



**TOWN BOARD
TOWN OF OSSINING
BIRDSALL-FAGAN POLICE/COURT FACILITY
86-88 SPRING STREET
OSSINING, NEW YORK**

**OCTOBER 28, 2014
7:30 P.M.**

**SUPERVISOR
Susanne Donnelly**

**COUNCILMEMBERS
Geoffrey Harter Eric P. Blaha
Kim L. Jeffrey Northern Wilcher**

I. CALL TO ORDER – PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE – ROLL CALL

The Regular Meeting of the Town Board of the Town of Ossining was held on October 28, 2014 in the Police/Court Facility, 86-88 Spring Street in Ossining. The meeting was called to order at 7:30 p.m. by Supervisor Susanne Donnelly. Members of the Board present were: Councilmembers Geoffrey Harter, Northern Wilcher and Kim Jeffrey. Councilmember Eric Blaha arrived at 7:45 p.m. Also present were Town Attorney Wayne Spector, Budget Officer Madeline Zachacz, Town Comptroller Thomas Warren and Town Clerk Mary Ann Roberts.

II. ANNOUNCEMENTS

Supervisor Donnelly read the following statement:

Entering the fourth year of the “2% Tax Cap” has required new levels of creativity and innovation in the Town of Ossining. Again this year, the rate of growth has been lower than 2%, and our levy limit has subsequently become a 1.56% cap, which further ties our hands as to what we can expend. Although projections remain mostly optimistic, revenues continue to be unreliable and the need for conservative budgeting has never been clearer. Federal and State aid continues to decrease, while the Town’s expenses continue to rise: between the ever-climbing cost of our electricity, our employee health insurance (expected to rise by as much as 6% for 2015) and our retirement contributions, our fixed expenses continue to rise markedly faster than the levy increase to which we’re entitled by New York State Law. To complicate the situation further, in 2015, for the first time the Town is subject to the New York State Tax Freeze Legislation, in which municipalities have even more pressure on them to reduce expenses instead of just holding them steady.

Furthermore, we continue to contend with assessment challenges on the values of our residential and commercial properties. Between residential “SCARS” (small claims by residents) and “tax certioraris” enacted by commercial property owners, the tax base in the Town of Ossining, and across almost every municipality in Westchester, continues to be impacted, as does the average residential assessment. As the economy has continued to improve, the Town has seen new construction, which has served to counter the lower assessments resulting from tax certiorari claims. This is especially clear in the Unincorporated Area, where we have seen a 1.07% increase in Taxable Assessed Value in 2015, while the Town General has seen a modest, but still promising, 0.15% increase. However, exclusive of the new construction, we are confident that the Town-wide re-evaluation plan, into which we’ve entered with other Westchester municipalities to reach economies of scale on pricing, will help to slow and eventually eradicate these reductions and find a fair and equitable balance for all of our taxpayers.

That said, we have been very diligent this past year in working with our Department Heads on their budgets, constantly evaluating their needs, reevaluating the sustainability of the way we do business in certain areas, and making changes as necessary to benefit the long-term bottom line of Town of Ossining. Lots of innovative and bold thinking has led to decisions that will have a long-lasting impact on how Town reserves are able to grow- selling the police building, contracting with the Village of Ossining Police, and budgeting revenues and expenses to more appropriate funds has helped to cast a different light on the services we provide and how we can best provide them. One of the best outcomes of this mindset is that we are able to take care of the non-emergency infrastructure concerns we all see every day without borrowing money to remedy them.

These tough economic times have spared few of us entirely, but we are still seeing properties that, for multiple reasons, have fallen behind on their taxes and enter (or, teeter dangerously close to entering) foreclosure. Permitting residents with tax obligations additional time to sell their properties in order to derive some profit from the sale after having satisfied their debts (with all interest and penalties) has helped the Town to be made whole on a handful of properties; we've also endeavored to put some qualified taxpayers on very limited payment plans in order to give them time to make good on their liens. A successful foreclosure auction this summer has relieved the burden of unpaid taxes on multiple properties that have been accruing fines and penalties for years- ending that cycle not only gives the property a new life and brings new families into our community, but allows the Town to increase cash flow and operate more smoothly with fewer outstanding debts on our books. Property owners taking out permits for work being done (sometimes after the fact, as with some homeowners selling their property or preparing for the reassessment), coupled with an upswing in new construction (mostly commercial in the Unincorporated Area) and increased enforcement of our building codes has resulted in revenue for the Town of Ossining above what we projected for 2014. Overall, the news is good, but each day brings a new set of challenges.

All of this work has provided us with a cautiously optimistic level of comfort as we approach the 2015 budget cycle. We have determined that, after 3 years of leaving the position vacant, we will fill the position of Confidential Secretary in the Supervisor's Office. Some of the functions we expect this person to perform include searching for and administering grants, managing our time clock software, Con Ed Help Desk monitoring, inventory and cyber threat monitoring, and Dale Cemetery recordkeeping. We know this position will be an asset to the overall Town team and our productivity.

One of the IMAs that we have with the Village of Ossining is for Recreational Services for the Unincorporated Area. This IMA has been in the Town General budget for many years, so in fact, people who live in the Villages of Ossining and Briarcliff Manor have been paying twice for their recreation service. Over the past few years, we have moved revenues such as cable franchise fees from the Town General to the Unincorporated Area budget, and now, in the interest of fairness, we will be moving the Recreation Services IMA to the Unincorporated Area budget. During our discussions with the Village of Ossining, we stressed the need for the residents of the Unincorporated Area to pay the same fees for the Recreation Department services as do the residents of the Village of Ossining. The Village has agreed to charge Unincorporated Area residents the same rate as Village residents for their "rec card", and for all recreation services (including use of the pool). The only exception to that would be lap swimming- Unincorporated Area lap swimmers will continue to pay a higher rate than Village residents; others outside of the area, including Briarcliff Manor residents, will pay a different rate entirely. Please note: even if you have a Briarcliff Manor address but live in the Unincorporated Area, you will still benefit from this change.

We would like to encourage each of you to visit the Joseph G. Caputo Community Center, especially the Aquatics Center, and sign up for their e-blasts which outline the programming for each season. There are always a variety of classes offered, and they will be looking to add on some new computer classes this winter that may be of interest to you.

In 2014, Moody's Investors Service improved the Town's credit rating to AA2 from AA3, which allows us to borrow at more favorable interest rates. This display of confidence in the way the Town is headed is due to amazing work by all of our employees, but I would be remiss if I did not give extra thanks to Maddi Zachacz, Dale Ferreira and Tom Warren. These three people work constantly to make sure we stay "on top" of the budget, that the procurement policy is followed when making departmental purchases, and ensuring that simple policies are put into place and followed, such as the control of supplies and materials.

One of our biggest successes in 2014 was the sale of, and retirement of debt on, our Police Station at 507 North State Road. By continuing to pay off all financing possible whenever a bond becomes callable, we will save Unincorporated taxpayers tens of thousands of dollars over the coming years. We will continue to pay down our debt on the building, and have budgeted an additional payment encompassing 50% toward the final balloon payment on the Police Station. The building will now be paid off in full by 2017.

Many concurrent factors have allowed us to realize a 0% tax increase in the 20 Fund for 2015. The difference between the 2014 and 2015 funds that we need to operate Unincorporated Area departments (including the savings in the Village of Ossining's Police Contract proposal coupled with other reduced liabilities related to staffing and the police station) that may otherwise result in a tax decrease will be put into a Contingency Fund for 2015. These funds will be used to pay out tax grievances, make certiorari payments and fund some much needed road repair. Allowing us to pay for these items out of our operating budget, rather than borrowing with interest, makes good budgetary sense- even with today's low interest rates, it is not free money, and decreasing our debt load is a responsible strategy.

We have confidence in our employees and in the leadership of our neighboring municipalities. We will continue working hard in 2015 to uncover innovative ways to save money and derive revenue from non-property tax sources. We are continuing our 20+ IMAs (intermunicipal agreements) with the Village of Ossining, and we are always brainstorming how our departments could do more with less without any interruption to service. We will also experience some staff changes this year, all of which we hope will save taxpayer money while enhancing the services we provide.

Our tax increase for 2015 complies with the levy increase allowed by the Tax Cap law- 1.56% plus a 0.28% growth factor. Our General Fund tax, paid by all residents in the Town of Ossining, has seen a 1.6% increase. The Town Unincorporated Blended rate, which is where we charge for Police, Building Department and Highway Services, shows a minimal 0.20% increase. Every other tax increase is minimal. Even though the tax rate has gone up 91.15% in the Water Fund, that still only accounts for \$0.90 per thousand of assessed value- this sharp increase is due to the debt on one of the many massive infrastructure projects the Town has undertaken in the recent past, namely the Cedar Lane/ Stormytown Road Water Main. This is the first year we have to make a bond payment on the project, but we think you'll agree that this major improvement to our infrastructure (to say nothing of the increased quality of life for our residents out on Cedar Lane) is well worth an increase of \$0.50 per thousand assessed.

The Supervisor's Tentative 2015 Budget is available in the Town Clerk's office at 16 Croton Avenue, the Ossining Public Library, and online at www.townofossining.com. The Town Board will be holding its final Town Hall Meeting of 2014 on November 18th. Please join us at 7:30PM at the Ossining Public Library (use the downstairs entrance), where we will be gathering Board & public input on the 2015 Tentative Budget. Your opinions matter to us- we are working for you, the taxpayers, to create a sensible and sound budget, while keeping costs low and maintaining or even improving service levels. The Ossining Town Board will be discussing the Supervisor's Tentative Budget during November work sessions and will hold a Public Hearing on Tuesday, November 25th, 2014, 7:30 pm at the Police/Court Facility, 88 Spring Street, Ossining. We urge members of the public to review the budget and make comments at the Public Hearing or by contacting me at 914-762-6001 or sdonnelly@townofossining.com.

Supervisor Donnelly announced that on Friday, October 31, 2014 DARE Halloween will take place at the Joseph G. Caputo Community Center from 6 – 8 p.m. Election Day is on Tuesday, November 4, 2014 which includes 3 propositions. The polls are open from 6 a.m. to 9 p.m. The Town Work Session will be held on Monday, November 3, 2014 at 16 Croton Avenue beginning at 7:30 p.m. The Town Board Legislative meeting will be held at the Birdsall Fagan Police Court Facility on Wednesday, November 12, 2014 beginning at 7:30 p.m. The final Town Hall Meeting of the year will be held on November 18, 2014 at the Ossining Public Library beginning at 7:30 p.m. The Town Board is hold its annual Public Hearing on the Budget on November 25th with its adoption scheduled for December 9, 2014.

III. PUBLIC COMMENT ON AGENDA ITEMS

IV. BOARD RESOLUTIONS

A. Approval of Minutes

Councilmember Harter moved and it was seconded by Councilmember Jeffrey that the following be approved:

Resolved, that the Town Board of the Town of Ossining hereby approves the October 14, 2014, Minutes of the Regular Meeting as presented.

Motion Carried: 3-1-0
Aye: Harter, Jeffrey & Wilcher
Abstain: Donnelly

B. Approval of Minutes-Special Meeting

Councilmember Wilcher moved and it was seconded by Councilmember Harter that the following be approved:

Resolved, that the Town Board of the Town of Ossining hereby approves the October 21, 2014, Minutes of the Special Meeting as presented.

Motion Carried: Unanimously

C. Approval of Voucher Detail Report

Councilmember Wilcher moved and it was seconded by Councilmember Jeffrey that the following be approved:

Resolved, that the Town Board of the Town of Ossining hereby approves the Voucher Detail Report dated October 28, 2014 in the amount of \$332,677.22

Motion Carried: Unanimously

D. Request for Bids- Delivery of Meals and Supplies for Nutrition Program

Councilmember Jeffrey moved and it was seconded by Councilmember Harter that the following be approved:

Resolved, that the Town Board of the Town of Ossining hereby authorizes the Town Clerk to advertise a Request for Bids for the delivery of meals and supplies for the Nutrition Program, located in the Ossining Community Center. Bids shall be submitted no later than 10:00AM on Monday, November 17th to the office of the Town Clerk.

Motion Carried: Unanimously

E. Call for a Public Hearing: Local Law #5 of 2014 for the Purpose of Changing the Town Taxable Status Date

Councilmember Wilcher moved and it was seconded by Councilmember Jeffrey that the following be approved:

Resolved, that the Town Board of the Town of Ossining hereby calls for a Public Hearing to be held on Wednesday, November 12, 2014 at 7:30 p.m. at the Village of Ossining Police/Court Facility, 86-88 Spring Street, in the matter of Local Law #5 of 2014 for the Purpose of Changing the Town Taxable Status Date from June 1st to May 1st.

Motion Carried: Unanimously

V. CORRESPONDENCE TO BE RECEIVED AND FILED

VI. MONTHLY REPORTS

Councilmember Harter moved and it was seconded by Councilmember Jeffrey that the following be approved:

Resolved, that the Town Board of the Town of Ossining hereby accepts the G.E. Crotonville Helicopter Report for the month of September 2014.

Motion Carried: Unanimously

VII. VISITOR RECOGNITION

Mark Frye, member of the Ossining Boat & Canoe Club, discussed a coffee table book relating to the history of the Board and Canoe Club which will celebrate their 100th anniversary in 2015. He also read an article from 1921.

Tom Earl, Edgewood Road, also read an article from the local papers celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Boat & Canoe Club.

Donna Sharrett, Morningside Drive, read a statement to the Board regarding the creation of a local law and adoption which recognizes the definition of a wetland.

VIII. ADJOURNMENT

At 8:15 p.m. Councilmember Harter moved and it was seconded by Councilmember Jeffrey that the meeting be adjourned.

Motion Carried: Unanimously

Approved:

Mary Ann Roberts, Town Clerk