

Brighton-Pittsford Post – “From the Supervisor” column – September 18, 2014 issue
Submitted by Pittsford Town Supervisor Bill Smith

Community Budget, Community Choices

Pittsford residents occasionally stop by my office or phone me to discuss their property taxes. All too frequently they are surprised, even shocked, to learn one fundamental fact.

Out of the total property tax you pay in a year – Town, School and County taxes altogether – less than 10% represents property tax paid to the Town of Pittsford.

The other 90% of your property tax you pay to those other jurisdictions – not to the Town.

You go to Town Hall to pay all those taxes together, for the convenience of “one-stop shopping” or, in this case, one-stop paying. But less than 10% of your total property tax bill is imposed by the Town government, or paid by you to the Town of Pittsford.

To illustrate, the average value of a house in Pittsford is \$272,500. Total property tax – Town, School and County tax combined – on a house assessed at that value, for the twelve months ending August 31, 2014, was \$9,805. Ten percent of that is \$981.

Therefore, property tax levied on that house by the TOWN OF PITTSFORD is no more than \$981. That’s the portion the TOWN gets from the entire annual property tax payment by the owner of that house.

That’s what pays for all the municipal services provided by the Town. They include our library, our parks, road maintenance and plowing, our recreation programs, leaf and branch pickup and all of the other town services you’ve come to depend upon.

It’s important to know this, in order to keep your eye on the ball in the upcoming public discussion about preparing a Town budget for next year.

To draft a budget is to make choices. What will we do? What do we reasonably want? How will we pay for it? This needs to be a community conversation and a community decision.

The law requires a public hearing on the budget. The Town Board and I want a much fuller public conversation than that. For this reason, in addition to the public hearing, we have scheduled four public budget meetings:

- Saturday, October 18 – 9-11am, in the Town Hall Meeting Room
- Friday, October 24 – 7-9pm, in the Town Hall Meeting Room
- Monday, October 27; Wednesday, October 29; both meetings running from 7-9 pm in the Fisher Meeting Room at Pittsford Library.

In these columns and in the recent Town newsletter I have described a number of Town initiatives, driven by public request, by necessity or by both. These include installing sidewalks in some key locations around Town, for reasons of safety and quality of life. They include restoring our

community center to the standard of our other public buildings – at a cost far more modest than building a new facility from scratch. They include improvements to our Town athletic fields, the project on which you just voted in the referendum held September 16. I am writing this column a week before that vote.

For purposes of illustration, we can first take into account the \$684,000 in saving to taxpayers we accomplished by refinancing bonds earlier this year. With savings from that factored in, we then must account for mandated expenses such as paying for the recently-enacted increase in the minimum wage and for mandatory pension plan contributions. We must budget as well for increases in the costs of goods and services paid by the Town government over recent years.

Taking all of these factors into account, I can tell you that if the Town of Pittsford were to move forward with each of the main improvement projects, including the fields – if we as a community decide to pursue those projects – it would result in a tax rate increase in the Town budget for 2015.

How much of an increase?

Let's go back to that house of average value in Pittsford, assessed at \$272,500. If we were to pay for all of the items described above, the owner would pay additional tax to the Town next year of \$180. One hundred eighty.

If you live in a house assessed at \$140,000 the additional cost to you next year would be \$91.

If your house is assessed at \$500,000 your additional cost would be \$326.

The point, of course, is that if we want to make these municipal improvements, we have to pay for them.

Having studied these matters since becoming Town Supervisor, I consider the initiatives I've described desirable. I recommend that we proceed with them. But the decision is one that, as a community, we need to make together. The Town Board and I need to know what you think. The budget document offered for public review later this month will include these items as a basis for discussion. The final budget to be adopted in November will be determined by that community discussion.

For this reason, I'm departing here from my usual practice of concluding these columns by merely letting you know how to contact me. Today, I'm asking you: please attend one of our budget meetings. If you can't, please contact me to express your views. The Town Board and I need to know what YOU think, for guidance in adopting a final budget for 2015.

When you attend one of the meetings, and as you think these matters through, keep in mind what the cost would be to you: \$180 per year if your house is assessed at \$272,500. Proportionately less if its value is lower; proportionately more if it's higher.

And finally, to put it all into context: if the community chooses to proceed with all of the initiatives described above, then your tax payable to the Town of Pittsford would still be less than 10% of your total property tax bill.

Contact Supervisor Smith at bsmith@townofpittford.org or 248-6220.