built out community, and I am pained by the drop in assessables. But I am not starry-eyed about the hope for any large numbers of new assessables magically appearing in real estate that, with very few acres left to develop, is going to provide much new stuff. The waterfront remains flying cars and bases on the moon material, as far as I am concerned, in terms of planning. We cannot plan for that now. You bring up Southside Avenue, you bring up other plots. Indeed there are some opportunities there and we have got to pursue them, but even in the most optimistic scenarios we are a fully built out community. And we will continue to lose assessables as corporations and individuals reassess through the certiorari process. They are all in values, and you cannot blame people for doing that. But if you get your house valued chopped through a reassessment by \$6,000 a year everybody else has to pick it up. You are squeezing the Play-Doh and we do not have many bits of new Play-Doh left out there to add to the lump. If I thought it were otherwise I would be very eagerly pursuing that. I am just realistic about what those lumps of clay are. And even if the waterfront were developed tomorrow, it, too, will be constrained by the physical nature of what can be put there due to the contamination, the height and all of that. So we may enjoy a benefit of a half a million dollars. It is not going to change the glide path permanently. It just delays reckonings we all face.

**Mr. Sheiber:** My job, every year we go through the same process and our health care benefit plan is always downgraded. We try to keep the same plan, but we usually drop down, our co-pays go up, whatever. They just keep going up, our co-insurance. Are you mandated to have a certain type of health care plan, or can we negotiate that with our employees?

**Village Manager Frobel:** A certain level of coverage is mandated through the contracts. Are you talking a particular carrier? Is that what you are referring to?

**Mr. Sheiber:** I, I am talking about not necessarily the carrier, but usually you can go from one plan to another. I used to pay \$20 to see the doctor, now I have to pay \$50. Each year it goes up. The prescription drugs go up. It used to be that if I had to go to the hospital it never cost me anything. Now I got like a \$2,500 deductible. The reality is that it has gotten expensive and it has to be shared by everybody. It is not a good thing. And in my job, I have to pay for most of my health care plan myself. They only offer a single plan. So is that something we have looked at because that can be a considerable cost?

Trustee Walker made a great point about the Village commuter lot. That is something that could be looked at, and that should be looked at now as a connection to the waterfront. We could start looking at the waterfront as something now by connecting it through that parking lot so it becomes an entranceway into the waterfront at some time in the future. That could bring tax revenue to the Village.

**Trustee Walker:** I noticed in articles about the other villages about everybody's budget, that Dobbs Ferry had changed health carriers. I also noticed did not the school district change.

**Mr. Mason:** The school changed the carrier, at a considerable savings.

**Trustee Walker:** Have we looked at that, and what is the possibility of doing something like that?

**Village Manager Frobel:** We have been with the Empire plan. I did an analysis for the Board awhile ago about that. It is one of the largest carriers in the state. But we can certainly take a look at that, and see if we could find comparables with another carrier at a reduced cost. Be happy to. But I can tell you that some neighboring communities have left other carriers to go to the Empire plan, based on the favorable experience.

**Trustee Walker:** It would be interesting to see which one Dobbs Ferry selected.

**Village Manager Frobel:** We will be happy to look at that.

**Dave Skolnik, 47 Hillside Avenue:** The issue that Trustee Armacost brought up in disagreeing with what you were describing, it seemed a little on an abstract level. I would like to understand this. Last year, as a Board you went through line by line in public meetings. Is it your intention not to do that this year?

**Trustee Armacost:** What I was saying was that if the expense is under \$5,000, then we have advised the Village Manager that these are expenses that are under \$5,000 and not expenses where if you did not do a budget versus actuals analysis you would even notice the difference on the line items. They are very small, but there are very many of them. They add up to a lot of money when you add them all together. If you multiply 100 by 1,000, it suddenly starts to become something. We have asked the Village Manager, and we have highlighted those areas, to discuss them individually with the heads of departments so they can hopefully come back to us and have a little different story to tell us at that point. There are a number of line items that are over \$5,000 which we do want to discuss with the Village Manager and/or heads of departments, if it makes sense, in the meeting that is coming up on Thursday. But those smaller line items, we should not have to discuss those items. The budget should be much tighter on those things before it comes to us. That is my personal opinion.

There may be reasons in some cases why the budget is up. But if we are seeing a trend over three years where the amount is quite small, the amount is \$50, \$57, \$67, but the budgeted amount is \$1,000, and we are seeing that, that \$1,000 adds up over time. That budget line item probably should be \$75, if we are seeing it consistently over time. There may be explanations, in some cases, why that line item is much higher which we will obviously accept if there are reasonable explanations. But we really want more rigor on some of those small items because we think it could bring in a fair amount of savings when you add them up. My grandmother, who is Scottish, used to say it is penny-pinching. If you save the pennies, it adds up to quite a lot of pounds. So that is what we are trying to do here. Hopefully, it saves us a little bit in that area.

**Mr. Skolnik:** My impression from the conversation between the two of you was that at the point you get to the micro view of penny-pinching you begin to question whether you are also having some impact on the level of service.

**Mayor Swiderski:** The penny-pinching is not likely to affect that, no.

**Trustee Armacost:** It will not affect it at all.



**Mr. Skolnik:** The comment was, given what we have seen described, whether there is some level of community, I do not want to use the word "activism," but engaging the community on a more active level in terms of trying to supplement what we seem not to be able to provide for ourselves through financial means.

**Mayor Swiderski:** I was thinking about that, as well, in the last couple months. There are things you can expect people to do. Pitching garbage and driving police cars are not these. But it may be that we actively seek volunteers, more volunteers, for the library to help stretch the services there, and in the Community Center to provide programs for youth by relying more on volunteers. I think, inevitably, we are going to see that over the next few years because it is the only way we are going to sustain the same level of services, given that the glide path only heads in one direction.

### **ADJOURNMENT**

On MOTION of Trustee Quinlan, SECONDED by Trustee Walker with a voice vote of all in favor, Mayor Swiderski adjourned the Public Hearing at 8:40 p.m.