

# Town budget process needs resident input

Aileen Rohr, For the Poughkeepsie Journal 11:51 p.m. EDT September 28, 2014



Fall is "budget time" in [Hyde Park](#) and throughout New York. It's when supervisors, as chief fiscal officers, work with their boards and staffs to develop workable budgets for the next year. Department heads submit requests and revenue estimates for the following year; sales and mortgage tax histories are analyzed; prior years' disbursements are assessed; and the number crunching begins. After thorough analysis and public comment, a budget is produced that ideally provides for the delivery for essential services with the least impact to taxpayers.

There are two parts to every budget: revenues and expenditures, and they must match. In Hyde Park, the town receives roughly 11 percent of total property taxes paid, schools receive 68 percent, 11 percent goes to the county, and the rest (10 percent) to lighting, and fire and library districts.

As most residents know, in 2012, Gov. [Andrew Cuomo](#) introduced tax cap legislation for municipalities and school districts. This limits the tax levy increase to percentages tied to inflation. The tax levy is the amount of expenditures that isn't offset by revenues and must be raised by taxes. In 2013, the tax cap was 2 percent; in 2014, it was 1.66 percent; and for 2015, it will be 1.44 percent

I and my colleagues in town government embrace the concept of limiting tax increases. But we also live, eat and breathe the needs of our varied constituents: providing police protection; road maintenance and repair; transportation and services for seniors; recreational programs for children and teens; park improvements and maintenance; water and sewer management; economic development by issuing building permits; planning and licensing services.

Towns have mandated labor contract commitments too: for health insurance and retirement benefits which have increased substantially the last few years.

I regularly hear that Hyde Park's aging corridors "need to be redeveloped." We need sewer for our commercial districts and streetscape improvements to make them 21st-century ready with vibrant hubs surrounding walkable neighborhoods. This cannot be addressed in our budget — we don't pay staff planners or grant writers. Instead, I and my fellow elected officials write applications for and manage grants on our own.

On the revenue side, the town receives income from various sources: mortgage tax, licenses and permit fees, sales tax revenue and taxes. Because the Dutchess County Legislature changed its distribution of sales tax in 2013, the Town of Hyde Park received \$210,000 less in 2014 than in 2011. In our 2014 budget, every \$50,000 the town spent above revenue equated to an increase of 1 percent in taxes. If we had received this same \$210,000 in revenue in 2013, instead of having a 2 percent increase, we would have been able to hold the tax levy and provide funds for capital investments including roads and other infrastructure.

There's a world of tough choices for local taxpayers. During these difficult economic times, town boards need resident participation more than ever to guide us with difficult decisions. I encourage their participation – attend budget workshops and town board meetings, watch channel 22 or visit our website, [www.hydeparkny.us](http://www.hydeparkny.us) (<http://www.hydeparkny.us/>), to see our meetings on YouTube. Give productive feedback by letting elected officials know what services are your top priorities and what can acceptably be deferred.

Aileen Rohr, a Democrat, is the Town of Hyde Park supervisor. "Legislative Spotlight," written by federal, state, county and municipal leaders, provides insight on topical issues. To submit a column, call 845-437-4806 or email Erika Smith at [esmith2@poughkeepsiejournal.com](mailto:esmith2@poughkeepsiejournal.com).

Read or Share this story: <http://pojonews.co/1sl1znt>