

MAYOR'S COLUMN

The 2008 New York State Legislative Session ended in late June, though the State Senate may return to Albany sometime in July. Several very prominent issues in the news including school property tax cap and relief from rising gasoline prices were left unresolved.

However, there were some legislative initiatives that directly affect the Village both monetarily and procedurally that passed both houses and are awaiting signature by the Governor.

In the area of labor relations, bills were passed that would increase the mandatory retirement age for police and firefighters from 62 to 65; authorize municipalities to grant a leave of absence to any employee who is elected to any office with his or her union, and require the use of an independent hearing officer in disciplinary cases involving an individual represented by a union if the penalty sought is dismissal.

In addition, a bill passed that would amend various provisions of the Retirement and Social Security Law to create a presumption that any heart disability incurred by a member of either of the two retirement systems administered by the State Comptroller was incurred in the performance of work duties and was an accident.

In the area of accessibility of public records, a new law now requires that local governments design information retrieval systems to provide segregation of public vs. non-public information in the same record to allow for electronic access. An additional bill requires a court to award costs and reasonable attorney's fees to plaintiffs in matters related to the violation of the open meetings laws.

Many of the above initiatives most certainly will have a negative financial impact on the Village.

Bills awaiting the Governor's signature that could be cost saving to the Village include affording municipalities the first opportunity to obtain State-owned surplus personal property and authorizing schools to pay all or any portion of the salaries and compensation of school crossing guards, a cost that is currently the sole responsibility of the host municipality. A net energy metering system bill allows for non-residential buildings with qualified renewable energy systems to transfer surplus energy back to the utility grid, receiving an equal credit against use.

For the residential energy user, a new law would create a grant program to encourage the construction of new homes and renovations of old homes using methods consistent with “green” standards established by the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority.

Three bills of particular interest and possible effect on our Village remained in committee at the legislative session’s end.

Reform of the municipal competitive bidding law raising the threshold for compulsory bidding of public works contracts from \$20,000 to \$50,000 and purchase contract from \$10,000 to \$50,000 was passed only by the Senate. A proposal permitting municipalities, at local option, to impose a service charge on certain tax exempt properties to offset the cost of services local governments provide to such properties remains at the committee level along with the proposed bill permitting local governments to utilize market-based assessments for cooperatives and condominiums that are converted or constructed on or after January 1, 2010. Current assessments on these types of properties are based upon the income producing value of the entire building and not the selling price of the individual units.

We will continue to monitor the effect of all the 2008 State legislation on the functioning and budget of our Village.