

# Village of Pelham Newsletter

Edward Hotchkiss, Mayor  
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October 1, 2010

Dear Neighbor:

This year, we find ourselves in the most fiscally challenging environment in memory, mandating difficult decisions. However, I am proud to report that the Village is functioning well, thanks to the dedication and expertise of our Village employees, as well as the efforts of my fellow elected officials and the many volunteers who serve on our land-use boards and other committees.

While the Village has traditionally been careful in stretching your dollars to provide vital services in an excellent fashion, the Board of Trustees has emphasized three philosophical principles.

1. We are committed to addressing long-standing issues and not passing the responsibility to fix them to future generations. For example, we continue our focused effort to address perennial flooding, particularly in North Pelham, and to present the Village with well-researched options for the underutilized former B&W Railroad property in Pelhamwood.
2. We have been systematically incorporating appropriate business practices in the Village administration, including detailed plans for specific projects, codifying standard employee policies, increasing the frequency of financial reporting, and creating an annual strategic plan to establish priorities for addressing long-range projects and new initiatives. We continue to follow the Comprehensive Plan adopted two years ago, ensuring we maintain continuity in practices from year to year and strive to be more efficient by using technology, bidding competitively and improving administrative processes.
3. We are pursuing solutions to our long-term challenges, including the high tax burden on homeowners. We have reviewed all properties owned by the Village and determined that the land between 3<sup>rd</sup> Street and Lincoln Ave. and between 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Avenues could possibly serve the community better if it were sold for commercial development and added to the tax rolls. We will soon issue a Request for Proposal (RFP) with various options to develop mixed-use residential / retail buildings. If done appropriately, this would significantly expand the tax base, increase the shopping population for downtown, and improve the appearance of the Village, while not materially increasing the demands on Village services and the schools.

While striving to meet our obligations and plan for the future, we continue to be committed to listening to all members of the Village, balancing the needs of homeowners, commercial property owners and merchants and conducting Village business in an inclusive and transparent manner. This includes televising all Board of Trustee meetings, posting minutes of Trustee and land use boards online, and providing emergency communications, as we did during emergencies such as the blackout in Pelham Heights last March.

## **Budget**

The Village budget for Fiscal Year (FY) 2010 (June 1, 2010 to May 31, 2011) is as lean as possible, without resorting to employee layoffs. Despite a 31% increase in mandated pension contributions (from \$747,500 to \$976,809), total

Village spending increased by only 0.07%. The Village was able to accomplish this through many tough austerity decisions and a new sanitation contract, which will generate first-year savings of \$340,000.

Sources of Budgeted Revenue FY 2010		Change From Past Year
Residential Property Taxes	\$7,488,905	7.12%
Commercial Property Taxes	\$1,408,323	13.48%
Other Income	\$2,953,832	-9.63%
Appropriated General Fund Balance	0	-*
<b>Total Budget</b>	<b>\$11,851,060</b>	<b>0.07%</b>

\*\$341,000 was appropriated in the previous year.

Unfortunately, because other sources of projected revenues (particularly mortgage tax, sales tax, and interest income) are substantially below last year's budget, the Village was required to raise property taxes as indicated in the table above. The Village also decided not to appropriate any of the fund balance in order to be well prepared for emergencies and maintain the Village's AA+ credit rating, which is among the highest for any municipality.

For the first time, the Village has required that non-union employees contribute 10% of their medical premiums and will be asking for the similar contributions in upcoming Police, Fire, and Public Works contract negotiations, as well as other concessions.

Village taxes represent about 23% of the property taxes paid by Village of Pelham residents. The balance is comprised of school, town, and county taxes. Approximately 80% of the Village budget goes to salaries, pension and health benefits for Village personnel: 28 police employees, 16 paid fire fighters, 10 public works employees, 5.5 office staff, 1 building inspector, and 10 part-time crossing guards. Staffing has not increased for several years. By department, including employee benefits, the budget composition is roughly police 40%, fire 20%, public works and sanitation 20%, and all others 20%.

The table below sets out our budgeted sources of revenue for the General Fund for fiscal year June 1, 2010 to May 31, 2011.

Sources of Budgeted Revenue FY 2010		Share	Assessed Valuation
Residential	\$7,488,905	63%	\$1,250,459,004
Commercial	\$1,408,323	12%	\$170,948,563
Other Income	\$2,953,832	25%	
Appropriated Fund Balance	0	0%	
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$11,851,060</b>	<b>100%</b>	

The Village's other income (parking permits, parking meters, other taxes and fees) is significantly higher than in many comparable Villages and helps control property taxes.

The Village budget also includes a Water Fund (for village-owned services, mainly in Pelham Heights) and a Section 8 Housing Fund (managing approximately 140 vouchers for rent subsidies for low-income residents) with appropriations of \$658,070 and \$1,656,250, respectively. These funds are supported totally by fee income and do not require property tax funding.

Despite funding substantial upgrades to our equipment and infrastructure, our debt (netted by unrestricted general fund balance) is only \$898,000. We continue to use long-term borrowing carefully to take advantage of low interest rates and to spread costs over the life of expensive capital assets, such as the purchase of two fire trucks in the last five years and replacing 100-year-old sewer pipes. The Board recently authorized borrowing to construct 42 parking spaces and reconstruct the public works yard (both behind Village Hall). Approximately \$900,000 will be paid for by

federal and state grants and revenue from the new parking spaces will pay for a significant portion - perhaps all -- of the annual debt service.

## Grants

For the past few years, the Village has been especially successful in obtaining grants for various initiatives. The major grants awarded or pending are:

Provider / Administrator	Project	Amount
Federal Transit Administration Intermodal	Parking Lot/Public Works Department	\$929,120
Congressional Member Item	Flooding Remediation	\$562,500
New York State Dormitory Authority	Wolfs Lane Park	\$647,000
New York State Main Street	Picture House and Retail Facade Renovations	\$400,000
Environmental Protection Agency	Flooding Remediation	\$340,000
Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)	Flooding Remediation	\$125,000
NYS Dormitory Authority Community Capital Assistance Program	First Street Parking Lot	\$100,000
New York Legislative Member Item	Wolfs Lane Park	\$25,000
FEMA	Flooding and Storm Drain Remediation	\$50,000
New York Legislative Member Item	Police and Fire Equipment	\$50,000
FEMA	March 2010 storm damage	\$50,000
<b>Total</b>		<b>\$3,278,620</b>

In addition to the above, the Village has collected more than \$500,000 of grants in the last 6 months.

## Long-Range Planning

The Trustees have adopted a strategic plan to establish priorities for use in planning, budgeting and performance assessment. The strategic plan will be updated annually, at the start of the fiscal year. The activities and initiatives outlined in the annual strategic plan go beyond the daily responsibilities of the Village government to supply essential services; they support the long-range goal of the Board of Trustees to make Pelham more attractive and economically sustainable, including through infrastructure improvements, parks and appropriate development. The Strategic Plan is available on [www.pelhamgov.com](http://www.pelhamgov.com).

## Flooding

We have made notable progress on flooding remediation, which has been a perennial problem, especially on 4<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, and 7<sup>th</sup> Avenues. The Village has been awarded more than \$1 million in grants for remediation. We have engaged Leonard Jackson Associates, which has four decades of hydrological experience, to submit the needed documentations and plans to secure the grant monies so construction can commence. Securing the approved grant money is taking longer than we expected, but we are optimistic that we should have some funds this fiscal year and we can start to implement the next stages of our comprehensive flooding remediation plan. Meanwhile, we continue to work with the City of New Rochelle, employing a protocol to lower the level of Glenwood Lake in advance of major storms to reduce the danger of flooding.

## Commercial Development

Deputy Mayor Geoff Lewis has been drafting the RFP to solicit bids and ideas on the development of the 52,500 square feet of village-owned property between 3<sup>rd</sup> Street and Lincoln & 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Avenues. Consistent with Village Comprehensive Plan, a successful project would be mix used residential / retail development with substantial financial benefits to the Village without unduly imposing on Village and school services. Trustee Greg Breskin has been working with the Fire Department and a consulting architect on requirements for a replacement Firehouse, a possible

option for developers that want to include the current Firehouse sited in their development plans. If a project is approved, the Village would significantly expand its tax base and realize a significant one-time gain from the property sale, which would be applied to restoring general fund reserves, improving aging infrastructure, and reducing debt.

The buildings destroyed by the cliff collapse on 5th Avenue in December 2005 should be completely rebuilt and ready to lease this calendar year. This will substantially improve the appearance and vitality of the downtown.

The Pelham Picture House will soon begin renovations of its main theater and its plans for a second, smaller theater are being reviewed by Village land use boards. With its improved programming and special events, the Picture House has proven to be a successful draw for our downtown.

Dunkin Donuts has filed a site plan application to occupy part of the building on Lincoln and 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue that suffered extensive damage in a fire last year. The Pelham Post Office has open in its new location on 1<sup>st</sup> Street with increased parking an architecturally compatible building design based on consultation with the Architectural Review Board.

### **Green/Open Space Initiatives**

The Tree Committee, under the direction of Trustee Ed Bullock, has been working with high school students to inventory every tree owned by the Village and is studying strategies for the Village and residents to replace aging or fallen trees.

The Village is thrilled to receive a \$647,000 capital improvement grant for Wolfs Lane Park from State Senator Jeff Klein. The money will be used to execute the part of the Wolfs Lane Park comprehensive plan, starting in the area between Wolf's Lane and Second Street, near the train station. The Village is working with the Town of Pelham to renovate the area by the steps to 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue on 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue next to the HSBC Bank and has dedicated the area known as Brick Park to the memory of Joseph Trotta, a former Village Mayor and Town Supervisor, and is working with the Town and County on renovation plans.

The Village has formed a task force to study possible uses for the former B&W railroad property between Harmon and Lincoln Avenues in Pelhamwood. Trustee Joe Marty is chairing this committee, which is expected to present a study of workable options and the associated costs. The Village has approved RFPs for experts to assess the safety of the Highbrook Bridge, safety, soil contamination, flooding, and other issues relating to the site.

For the second year, the Pelham Farmers Market is open on Sunday mornings and afternoon on Michael Schwerner Place and Fifth Avenue. Trustee Laura Morris is the liaison to the market. This is a great place to buy fresh produce, baked goods and other foods.

Trustee Theresa Mohan is reviewing additional green initiatives in nearby communities, particularly ways to incorporate bike trails and designated walking paths into the community.

### **Media and Communications**

The Village's continues to redesign its website to increase functionality and provide more information. The Village also continues to expand our emergency e-mail notification lists, which we use to provide alerts when a major storm is predicted. We urge you to sign up for regular updates and notices about parking, garbage collection and other Village services. If you are interested in receiving alerts, notices, or newsletters online, send an e-mail to [info@pelhamgov.com](mailto:info@pelhamgov.com) and we will add you to the e-mail list. To promote Pelham businesses during the end-of-year holiday season, Deputy Mayor Lewis interviewed local merchants and we ran the interviews repeatedly on our Cable TV public access channel and posted the video on YouTube. We encourage everyone to shop Pelham and support the local businesses in Pelham.

### **Cable TV**

Verizon and the Village have signed a franchise contract to bring FIOS service to the Village. Under this contract, negotiated by Trustee Mohan, Verizon has agreed to provide \$18,000 to the Village to purchase new public-access broadcasting equipment. The Public Utility Commission approved the agreement in September.

### **Public Parking**

We will soon begin construction of 42 parking spaces in the area behind Village Hall. This project, which will also involve relocating and rebuilding the Public Works garage, is funded by a federal grant to promote mass transportation by increasing commuter parking. During non-commuting times, these spaces will be available to all, including patrons of the expanded Picture House and nearby restaurants and stores.

Using grant funding, we will also begin improvements to the public parking lot on First Street behind the old post office, which will add 15 spots for commuter and shopper parking.

### **Inter-Government Relations**

The Village considers it a top priority to have open and frequent communications with the other Pelham governments (Manor, Town, and School District), as well as neighboring communities. We routinely share information and expertise with Pelham Manor, as we both have similar departments and issues. The Village continues to seek ways of sharing services with other municipal entities to reduce cost and improve performance.

### **Employee Relations**

The Village is grateful for the high quality work and dedication of our employees, whether carrying out routine duties or responding to emergencies. In order to ensure fair and equitable treatment of employees, we are working on the Village's first Human Resources Manual to codify common policies and practices for all employees, particularly those not covered by collective bargaining. We also plan to create a Benefits Statements for employees, listing benefits and total compensation.

### **Building Department and Code Enforcement**

Building Inspector Leonard Russo's responsibilities include consulting with owners of residential and commercial properties about construction plans, issuing building permits, coordinating with the land use boards during the site plan approval process, and inspecting properties for code compliance.

The Village has organized a committee, headed by Deputy Mayor Lewis and including representatives of land use boards and citizen volunteers, to clarify and update the commercial zoning code and eliminate anomalies left over from the merger of the Villages of Pelham and North Pelham more than 30 years ago. The proposed changes also reflect the priorities in the Village Comprehensive Plan.

Separately, the Village is incorporating changes in the New York State Uniform Code relating to building inspections and a committee of trustees and land use board members and chaired by Trustee Marty is working on a more streamlined, transparent site plan process, including review by the Architectural Review Board.

### **Fire Department**

The joint career / volunteer department responded to more than 900 calls and alarms in FY 2009-10, including a fire of two garages between 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Avenues and the collapse of the roof at Colonial Elementary School. Chief Larry Cohen, who came to Pelham with 15 years experience with the NYFD, recently resigned for personal reasons. Lieutenant James DiNapoli will be acting chief until a replacement is found.

### **Police Department**

Under Chief Joseph Benefico, the police department responded to more than 4,900 calls for services in FY 2009. Crime statistics for 2009 show a 7% drop in overall crime, including aggravated assault, burglary, larceny and motor vehicle theft. Police officers attended many training classes, seminars and programs, including courses in traffic safety, workplace violence, drug enforcement, counter-terrorism, first aid, firearms and tasers, underage drinking and bicycle safety.

### **Department of Public Works**

The Public Works Department, led by foreman Michael Shriman, maintains the streets, public parking lots and decks, Village green spaces, leaf removal, storm and sanitary sewer systems, the water system in Pelham Heights, street lights, traffic signs, and other essential infrastructure in the Village. DPW is especially efficient in snow removal, perhaps the best in Westchester County.

### **Village Staff and Volunteers**

I would like to acknowledge the following retirees and appointees for their outstanding service to our community:

- Peter Bonnington has been hired as Assistant to the Administrator. He is a recent graduate of Quinnipiac University.
- Crossing Guard, Sally Hintzen retired after 8 years of service.
- Police Officer John "Chuck" Zoccolillo, retired after 22 of service.
- Sergeant Daryl Jackson has retired after 22 years
- Ron Czajka has been appointed chairman of the Architectural Review Board and Ray Beeler was appointed as a new member of the ARB. Nigel Scott-Williams stepped down after 15 years of ARB service, including as chairman.
- Cathy Draper was appointed to Zoning Board of Appeals, replacing Alan Carden.
- Suzan Marciona was appointed as a member of the Planning Board.

With warm regards, and best wishes for all Pelham residents,

Ed Hotchkiss  
Mayor, Village of Pelham