

## MAYOR'S COLUMN

Last week I spent some time in Albany at the New York State Conference of Mayors with Village Administrator Harry Porr. I don't usually attend these events, (especially when they are in Buffalo!), but I thought it important given that the primary focus was the Federal Stimulus Package and its benefits to New York State. All of our major elected state officials spoke with us including Governor Patterson, Senators Schumer and Gillibrand, Comptroller DiNapoli and Senate Majority Leader Malcolm Smith.

According to our leaders, New York expects to receive \$24.6 billion in funding in five major categories of spending:

- Fiscal Relief (\$14 billion) – includes funding for Medicaid and to offset the cuts made to education in the 2009-10 Executive Budget.
- Infrastructure and Energy (\$3.97 billion) – includes funding for mass transit, highways, bridges, water projects, weatherization and energy efficiency.
- Health and Human Services (\$4.43 billion) – includes funding for food stamps, unemployment benefits, child care and housing.
- Education (\$2.08 billion) – includes funding for high needs and special education students, tuition assistance and technology.
- Public Safety (\$10 million) – includes funding for law enforcement, prosecution and crime related programs.

In order to manage the development of state and local infrastructure projects financed through the Federal Stimulus Package, the Governor has created the New York State Economic Recovery and Reinvestment Cabinet.

Of significant interest to smaller communities like Bronxville is the money dedicated to infrastructure and energy. With the goal of putting people to work as quickly as possible, some of this money must be obligated by the state within 120 days, and decisions will be made in the next few weeks.

Though the application process is confusing at best, we have submitted funding requests at all “price points” operating under the theory that regardless of our prospects, “you have to be in it to win it.”

Our requests run the gamut from a multimillion dollar flood mitigation plan to funding the scoping and cleaning of our pipe infrastructure to a “green” garbage truck right down to some police equipment needs.

There is considerable uncertainty with respect to how the state wide community “wish lists” will be evaluated, how funding decisions will be made and what the exact criteria is for each funding category, knowing the overarching requirement is that they be “shovel ready.”

While I understand the desire to get the money out the door as quickly as possible, I share many of the concerns of other Mayors as to execution.

Are the “shovel ready” projects really the best long term? Will there be sensitivity to equitable geographic distribution? Will these projects generate optimal economic impact including the ability to generate private investment? Are these projects the most cost effective or just the most available? Could they be old projects that have all the engineering/approvals completed but weren’t built for a variety of reasons and are now dusted off and tried anew?

My preference, shared by many of my colleagues in Albany, would be to funnel the money directly to local municipalities, bypassing state agencies.

Each municipality currently receives state aid based on a prescribed formula that could be used to apportion stimulus funds.

I believe local governments know local needs best and could put the money to the most direct and needed uses in the most efficient and expeditious way.

But given this is not the preferred method of distribution, we have done all we can at this juncture to put our Village in the most advantageous position for possible funding.

To promote transparency and accountability with respect to the funding decisions, both the state and federal governments have established websites for this purpose. The state website is [www.economicrecovery.ny.gov](http://www.economicrecovery.ny.gov) and the federal website is [www.recovery.gov](http://www.recovery.gov).