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"From the Supervisor" column

Submitted by Pittsford Town Supervisor Bill Smith

From the Supervisor

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Supervisor Smith's 2020 Budget Cuts Town Taxes 2nd Year in a Row

- Town taxes cut
- Sound budget reserves protect taxpayers, uphold fiscal health
- Town's AAA credit rating reflects superior financial stability

State Law assigns to the Town Supervisor responsibility for preparing the annual budget and submitting it to the public and the Town Board. Pending the public hearing on my proposed budget for 2020, I'd like to share with you some of the core considerations that drive my approach to this important responsibility.

My first duty to Pittsford residents is to devote Town resources – meaning your tax dollars – to the services and amenities for which municipal government exists in order to provide. Following the example of my predecessors in office, the members of my Town Administration and I will not squander resources, whether money, property or time, on issues unrelated to the central mission of municipal government. Our duty is to serve our residents. To do so in a way that promotes at every turn better quality of life, such as promoting walkability, protecting our natural environment, preserving our architectural history, promoting broader housing options for residents in their retirement years and within their means, among other goals.

This discipline keeps Town taxes low while:

- maintaining and improving our parks, roads, trails and sidewalks
- maintaining and improving our Library, Community Center and Recreation programs
- maintaining a regular leaf collection schedule and weekly yard debris collection, matched by few other towns
- providing timely and effective response to snow, ice and emergency conditions

More generally, our approach to managing Pittsford finances is what makes it possible to fund the continual improvement in services and amenities that's necessary to maintain the character of Pittsford as a community of quality. This approach includes keeping Town taxes low, maintaining necessary budget reserves and maintaining our excellent credit – the highest of any town in New York north of Westchester County.

Cutting Town taxes while preserving the quality and range of services takes resourcefulness, commitment to efficiency, lean staffing and clear understanding of Town operations and needs both current and future. This year, for the second consecutive year, my proposed budget for 2020 cuts town taxes – both the general tax rate and the general tax levy.

To put it in perspective, of the 18 towns in Monroe County, Pittsford's Town tax rate is 7th lowest. If you don't count towns that make money from big landfills, and towns with big box commercial areas much bigger than Pittsford's, we're 5th lowest. And Pittsford provides municipal services that not all of the other lower-taxed towns do, such as regular and frequent leaf pick up, yard debris pick up, a community center, recreation programming and a Town-financed library, just to name a few.

My 2020 budget cuts the general Town tax rate and the general Town tax levy, preserves existing services and amenities, and funds the following new services and amenities, among others:

- stepped up and more aggressive residential road repaving program
- improvements to our Pittsford Community Library
- increased support for Pittsford Volunteer Ambulance
- a new kayak launch on the canal that's easier to use for senior citizens
- our Aging-in-Place initiatives
- our continuing environmental initiatives that save taxpayers money while protecting our natural resources

Budget reserves are funds set aside to cover longer-term expenses expected beyond the current budget year and unexpected costs. It's the municipal equivalent of personal savings, to fund a roof replacement you've planned for next year, or to be able to buy a new furnace when the old one suddenly dies.

Having to borrow in order to buy a \$247,000 snow plow truck costs taxpayers. It costs much more than buying one from available funds. Pittsford prepares properly.

The same principle of intelligent fiscal management applies to being prepared for emergency situations. Pittsford is prepared to deal with emergencies. We're not at the mercy of lenders who can gouge municipalities who haven't planned with the highest interest rates, knowing the municipality has to borrow immediately, no matter what.

Responsible financial management along these lines provides for **tax stability**: municipalities that suddenly have to borrow at high interest rates to cover an emergency then have to hike taxes to pay for it. Pittsford doesn't have to do that. We're prepared. We have adequate reserves. Our reserves keep to the State Comptroller's guidelines. Most are earmarked for specific purposes, such as vehicle and equipment purchases, building repairs and sewer improvements and repairs, and are required by the State Comptroller to be used solely for the purposes specified.

On the subject of the cost of borrowing, Pittsford is able to deliver the best value to our residents because of the Town's **AAA credit rating**. It's the highest rating possible. Pittsford is the only town in all of upstate New York – everywhere north of Westchester County – to have it. So when we take on a big project, like building the Pittsford Community Library or, more recently, renovating the Spiegel Community Center, or refurbishing our athletic fields and parks, we can borrow at the most favorable interest rates available to a municipal government. Pittsford residents pay the least. Because our credit rating is the best.

For this budget and beyond, my priority in budgeting is protecting our taxpayers by continuing to keep Town taxes low, maintaining Pittsford's high standards of services for residents, and planning carefully to provide adequate funding for expenditures down the road and for unexpected expenses.

As always, should you have any comments about this or any other topic you may reach me directly by phone at 248-6220 or by email at bsmith@townofpittsford.org. My door is open and I answer my own phone. I'm always interested to know what matters most to you as a resident.