

**“From the Supervisor” column – January, 2021
Pittsford Town Supervisor Bill Smith**

In Spite of COVID-19 Challenges, Town 2021 Budget Holds Tax Rate Flat

The COVID-19 pandemic brought unexpected challenges, including a strain on Town resources. Despite this, I am proud to report that we succeeded in keeping the tax Town rate flat into 2021. As a result, Town tax remains proportionally low. Town tax continues to comprise less than nine cents (\$0.09) of every dollar in property taxes paid by Pittsford residents.

After hearing advice and ideas from residents who contacted me or spoke to me about the preliminary budget, and the views of Town Board members, the Town Finance Director and I went to work with the department heads and others, to get us to a budget that holds the line on the tax rate without compromising the services we all depend on, and expect.

Major Factors Affecting Budgeting for 2021

In 2020 the Town’s revenues declined severely because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic will continue to have a similar effect in 2021. Moreover, it presents us with many sheer unknowns.

The points below illustrate the shocks to the budget in 2020, in terms of decreases in expected revenues due to the pandemic:

- Sales Tax – down 13% (-\$223,211)
- State Local Street Program (CHIPS) – down 20% (-\$48, 374)
- State Aid to Municipalities (AIM) – down 20% (-\$21,616)
- Recreation Fees – down 173% (-\$240,249)
- Library Fees – down 66% (-\$29,993)
- Interest Revenue – down 31% (-\$69,000)

Total Revenue Losses 2020: -\$632,443

It is possible that for CHIPS and AIM funding, the reduction for 2020 will be 100% in either case or both. A 20% reduction represents the best current estimate and is shown in the chart.

In addition to the COVID-related and other revenue decreases detailed above, the Town has incurred unanticipated COVID-related expenses. These include \$75,000 for Plexiglas, technology protective upgrades, sanitizer stands/dispensers, thermometers, soap, gloves, paper products, signage, work pods, masks and the like, and an additional \$184,289 for the Pandemic Time Bank established for our employees and \$34,638 in payment to employees for pandemic-related childcare. Together with other unanticipated expenses for equipment to maintain the brush and leaf pickup uninterrupted as well as road repair, and non-routine vehicle maintenance, these expenses add up to more than \$388,927.

The State's increase in minimum wage alone adds \$170,621 in additional expense for wages in 2021. This does not include increases due to the cascading effects of the minimum wage hike throughout our wage scales.

Looking Ahead

Pittsford's longstanding record of fiscal responsibility and careful budgeting practices have placed the Town in a strong position to meet the fiscal challenges imposed by COVID and other factors, while protecting taxpayers by holding the tax rate flat for 2021.

For another year, our 2021 budget maintains and improves the essential services that contribute to the quality of life of Pittsford residents. It reinforces my commitment to an aggressive road repaving program, to building stronger neighborhoods, to continual improvement and to services of importance to youth and seniors.

The 2021 budget provides the following, among other features:

- Another \$100,000, in addition to the 2020 increase of \$272,000, to the road repaving and repair budget, totaling \$372,000 in increased funding for road repair since calendar year 2018
- \$100,000 for projects in the Active Transportation Plan
- \$22,000 for Pedestrian Safety and measures to reduce speeding
- \$11,000 for a Crossing Guard at Allen's Creek School
- \$13,500 for new trail maintenance machinery
- Increased funding to Pittsford Volunteer Ambulance
- Funding for the 4.5% increase in medical expenses for Town employees
- Cost of Living Increase of 2% for Town Staff earning less than \$75,000 and 1% for those above it, with no increase for elected officials
- 5.8% increase in funding for Pittsford Youth Services. This represents a total increase in Town funding for PYS since 2017 of 69%.
- Funding for a grant-writer, to help the Town take better advantage of state and other grants, further protecting taxpayers.

Notwithstanding uncertainties in revenues going forward in the era of COVID, our 2021 budget maintains the increases in funding for senior citizens' programs and services. Funds continue to support lunch and nutrition programs, including the pandemic-friendly Grab-and-Go lunches program and online resources designed for and offered specifically to Pittsford seniors.

Of the 18 towns in Monroe County, Pittsford still has the 7th lowest town tax rate. If you exclude from the comparison those towns that receive revenues from landfills, and those that have commercial areas much more extensive and intensive than Pittsford's, we're the 5th lowest. And Pittsford provides municipal services that not all of the other lower-taxed towns do, such as leaf pick up, yard debris pick up, a recreation program and a Town-financed library.

Summary

Our 2021 budget maintains and improves the services that contribute to the quality of life enjoyed by Pittsford residents. It reinforces my commitment to building stronger neighborhoods, to continual improvement and to services of importance to youth and seniors. The budget builds upon a longstanding fiscal record that protects taxpayers and reaffirms the Town's commitment to responsible budgetary practices. The revised budget proposal gives Pittsford a budget in full compliance with the New York State Property Tax Cap – because there is no increase to the tax rate at all.

I thank those Pittsford residents, representing a broad cross-section of our community, who offered the practical suggestions and advice that influenced our thinking in refining the preliminary 2021 budget proposal. Ideas grounded in reality, experience, intelligence and good will have a way of asserting themselves. They're always welcomed by me and our Town staff.

Once more, as well, I thank the Town's new Finance Director, Brian Luke and our capable Town Department Heads for their efforts and analysis in preparing both the preliminary budget proposal and the final 2021 budget. With their knowledge, skill and work, with residents who care about our community and with their continuing support, Pittsford continues to pave the way toward improving services and infrastructure of Pittsford and in protecting our taxpayers.

You can find complete details about the 2021 Pittsford Town Budget at www.townofpittsford.org/home-budgets. As always, should you have any questions or comments, you may reach me directly by phone at 248-6220 or by email at wsmith@townofpittsford.org. I answer my own phone and am always interested to know what matters most to you as a resident.