

# Town of Johnsburg Newsletter

## Supervisor's Report

### Short Takes

#### Highway Meetings

A series of meetings between Johnsburg Highway Superintendent Dan Hitchcock, Town Bookkeeper Candace Lomax, Councilman Gene Arsenaunt and Supervisor Goodspeed have occurred recently. The group has tackled issues with both the 2009 and 2010 budget as well as long range planning for equipment purchases and a major repair project for the Town's largest loader which is essential for winter snow removal.

#### Zoning Comments

Dozens of residents have visited Town Hall, while others have submitted written comments regarding the APA proposal to change certain zoning classifications. It is not too late to comment as we will hold off until Mid November to advise the APA of citizen feelings about the proposed remappings

#### Can We Dig It?

A team of volunteers led by resident Bob Nessle is working to construct a trench between the upper portion of North Creek and the town swimming area with the goal of rendering water levels at the Town Beach more consistent.

#### Farmer's Market

The first season of the Farmer's market was a remarkable success. According to Barbara Thomas who chairs the committee, upwards of 250 people were in attendance on some Thursdays. Offerings at the market included produce, baked goods, free range meats, hand made chocolates, maple products and flowers.

#### The Next Cut

A connecting trail from the Summit of the Ski Bowl to the base of the Burnt Ridge Pod is being cut as of the publication of this issue by ORDA.

### Town Tax Down Slightly County Turmoil Continues

For the second year in a row Johnsburg Town taxes will decrease slightly but the Town's budget is back dropped by staggering financial challenges at the County level of government. While County Supervisors have cut \$4.2 million in their budget already, a nearly \$7 million shortfall remains. January's land tax is the sum total of the Town and County levy so a taxpayer's hit is defined by both the Town and County budgets.

#### Town Budget Summary

On the Town front, taxes under the tentative budget will be reduced by .01% while significant attention is focused on the highway budget as efforts continue to rebuild the highway fleet of vehicles. Highway Superintendent Dan Hitchcock has assisted in preparation of this portion of the budget with a goal of increasing dollars available for road maintenance and snow removal while planning for the purchase of another major piece of equipment. The highway portion of the town budget shows an increase of 8.36%.

The budget process has forced a difficult analysis of priorities as from day one nearly every revenue (sales tax, mortgage tax) was down significantly. To weather the storm, protect taxpayers and simultaneously acknowledge needed enhancement in portions of the budget, difficult choices were made. Put simply, the challenge has been to control taxes when revenues are down and a true need exists to rebuild and maintain our highway department.

The tentative budget anticipates elimination of curbside recycling pick up and with this the reduction of staff by one. The costs associated with garbage removal continue to grow and are not nearly covered by garbage sticker purchases, thus requiring a increase in sticker prices.

A major shift in employee insurance will save nearly \$60,000.00 as employees will participate in a high deductible plan where the deductible for each employee or family will be covered by a separate fund that permits the Town to gain the savings without forcing the employees to cover the deductible.

Professional services costs continue to be shifted away from the taxpayers to developers. A small revenue line has been established and will continue with respect to Tannery Pond Community Center. Other cost savings initiatives continue as well.

In many respects this budget has been an effort to say "no" to a good many requests from groups who have much to offer. It is not that the services or proposals are held in low regard, but rather the current budget situation requires a focus on essential services only.

*(Taxes, cont. on back page)*

Warren County Sales Tax 2008 vs 2009				
	2008	2009	\$ Difference	% Difference
Jan.	\$3,142,674.43	\$3,087,154.70	(\$55,519.73)	-1.8%
Feb	\$2,681,994.87	\$2,437,716.76	(\$244,278.11)	-9.1%
March	\$3,793,586.38	\$3,729,595.54	(\$63,990.84)	-1.7%
Apr	\$2,973,324.84	\$2,753,063.01	(\$220,261.83)	-7.4%
May	\$4,249,029.22	\$4,020,431.15	(\$228,598.07)	-5.4%
June	\$3,642,826.52	\$3,425,624.25	(\$217,202.27)	-6.0%
July	\$4,604,476.86	\$4,000,961.47	(\$603,515.39)	-13.1%
Aug.	\$4,531,504.57	\$4,076,749.54	(\$454,755.03)	-10.0%
Sept.	\$5,761,109.99	\$4,727,979.90	\$1,033,130.09	-17.9%
Total	\$35,380,527.68	\$32,259,276.32	\$3,121,251.36	-8.8%

\*Sales tax collections for a month are actually received in the following month, but are shown in this report under the month relating to the sales tax reporting period.

Taxes, cont.

### The County Crisis

As of this writing the County has eliminated nearly 40 positions and attacked funding for all non mandated services. While the County has saved in excess of \$4 million, a \$ 7 million gap remains.

While some have found it easy to blame board spending decisions, the reality is the situation is much more complex and will likely get worse before it gets better.

While spending decisions are a factor, the financial meltdown of New York State government is an important cause of the crisis. The State has, over the last year, perpetuated mandated programming while at the same time removing state funding for such programming, in some instances to the tune of millions of dollars. The State budgetary shortfall is likely between \$3 billion—\$4 billion and if the current trend continues, the State will try to bridge this gap by removing payments to the counties. The net effect is to move the cost of mandated services away from state income tax and on to property tax. The impact may be devastating.

As of this writing, the County struggle continues and it is not possible to project where it will end.

### Sidewalk Shuffle

Main Street businesses in North creek, led by the Alliance group are working with the Town to attempt to coordinate sidewalk and road maintenance during the upcoming winter season. The goal is to create a positive winter ski village environment and make sure sidewalks are safe for pedestrians, especially school children. The project must be handled in a manner that reaches its stated goals but also doesn't unfairly tax parts of town that will not benefit from the work. A further report will follow on this topic.

## DEC Changes "Burn" Municipalities

A modification to Department of Environmental Conservation regulations associated with the burning of brush is creating havoc in towns and villages across Upstate New York including Johnsbury.

Historically, Johnsbury, like other towns, has collected and burned brush and limbs at a central location, its landfill. The central burn occurs under controlled circumstances and with supervision.

Some weeks ago the Town's application to extend its burn permit for the local landfill was denied by DEC. DEC has promulgated new regulations that end municipal burning at landfills without providing other options to municipalities. During part of the year individuals may apply for their own private burn permits thus creating a scenario of increased, less controlled burning.

Town Hall has explored a number of options including chipping of materials at the landfill, but the experience of the Town has been highly unsuccessful in this regard. With limited space at the landfill, the Town has been forced to cease acceptance of brush and limbs at the landfill as have many of the other towns.

Department of Environmental Conservation's change of regulation has created inconvenience not just for individuals but for some businesses as well, who have relied on this service. One business owner advised that elimination of the landfill burn may force that businesses relocation to another area.

Town leaders across the State have protested Department of Environmental Conservation's regulatory stance to anyone who will listen but it appears a speedy withdrawal of the regulation change is highly

## Animal Control Issues

The Town Board and Town Attorney Tony Jordan have been attempting to respond to a number of complaints about cat problems in the Johnsbury area and are attempting to respond to concerns regarding feral cats and the damage they have done in certain parts of the community.

In attempting to respond to complaints, the Town has learned that there is a limitation placed on the Animal Control Officer with regards to handling of cat matters. The Town has asked Attorney Jordan to establish a local law to broaden the position to cover cats.

**Election Day is  
November 3**

**Don't Forget to Vote!**