

## **State-of-the-Town for 2012**

**by Ronald W. Nesbitt, Supervisor**

I believe the residents of the Town of Webster are really beginning to understand the spending of their tax dollars and the services these dollars provide. The Town Board found itself in an unusual situation in 2011 where fund balances had begun to shrink and a tightening of our belt was needed even more. When the Town Board announced the decision to lay off some employees within the town, reaction from residents on both sides of the issue was fast and furious.

The Town Board values each and every one of our employees and the decision at any time to lower our work force numbers is not taken lightly. However, the continued double digit increases in health care costs and pension costs with no action being taken by our state government to address these issues has left the Town Board no other choice at this time. As I have stated in the past, there has not been any "fat" in the budget for years. In fact our budget is not only bare bones, but is has been reduced to the bone marrow. Each and every town Department Head is watching each and every penny very closely each day as the year goes on.

The state government is still rejoicing over the passing of a tax cap of two percent a year on local and school districts throughout the state. This tax cap had no effect on town residents due to the fact that for the past five years town taxes have not gone up and the Town Board of Webster has controlled spending. What the state government should have done was put a two percent cap on THEIR spending at the state level and stop rejoicing and taking credit for a cap that does more harm than good at the local level. Better yet, the state government could address pension reform and the continued state mandates they put on local governments without funding or personnel to administer their programs (i.e.; THE STAR PROGRAM).

We will have continued health care increases in 2013 of at least 13% which is our cap for that year under the consortium that we belong to. As we have seen this year, our increase of 12% was under the average of 18% offered under other community rated plans. This represented a savings to Webster taxpayers of 6% - if you can call 6% a savings. Pension costs for our employees will again be increased to double digits as in past years. For 2012 we where up over \$283,000.00, or 17.5%, and I would expect the same in 2013. Pension costs for employees not employed by the police department have gone up \$480,632.00 since 2010, and the police pension costs have gone up \$235,415.00 since 2010. The state truly needs to step in and find a different solution for these increases each and every year while also making local governments stay under a two percent property cap increase with these increases in pension costs.

The 2012 tax rate for residents living in the town (outside of the village) will remain the same as last year at \$4.33 per thousand of assessed valuation. This is the fifth year in a row the Town Board has kept the tax rate stable. The village tax rate will decrease eight cents to \$ 3.67 per thousand of assessed valuation. The sewer rate of \$162.50 will also continue to be the same in 2012. Please keep in mind that there has not been a town-wide reassessment since 2004 which means that your TOWN tax bill remains the same unless you added an addition to your home or work was performed that required a building

permit.

The town continues to have very little debt to pay and this Town Board continues to believe in paying for equipment and other needs in cash without mortgaging the future of our kids and grandkids. Standard & Poor's continues to give the town a credit rating of Double AA because of our fiscal reasonability in controlling the taxpayer's monies.

In October, 2011 the town opened the long awaited new Webster Recreational Center on Chiyoda Drive. Construction of the new building and fitness center took about eighteen months to complete but in the end the building will be well used by many residents in the years to come. The new building sits on land that has a one mile walking track, three baseball diamonds, an outdoor ice skating rink, and 74 acres of open space to enjoy. The inside has a fitness center with state of the art equipment for residents to use at a minimal monthly rate. There is also a game room, party room, senior lounge area, kitchen area, outside sitting area to enjoy nature and many other opportunities for young and old to use.

There was not much in the way of commercial development happening in 2011 and only just recently have I heard that Xerox might be remodeling 20,000 square feet at building 200 for a call center to employ around 350 new employees which surely would be an economic development for the town. As of this time, there are no other commercial plans that have been submitted to the town for approval.

Housing starts again where real slow based on the national economic housing bust which has taken place all over the county. The Town of Webster had around 40 new housing starts in 2011 and there are a lot of houses for sale in our community at this time. Hopefully, with mortgage rates at all time low, we will see things picking up in 2012. The new 129 unit patio home development called "The Meadows" Schlegel Road and Phillips Road has begun and we should see a few houses there in the coming months.

The outflow pipe into Lake Ontario from our Wastewater Treatment Plant on Phillips Road has been completed and the Sewer Department continues to work on upgrading our sewer system and keeping it flowing freely. They continue to be pro-active in the collection of pharmaceutical waste before it goes into the sewer system.

The Webster Police Department continues to serve and protect our community every single day. There was concern that with the retirement of three officers that would not be replaced, that the community would suffer in response times in Webster. Upon working with the Chief of Police and other command officers, a decision was made to take the two Community Policing officers and put them back on the road thus having the same officer complement working the road detail as it past years. This was not an easy decision for the Town Board and created a lot of community tension during the budget hearings. However, in light of the continuing costs of police protection, it was make these decisions or have a tax increase.

The Webster Public Library is fast approaching ten years of being at the current site! The facility is still going great guns and serving a majority of Webster residents each and every day. Again, the cost factor affected the library too and the Town Board cut \$50,000.00 from their operating budget to balance the town budget. Due to these cost

cutting measures, the library is now closed on Sundays which I have heard has affected some of our residents. The Library Board of Trustees, which oversees library budget, continues to work with the Friends of the Webster Library to bring in revenue during book sales and other events staged by the Friends.

The Highway Department continues to multi-task on many different projects throughout the town during all four seasons. Snow fall so far this year has been light so crews have been getting equipment cleaned up and maintained plus doing repairs to the current highway garage and facilities. The Highway Department played a huge part last year in the site work and parking lot construction at the new recreation center, along with the design and implication of the ice skating rink. Drainage is a huge spring and summer job for the department as Webster has miles of creeks and ponds that we maintain to prevent flooding from happening in and around resident's homes. We have made great strides in the past years on drainage and this is all do to the dedication of our Highway Department personnel to prevent flooding in the town.

The Webster Town Board believes in complete open government with dialogue and we have practiced that since I became Supervisor in 2006. We will, in the coming year, continue our practice of televised Town Board, Planning Board and Zoning Board meetings on Cable Channel 12. I will have my monthly Electronic Town Meetings, the Town Times will be published three times a year, and I will continue to write my columns for the Webster Herald and Webster Post newspapers on a weekly basis. You can also contact me at any time by email at [supervisor@ci.webster.ny.us](mailto:supervisor@ci.webster.ny.us).

This is my seventh State-of-the-Town presentation and I will continue to reiterate my belief that imposing higher taxes is not the answer to maintaining a balanced budget. Nevertheless, as was seen this past October during the budget hearings, the demands for services and the costs of such services here in Webster are now clashing. The Town Board, for the past five years, has not presented the residents of Webster with any tax increase and we now have used up any fund balances we had left in reserves. We still have fund balances in case of an emergency, but there is no "fat" in the budget any more. We are now at the point of cutting services or raising taxes; either way, neither is a pleasant option.

In my sixteen years of service as a Town Board member, I have always told the residents the way it is – even if some did not like what was being said. I am getting too old to stop now from completely telling the honest truth to the Webster residents that without revenue increases from outside sources (which I doubt will happen), to maintain the current level of services in 2013 taxes will have to go up. I will take a minute here to explain my outlook:

To cut from the Highway Department is not possible. We are at the lowest amount of employees now that we have had in years. We need this at least this amount maintain the snow plow routes in the winter and the road surfacing plus repairs in the summer. Sewer is a separate fund and does not affect the current general tax rate. However, we need to stay where we are at if we wish to continue the sewer rate of \$ 162.50 that we have had for the past ten years. The staff at Town Hall includes the Town Clerk's Office, the Office of the Assessor, the Building Department and the Finance Department. At this

time, none of these departments are over staffed and could not do without any of the current employees without impacting services for our residents. I work here every day and can testify to you that these employees give their all each day for the residents of this town.

The Library is a service that takes care of around 300,000 patrons a year. While the budget was cut in 2012, I cannot imagine doing another cut without hampering services again. In this lean economic time, the library is used more for residents looking for work, putting together resumes and doing research.

The Webster Police have been cut from a high of 32 officers a few years ago to the present day 28 officers. We have cut back on some of the community policing services that had taken place in the schools do to higher police costs. Our present day goal of protecting and serving daily with appropriate response times is being met with the 28 officers, but any lower officer totals would have a negative effect on those response times.

I am hopeful that 2012 will start the turnaround in the state and nation wide into a county that recognizes that we cannot spend our way out of this economic mess we currently have ourselves in. Government cannot be the answer for all of our problems and we cannot expect government to solve all of our problems. We have to expect to do more with less and expect our government to do the same.

I am confident that your current Town Board has the experience, knowledge, and self commitment to face all the challenges that are thrust upon us in 2012. Once again our goal will be to make Webster a place that people want to visit, shop, conduct businesses and call home.