

**PUBLIC HEARING HELD BY THE VILLAGE BOARD
OF TRUSTEES APRIL 1, 2013 AT THE VILLAGE HALL
TO CONSIDER THE TENTATIVE BUDGET OF
THE VILLAGE OF MARCELLUS FOR THE COMING
FISCAL YEAR 2013-2014**

PRESENT: John P. Curtin, Mayor See List
Patrick W. Cox, Trustee
Sara N. Tallman, Trustee
Antonino J. Provvidenti, Treasurer
Robert Wicks, Police Chief

ABSENT: None

Trustee Cox made a motion to open the public hearing, seconded by Trustee Tallman. Mayor Curtin called for a vote. All board members voted aye, and the public hearing was opened. The meeting was called to order at 7:15 p.m.

The Village Clerk read the affidavit of publication.

Mayor Curtin began the public hearing by explaining that the purpose of the meeting was to consider the tentative budget for the fiscal year, June 1, 2013 – May 31, 2014. Mayor Curtin and Village Treasurer Nino Provvidenti made the following comments on the tentative budget.

Comments by Village Treasurer on Tentative Budget:

Treasurer Provvidenti explained that the tentative budget has three components: the General Fund, the Water Fund, and the Sewer Fund.

General Fund:

Treasurer Provvidenti informed the public that for the last several years, village residents had enjoyed the benefit of a reduction in their Onondaga County taxes and that the tax reduction had been accomplished through a continuous reduction in sales tax revenue distributed to the Village of Marcellus. Several years ago, the village was receiving \$300,000 a year in payments of sales tax revenue from Onondaga County and that now it receives nothing.

Onondaga County further informed the Village that the total taxable value of properties in the village had dropped by well over \$600,000 since the prior year. The end result is an immediate decrease in village tax revenue for the upcoming fiscal year.

The Treasurer mentioned that the effects of the loss in revenues on the proposed General Fund budget are also “immediate”: the Village will only be able to offer its employees a minimal cost of living increase equal to a 1% salary increase for all full and part time employees, except for the Board of Trustees.

Numerous spending freezes and cuts to the operating expenditures for the highway and police departments, as well as administration, are necessary. He also mentioned that the Village is now at the point where any further reductions in the budget for operating expenditures will jeopardize the Village’s ability to continue to provide essential services to its residents.

Additionally, the Village is also at the point where it will be necessary to use a portion of its unappropriated General Fund balance to pay for the operating expenditures.

Treasurer Provvidenti explained to those who felt that the Village should automatically dip into its General Fund balance to make up for all lost revenues, that the Village had been given a benchmark to follow from Albany, whereby the Village should be maintain a fund balance equal to at least three months of expenditures. The projected fund balance at the end of the current upcoming budget year would barely cover **one** month’s worth of expenditures.

Treasurer Provvidenti informed the public that an increase in the village tax rate is proposed: from \$6.25 per \$1,000 of assessed valuation to \$6.50 per \$1,000 of assessed valuation. Instead of a \$625 tax bill on a \$100,000 home, the assessment will now be \$650, which represents no net increase to the village taxpayer when the reduction in Onondaga county taxes is considered.

Water Fund:

Treasurer Provvidenti explained that in 2007, the Village entered into a long-term Intermunicipal Agreement with the Town of Marcellus in which the Village shares in the cost of maintaining the Limeledge Water District, in the form of a fixed annual payment to

the Town. The Village is also required by OCWA to pay for the maintenance of the fire hydrants in the village, again on an annual basis.

In the absence of revenues from water usage charges since the time that OCWA took over water service to village residents, the expenditures have been made from the Water Fund's remaining unappropriated fund balance.

The Village is currently at the point where the unappropriated fund balance is insufficient to cover the annual cost of the expenditures. Treasurer Provvidenti pointed out that the revenues section of the proposed Water Fund budget incorporates an inter-fund transfer from the Village's General Fund in an amount equal to the amount of expenditures which will be required for the upcoming fiscal year.

Sewer Fund:

Treasurer Provvidenti explained that although the construction phase of the Village's Composting Facility was now completed, the costs of the Village's wastewater treatment process are ongoing.

Similar to the General Fund, the Village is at the point with the Sewer Fund where it will be necessary for the Village to use a portion of its unappropriated fund balance in order to keep the Wastewater Treatment Plant operational.

And once again, if the Village follows the benchmark from Albany, and look at the projected Sewer Fund balance at the end of this upcoming budget year, it would not even cover one month's work of expenditures.

Comments by Mayor on Tentative Budget

Mayor Curtin gave remarks on the following:

Loss of sales tax revenue – continues to affect the Village budget. The Village has received infrastructure monies from the County, which has helped to offset the revenue loss, but it by no means has made up for what the Village once received.

Reduction in Assessment – the County Finance Department provides the amount of total assessment for all Villages and this year, the assessment went down by over \$600,000, meaning a reduction in tax levy of almost \$7,000. Most of the decrease in assessed valuation is due to an increase in tax exemptions

An increase in the tax rate is proposed – from \$6.25/1000 of assessed valuation to \$6.50/1000 of assessed valuation. Instead of a \$625 tax bill on a \$100,000 home, the assessment will now be \$650, which represents no increase when County and Town taxes are considered in the total mix.

Property tax revenue will increase – from \$533,000 to \$550,300, which represents approximately 52% of the total revenue received by the Village. Other sources of revenue can be noted by referring to the pie chart.

A 1% increase in salaries – for all employees, full and part-time, is included in this budget. Village employees received a 2% raise last year, but because of our budgetary concerns, a raise of 1% is proposed. This is not much, but reflects on-going financial concerns that the Village faces. The benefits package remains the same – the Village employee pays 10%, while the Village provides 90% of health coverage. Mayor Curtin noted that it is better when compared with similar arrangements in the private sector

Employee Benefits – some of these costs, including retirement, health insurance, unemployment insurance, and workers compensation continue to remain beyond Village control.

Debt Service – continues to be a very large item in the budget and it cannot be overemphasized. Mayor Curtin went on to say that the debt service is always the "gorilla in the room" and one that would not go away even if there was complete dissolution of the Village - Residents would still pay the debt.

State Regulations and Unfunded State Mandates – continue to compound budget problems for the Village, items over which there is, again, no control by the Village. Last year, Coon's Pond was an example, and an even more recent example is the requirement from NYSDEC which has ordered the removal of phosphorus down to a 1.0 mg/L level so as to stop the pollution of Onondaga Lake. Mayor Curtin explained that this is of major concern to the Village and the plant operators because of the high cost to implement this unfunded mandate. The WWTP is the only one, other than METRO that comes under the directive and the Village must meet a 2016 State mandate – the cost has been estimated at over \$2,000,000. The Village secured an engineering grant of \$30,000 to plan for the eventuality, but the Board is very concerned as to how to pay for the implementation of the mandate.

Department Cuts – there have been cost savings in each department, but the Board is hopeful that the cuts will not affect service too severely. Mayor Curtin expressed that the Board hopes to set aside monies to make road repairs to Kelly Ave, Park Street, Chrisler Street and Hillside Drive, as well as some sidewalk repair that was put off from last year.

Eliminate Police Department – some continue to argue that if there is a need to cut services, the Marcellus Police Department should be eliminated. The Board is unanimous in its decision that the Village needs a police force and addressed the issue once again. The absence of major crime in our Village has given rise to some complacency as well as questioning the need for a police force. The absence of major crime is not just a piece of good fortune. The Village does not have major crime because the mere presence of a police force acts a major deterrent to crime and causes the criminal element to move on to other communities – ones that would provide less scrutiny and not hinder illegal activity as much. The criminal element prefers to be as inconspicuous as possible. Some claim that our police department could be easily absorbed into a larger police entity (e.g. the County Sheriff's Department) without losing the level of protection that the community currently enjoys. While the Sheriff's Department provides much assistance to the village, including use of its many resources, it is doubtful that the Department could answer 300-400 extra calls a month adequately, since it would not be able to dedicate a car to the Village on a regular basis. The Sheriff's Department, like all policies agencies, is stretched to the limit with its own budgetary concerns. The village would be safe, but quality of life issues (a hard-to-define concept made more conspicuous by its absence), ones that are important to village residents, would be seriously compromised. Some point to the 2009 merger of the Clay Police Department into the County Sheriff's Department as an example of police consolidation – a merger that promised to save millions of dollars. However the taxpayers in the Town of Clay are still waiting for the savings to begin. In addition, the Town of Clay is not an urban center like a village. It is a community made up of neighborhoods that are bisected by a number of highways. Therefore, merging a highway patrol, such as the Clay PD, into the Sheriff's Department was not as difficult as it would have been, had the community been an urban, settled community where people live much closer together, where businesses are more concentrated and issues are more challenging than highway street patrol. Each village is different and each should address the issue of police protection in light of its own particular circumstances. At present, the Marcellus Board of Trustees is committed to maintaining a police presence in the Village of Marcellus – a force that has become increasingly professional in recent years and a model for others in the county.

Clerk and Treasurer – the salaries and benefits of the Village Clerk and Village Treasurer are divided between two funds – the General Fund and the Sewer Fund – since the duties and work activity of both employees is often equally divided between the two funds.

The Village Attorney – is no longer considered an employee of the Village, but a contractor, hired by the Village, and those costs have been reduced somewhat in the proposed budget.

Code, Fire, Zoning Inspections – there has been a slight decrease in the cost of code, fire and zoning inspections because these officers are now under individual contracts with the Village. Code Officer, Bill Reagan, has been instrumental organizing the files in the Village Office and also with the development of a new Code, which went into effect in January 2013. Bill and Fire Inspector Kurt Field will continue to be effective as the new Rental Registration and Inspection law becomes more fully operational in the next few months.

Culture and Recreation – parts of the budget include some monies, in the form of contract agreements, for the Health-Loan Closet and the Marcellus Historical Society, since these organizations provide a service to the Village and its residents.

The Water Fund – is no longer being eliminated, and monies have been allocated from the General Fund to supplement the Water Fund, primarily to pay for hydrant inspections by OCWA and to pay for the annual Limeledge Contract of approximately \$6,000 each year.

The Sewer Fund – there is no longer a large un-appropriated fund balance, most of that spent for construction of the composting facility at the WWTP. It is important to build up the fund balance, which is extremely low at present, to plan for unexpected emergencies, particularly the purchase of new, very expensive pumps.

The Compost Project – is another consideration regarding the Sewer Fund. Last year, the Village's WPCP began composting its first piles of bio-solids/wood chips on-site and the residents were able to obtain some of this natural compost for their individual gardens. The WPCP will again begin to distribute compost on a first-come, first-serve basis in the month of May and the public is welcome and encouraged to view the new facilities at an official open house which is being planned for May 18th, from 9 to Noon, at which time compost will also be ready for pick-up by residents. The Village flower boxes will also be planted with the new compost as a demonstration of its value as a soil enhancer. It is expected that the pay-back time for the composting facility will be 10-12 years – not a very long wait for a long term solution to a problem that confronts all Waste Water Treatment Plants and one which will probably be adopted by other plants in the near future.

Tree Nursery – another project begun by our WWTP operators is the start of a tree nursery at the plant. Seedlings purchased and planted in years past are now ready for street tree planting. There are also some extra trees that the operators will distribute to residents on a first come first serve basis at the May 18th Open House.

Sewer Consolidation Grant – a NYS Local Government Consolidation Grant to improve the Village sewage collection system was awarded in the amount of \$600,000 last October. These monies will be used to make repairs to those portions of the collection system that are jointly used by the Village, the Town and the School District, effectively addressing the inflow and infiltration of storm water into the treatment plant, as well as address the new DEC requirement for phosphorus removal at the plant and to bring about targeted improvements to several parts of the sewer system including the Orange Street Pump Station. Eventually, it is expected that the operation, maintenance, repair and billing of the entire sewage system will lead to a consolidated arrangement, under the sole ownership and responsibility of the Village.

Comments from Trustees

Mayor Curtin asked if there were any comments from the other members of the Board.

Trustee Cox wanted to reiterate Mayor Curtin's comments in support of the Marcellus Police Department. He also wanted to let the public know that he, along with the Board and Village Treasurer, was surprised at the reduction in total taxable value in the Village, due to tax exemptions. Trustee Cox informed the public that the trend will most likely continue into the foreseeable future.

Trustee Tallman wanted everyone to know that she inspected some of the streets that are being considered for repair work in the tentative budget, including Chrisler Street, Park Street, Kelly Street and the Wilson Tract. She confirmed that these streets are those scheduled for necessary priority repair.

Comments/Questions from the Public

Mayor Curtin opened up the floor and asked for comments from the public. Mary Jo Paul inquired if the phosphorus monitoring applied to stormwater. Mayor Curtin informed Mary Jo that Code Officer Bill Reagan was in the process of completing the Village's Annual Stormwater Report, along with a Stormwater Plan. Mayor Curtin explained that his understanding is that the main concern is addressing the phosphorus from the effluent at the WWTP.

Vote on the Tentative Budget for 2013 – 2014

Mayor Curtin asked if there were any additional comments or questions from the audience. Hearing none, Trustee Cox made a motion to approve the Tentative Budget for the Village of Marcellus, for 2013-2014, as well as a motion to approve an increase in the property tax levy from \$6.25/1000 of assessed valuation to \$6.50/1000 of assessed valuation. The motion was seconded by Trustee Tallman. Mayor Curtin called for a vote. All board members voted aye and the motion carried.

Motion to Adjourn

Trustee Tallman made a motion to adjourn the tentative budget hearing. The motion was seconded by Trustee Cox. Mayor Curtin called for a vote. All board members voted aye and the meeting was adjourned at 7:40 p.m.

Dawn O'Hara
Village Clerk