



GOVERNMENT

Jenkins to Astorino: The FY 2011 County Budget Process is Over

Westchester County Board of Legislators (WCBol) Chairman Ken Jenkins (D-Yonkers) last week released a statement condemning Westchester County Executive Robert Astorino for his useless veto of the county's tax levy. The FY 2011 tax levy – which will deliver a 2.25% tax cut to all Westchester residents – was approved by a vote of 10-1 on December 27. The final approved budget was adopted on December 23, when the Legislature overrode 249 of Mr. Astorino's 260 vetoes.



Ken Jenkins (D-Yonkers)

year, including state, county and special district taxes, shall be levied not later than December 28th. The County Board shall levy, assess and cause to be raised by tax upon real property liable therefore the amount of taxes determined by such budgets and in the manner provided for the levy of state and county taxes.'

The Budget Act is not a normal Act. The Budget Act is very specific in the actions that can be taken. Mr. Astorino exercised his Charter authority to veto

line items within 5 days of receiving the approved budget from the County Board.

The budget was not finally adopted until December 23, 2010 until his 260 line item vetoes were considered by the County Board. The required Tax Levy Appropriation Act is ministerial, a result of the final adopted budget, beginning with the recommended

budget, additions by the Budget and Appropriations Committee, deletions to the recommended budget and sustained vetoes. In fact, the Budget Director develops the Tax Levy Appropriation Act and the Legislature is required to adopt such appropriations Act by December 28. This is the Charter role and sole responsibility of the Legislature.

There is nothing for Mr. Astorino to approve.

With regards to Mr. Astorino's outrageous assertions in relation to the Budget process, every detail of the budget process as outlined in the County Charter was followed. The Minority caucus chose not to make any additions to the budget. The Budget and Appropriations Committee spent 3 weeks hearing presentations from the Commissioners and Department heads. Over 2,000 people participated in the public hearing process and the County Board web-streamed the committee meetings live and have all the sessions available on-demand. The Budget and Appropriations Committee worked throughout the year,

having regular meetings with the various County departments in fulfilling the role of the County Board in providing oversight of the County budget. This budget is balanced, accessible and transparent.

Frankly, it is my expectation that in the ensuing year, Mr. Astorino's administration will be more participatory in the open and transparent committee structure of the Legislature where his proposed initiatives will be vetted in public where good public discourse could take place.

Finally, I think it is completely counterproductive that Mr. Astorino and his staff to continue to use inflammatory and malicious language in various policy debates. The people of Westchester expect their elected officials to be leaders and to act responsibly and respectfully while we develop creative solutions to Westchester's challenges.

Reasonable people can disagree without being disagreeable and offensive."

SOURCE: Office of WCBol Chairman Ken Jenkins

MAYOR MARVIN COLUMN

GOVERNMENT

Reflection By Mary C. Marvin



The year 2010 at Village Hall mirrored what occurred in most Village households. We simply tried to make do with less and solve some of our needs/issues in more creative ways.

It was the second year in a row without a tax increase so discretionary funds for projects were non-existent. Nonetheless, thanks to an amazingly dedicated corps of employees, many of our goals, however modest, were achieved.

Our periodic property revaluation program was completed on time providing us with truly the most equitable tax roll in the county; funding was obtained for at least partial restoration of both Sagamore Park and Maltby Field and we deservedly won many "Green" awards for our recycling efforts and general stewardship of Village

resources. Three new police officers joined our force, some very successful stores were attracted to the business district and we initiated an emergency alert system to make residents aware of issues in the village such as power outages or unexpected closings. Staff began a GIS initiative to locate all of our village assets going forward including street trees, water lines, and sewers and we are still in the running for flood grants filed at the federal and county levels. We shopped every possible service within our control including utilities, legal services and health care providers and achieved savings in the hundreds of thousands of dollars. Much needed parking was added at the site of the former BAMS service station and we cobbled together enough funds to have a traffic signal soon to be installed at the intersection of Cedar Street and Kraft Avenue adjacent to St. Joseph's Church – and we even had a movie filmed in the Village entitled, "The Oranges", which

produced some unanticipated revenues.

On the down side, we fought hard, in unison with nine other municipalities, to challenge the water company's usurious 30% increase in water rates and lost. Some stores still remain empty on Pondfield Road and despite our persistent efforts, Metro North continues to respond to our concerns in a way only a monopoly can.

Looking forward to 2011, all of our local initiatives will be dwarfed by our obligations from the State. Far and away, the most challenging issue for the coming year is the prospect of continued unforeseen and unfunded mandates generated by the State of New York. Chief among these is the unsustainable rise in employee pension costs. As an illustration, even if we don't buy one extra pencil in the upcoming budget, Village taxes will need to increase at a minimum of 4% just to cover additional pension obligations charged to the Village. And we are not alone. At a recent pension seminar I attended, colleagues from upstate New York are now budgeting more for pension costs than for municipal services. To put in perspective, in 2000,

taxpayer funded employer contributions to New York State's pension fund totaled just under \$1 billion. In 2010, they rose to \$17.3 billion and our village obligation to the fund is slated to more than double over the next five years.

At this point it matters little as to one's view of the defined benefit pension plan as provided in New York State, the numbers reveal the current system has been mismanaged and is now unsustainable. (In my view, consolidation – the buzz word for 2011, accomplishes nothing but to distance citizens from their government and simply combine unsustainable mandates at town and city levels).

Despite tremendous outside financial pressures, I can honestly say that the Village is spending your tax dollars prudently, and will strive to continue to offer the services that make the Village unique.

In closing, I thank you for allowing me to serve as your Mayor. I consider it an honor and a privilege every day I come to Village Hall.

Mary C. Marvin is the Mayor of the Village of Bronxville.