

# Village of Pelham Newsletter

Edward Hotchkiss, Mayor  
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## State of the Village Report

April 20, 2009

Dear Neighbor:

I am happy to present our annual State of the Village report, to highlight the accomplishments of your Village government and recognize the outstanding the efforts of our Village employees, who work tirelessly to provide high quality services to the residents. I would also like to thank my fellow elected officials for their service and acknowledge the unstinting work of the many volunteers who serve on our land-use boards and other committees.

This year, we find ourselves in a challenging environment. Our board has always shared your concerns about taxes in the Pelhams and has always strived to maintain excellent services at the lowest possible cost. Now we face the most difficult economic downturn in more than a generation and we know that many of our families are affected. We responded with new spending controls last summer and we have worked hard this spring to bring in a tight budget. We have approved a budget with just 1.46% increase in total spending and a 3.38% increase in property tax levies, below last year's 3.68%.

While we will continue to find creative ways to stretch your tax dollars in this crisis—including pursuing grants and other funding options—we feel it is important not to lose sight of our responsibility to the future of the Village. We can't defer all capital spending and infrastructure improvement projects. Nor should we postpone the development efforts that will make our downtown more successful and attractive—and eventually bring tax relief to homeowners by broadening the tax base. Our hope is to build on the accomplishments of recent years, including the update of the Comprehensive Plan, to provide a series of objectives and projects that will produce a more attractive, financially stable and thriving Village for the next generation.

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### **Budget**

Village taxes represent about 22% of the property taxes paid by Village of Pelham residents. The rest are 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.

The table below sets out our budgeted sources of revenue for fiscal year June 1, 2008 to May 31, 2009.

Sources of Revenue		Share	Assessed Valuation
Residential	\$ 6,795,206	58%	\$1,239,420,842
Commercial	\$ 1,167,797	10%	\$ 153,737,634
Other Income	\$ 3,352,649	29%	
Appropriated Fund Balance	\$356,000	3%	
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$11,671,652</b>	<b>100%</b>	

The Village's other income (parking permits, parking meters, other taxes and fees) is significantly higher than many comparable Villages and keeps the property taxes at a lower level. During 2008-09, we felt the impact of the recession as revenue from sales tax, mortgage taxes, and interest payments were off \$245,000 from budget.

We are now finalizing our fiscal year 2009-2010 budget, proposed as:

Sources of Revenue		Change From Past Year
Property Taxes	\$ 6,795,206	3.38%
Other Income	\$ 3,268,619	-2.51%
Appropriated Fund Balance	\$341,000	-4.21%
<b>Total Budget</b>	<b>\$11,671,652</b>	<b>1.46%</b>

Despite funding substantial upgrades to our equipment and infrastructure, our debt (netted by unrestricted fund balance) is only \$507,000. We continue to carefully use long-term borrowing 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 four years and replacing 100-year-old sewer pipes. Our unrestricted fund balance, our financial cushion, remains a prudent 7.5% of the annual budget. Moody's rates our debt AA+, among the highest for any municipality.

We recently finished an actuarial study, which found that the Village has a liability of \$20,230,000 for post-retirement health insurance benefits. This obligation will increase each year under current arrangements. We also are aware of significantly higher pension contributions in fiscal year 2010-2011 if the stock market doesn't recover. As a result of these looming liabilities, we are forming a citizen's committee chaired by incoming Trustee Ed Bullock to review our current and post-retirement employee benefits and to determine ways to reduce our outlays.

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## **Grants**

We have been particularly successful in obtaining grants for various initiatives. The major grants awarded or pending are:

- Congresswoman Nita Lowey has appropriated \$562,500 in funds for flooding remediation in the Village of Pelham. These funds combined with a \$187,000 Village match brings the total amount of awarded funds to 1.5 million dollars.
- Environmental Protection Agency grant of \$340,000 and a FEMA Hazard Mitigation grant of \$125,000, obtained with the assistance of Congresswoman Nita Lowey, to upgrade storm drains and sewers.
- New York State grant of \$100,000 for construction of a new parking lot on First Street, obtained with the assistance of State Senator Jeff Klein.
- FEMA Assistance for an emergency backup generator for the Firehouse, in the amount of \$38,000.
- NYSDOT Intermodal Sidewalk Replacement grant of \$22,000 for Hutchinson Elementary School.
- Member item grant from Assemblywoman Amy Paulin for \$10,000 for lockers for the police department, and ropes to upgrade escape harnesses for firefighters.
- N.Y. Consolidated Highway Improvement Program (CHIP) grant for \$93,939 for repairs and improvements to our streets. The Village has been receiving this funding, with regular increases, on an annual basis.

The Village has applied for several grants under various federal stimulus programs, as it has many shovel ready projects as a result of its planning initiatives.

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## **Long-Range Planning**

The Village adopted our new Comprehensive Plan, which won the Upstate American Planning Association award for best plan. We have formed a citizens committee, chaired by Trustee Geoff Lewis, to rationalize the commercial zoning code and make sure it supports the goals of the plan. The board continues to work with Hank White Architects to finalize plans for upgrading Wolf's Lane Park. Trustee Greg Breskin is chairing a citizen's committee to review options for the former Boston & Westchester Railroad land in Pelhamwood, which the Village owns.

## **Flooding**

I am delighted to report that progress on flooding remediation, which has been a perennial problem that we have made a top priority. Working with the City of New Rochelle and the Glenwood Lake Homeowners Association, we have established a new protocol to lower the lake if a large storm is forecast, relieving a major factor in flooding; during Hurricane Hanna in September, this probably prevented flooding on Fourth and Seventh Avenues.

The Village retained the services of Leonard Jackson Associates, a consulting firm that has worked extensively with the Army Corps of Engineers, to perform a hydrological study of the North Pelham drainage system. This will guide our use of the \$525,000 of grants we have been awarded to remediate flooding.

### **Cliff Remediation on Fifth Avenue**

More than three years after the cliff collapse on Fifth Ave., we are finally approaching full restoration. The slide destroyed three storefronts and damaged several other buildings. By September, 2006, most stores reopened in the Lordae Realty buildings after the landlord stabilized the cliff behind its property. Now that Pelham Medical Group has stabilized the cliff behind its building and is completing the retaining wall, Lordae Realty is able to begin reconstructing the building that was demolished.

### **Pelham Post Office**

After effort by the board to find viable sites for a new post office on Fifth Ave., the U.S. Postal Service decided to proceed with a new building on the property it owns on First Street. The USPS worked with our Architectural Review and Planning Boards to amend its original design, which is far more appropriate for our community. We welcome the opening of a modern facility with increased parking.

### **Cleanup, Parks and Plantings**

Trustee Laura Morris helped to organize a town-wide spring cleanup that involved both Villages, volunteer employees and citizen groups. The Department of Public Works sweeps downtown and picks up litter three times a week and empties downtown garbage cans six days a week.

Using grants, we are adding more trash and recycling receptacles. In 2008, we planted 40 trees on streetscapes around the Village to replace dead and damaged trees. Contact the Village if you are interested in getting on our tree list for 2009. The Village is forming a citizens committee to study best practices and recommend guidelines for residential and Village trees.

### **Safe Routes to School**

Deputy Mayor Mia Homan and Trustee Pete Potocki have worked with the Board of Education, school administrators, parents and the PTAs of all of the schools in Pelham -- Colonial, Hutchinson, the High School and Middle School -- have created drop-off zones and designated visitor parking areas.

### **Media and Communications**

The Village's Website has been redesigned to make it more efficient and easy to use. The Village also continues to expand our e-mail notification lists. 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, I conducted video interviews with a number of merchants and we ran the interviews repeatedly on our Cable TV public access channel and posted it to YouTube, where it is still available. We encourage everyone to shop Pelham and support the local businesses in Pelham.

### **Cable TV**

Verizon discontinued negotiations for a second cable franchise (FIOS) last fall, but we have restarted the discussions and hope to soon have an agreement.

### **Transportation and Parking**

Using grant funding, we will redesign the entrance to the public parking lot on First Street behind the old Post Office and add 15 spots for commuter and shopper parking.

### **Fire Department**

The Village hired a new Fire Chief, Curtis Taylor, a retired captain with the City of New Rochelle who has a strong background in fire prevention and training. The department responded to more than 1,000 fire and emergency calls in 2008. This year the Village purchased a new pumper, a 2004 demo model, paid for mostly from grant money.

### **Police Department**

With the management of Chief Joseph Benefico, the police department has sent four officers to tactical team training, which qualifies them to respond to high risk situations (hostage tacking, terrorism. The Village put into service an armored van that was equipped for this tactical response team. In one of several cooperative efforts with Pelham Manor Tom Lavin, the two Villages jointly trained to respond to an "active shooters" incidents at the middle school and high school. In a show of support that is typical of Pelham, The Police Department raised \$8,000 from citizens to buy equipment to outfit the new Emergency and Tactical Preparedness Team.

### **Department of Public Works**

Longtime employee Michael Shriman became the general foreman of our Department of Public Works. The Village bought a new front-end loader for leaf and snow cleanup, to replace our 20-year old front-end loader. With this new equipment, and redeployment of our other forces and equipment, we were able to complete our curbside leaf collection on time.

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## **Village Staff and Volunteers**

I would like to acknowledge the following employees and volunteers for their outstanding service to our community:

- Richard Slingerland, our Village administrator for seven years, has become Village manager of Mamaroneck. We thank him for his service and the institution of new procedures that make the workings of the Village more efficient and transparent.
- We welcome Robert Yamuder, our new administrator, who brings a wealth of engineering experience that will be quite useful for our Village.
- Devron Wilson, Assistant to the Administrator, has taken a position in the City of Bridgeport, Conn., where he now resides.
- William McDevitt, a former chairman and longtime member of the Zoning Board of Appeals, passed away after a long battle with cancer. Our sympathies and condolences go out to the McDevitt family, with our thanks for his many years of service to the Village.
- Police Chief Joseph Benefico was elected President of the Westchester County Association of Police Chiefs.
- Police Sergeant Michael Glover retired after 21 years of service.
- Our new Village attorney is Mercedes Maldonado.
- Ed Petti resigned after five years on the Planning Board. Joseph Marty was appointed as his replacement.
- Brian Chabrunn finished his term on the Architectural Review Board. David Grigg was appointed as his replacement.
- Ed Smith was appointed Chairman of the Zoning Board of Appeals. Gary Hyer and Alan Carden were appointed to fill vacancies on this Board.

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

Ed Hotchkiss, Mayor

Mia Homan, Deputy Mayor

Greg Breskin, Trustee

Ed Bullock, Trustee

Geoff Lewis, Trustee

Laura Morris, Trustee

Peter Potocki, Trustee

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## **Village of Pelham announces its completely redesigned and updated village website**

The redesigned and updated village website [www.pelhamgov.com](http://www.pelhamgov.com) is aimed at improving site navigation and making it easier for residents to find resources and communicate with the village government.

News and updated features include a scrolling News and News Archives section and a Quick Links section, which provides shortcuts to the most commonly used resources. The new site will also feature more village news and advisories to inform the public about village initiatives and procedures.

We invite everybody to visit the site and to use its many self-service features, which can be used to request service, report problems such as potholes, and download forms," said Mayor Ed Hotchkiss. To report a missed garbage pickup, litter or street repair, follow the "Contact Us" link on the left side of the home page.

Mayor Hotchkiss also reminds residents to register for email alerts and newsletters by using the "sign up" link under Quick Links on the homepage. The Village uses the email alert system to warn residents when heavy rains, storms or other emergency conditions are expected. Residents can also sign up for all village notices and periodic email newsletters. Residents have to sign-up for these features, and email addresses are not shared and will not be used for any other purpose.

The site redesign was conducted over the summer by intern Danielle Cardinal (a senior at Pelham Memorial High School) with guidance from Mayor Hotchkiss, Trustee Geoff Lewis and Assistant Village Administrator Devron Wilson.

Please use the "contact us" section of the site to offer feedback or suggestions.

## **Village of Pelham Overview**

The Village of Pelham in Westchester County, New York is a tightly knit community with small-town values located in one square mile nestled up against the greatest city in the world. The Village of Pelham was originally incorporated in 1896, and then re-incorporated in 1975 to combine the two municipalities of Pelham Village and North Pelham into one Village of Pelham. The Village is a composition of the neighborhoods of Chester Park, Pelham Heights, Pelville, and Pelhamwood. Our downtown business district hosts an eclectic mix of small business storefronts, restaurants, art center, historic movie theatre and the Wolfs Lane Park.

Pelham's historic and recently renovated train station is located in the center of the village, within easy walking distance to most homes. It provides a short 29-minute commute to midtown Manhattan via Metro North's New Haven line trains.

The Village has two neighborhood elementary schools (Colonial and Hutchinson) within walking distance for students. The Pelham Middle School (grades 6-8) and High School grades (9-12) are also located in the Village of Pelham.