

MAYOR MARVIN'S COLUMN

Based on some e-mails I received this week, there is some confusion as to my and the Trustees' role in the school budget process. We are not involved in the choices made by the School Board and the School Administration. We do not, nor should not, have a decision-making role just as school officials do not make decisions for the municipality. I, however, do support the overarching goal of the School Board and Administration to control spending to ensure the continued excellence of our school and the health of our community. I thank the School Board for graciously granting me the opportunity to communicate a perspective on the school budget that is shared by many, many Village taxpayers. I felt duty bound to add their voices to the discussion. Bottom line, in spite of different views as to how to achieve a sustainable budget, we are all committed to the long term excellence of our school. School families and non-school families need each other to maintain both the fiscal and intergenerational balance in our Village.

I spoke out because due to the high taxes residents are no longer staying in the Village ten to fifteen years after their last child graduates which was the norm in the past. We now see many folks putting their homes on the market the March before their last child graduates in anticipation of a quick exit. This is not good for the community. That is why we must respect and include everyone's perspective in the budget process.

As an example, let's play out a scenario – a family buys a home in the Village with a \$45,000 tax bill which is not uncommon. They enroll their two or three children in our school where the cost of educating them is approximately \$25,000 per child. Given the Village services, the excellence of the school and the cost of duplicating this education at a private school this seems to be a bargain. So from this parent's vantage point adding more money to the school budget to preserve or add programs seems quite rational and acceptable. Balance this with the view of their neighbor with a family long past school age carrying the same \$45,000 tax bill - \$37,600 of which goes to the school district - that has risen every year. Their family and/or financial advisor is counseling them that this burden makes no economic sense and they should move. We do not want them to have to leave because not only will they most assuredly sell to a school family thus increasing the school population but most importantly, we will lose one of the most significant assets of our Village, an intergenerational mix. This is not a good outcome for everyone in the Village.

We need all of our constituent groups to remain in the Village if we want to ensure the long term health and excellence of our school and Village.

Recognized as being the highest taxed community in the highest taxed County is not an award we can afford to keep winning. I congratulate our school administrators for voluntarily offering to forego raises. Many residents have been heartened by this act. Having given the faculty and staff unwavering support in the better economic times, a giveback during this fiscal downturn is most appreciated. The Village government is doing its part to trim costs as well. We are very cognizant of the fact that we are stewards of your tax dollars and must ensure that they are spent wisely and our budget will reflect the new economic reality. We had a zero tax increase last year and are presently working very hard to try to duplicate that in the next budget. We do not have much left to trim and even our budget trimming does not translate into big savings on your tax bill because we are only one-sixth of the final number.

Last year to get to a 0 percent tax increase, we had to let people go and leave positions unfilled. It was extremely difficult but bottom line, it is staffing that drives most of the costs in any operation. As a result, the Police Chief, the Village Administrator, Mayor and four Trustees share one secretary. Our Library budget was trimmed so drastically that our Children's Library which serves the toddler on up population for the Village and surrounding areas now has less staffing and a smaller book budget than the Elementary School library.

Any additional cuts going forward would have to involve a curtailment of services which is not a direction we want to go because our sanitation, recycling, police services and infrastructure maintenance serves the needs of every Villager and keeps the Village the attractive and safe place we all value.

We will be having budget workshops on March 24th and March 25th starting at 6:30PM at Village Hall. All interested residents are invited to attend.

As a Village, we must keep our spending in balance and create a healthy and sustainable model of management, which will, in turn, only serve to enhance our Village and School.