

## **MAYOR MARVIN'S COLUMN**

Again this year, Bronxville residents will pay more in property taxes to Westchester County (\$8 million plus) than they do to operate the Village. Many taxpayers have rightfully asked, "What am I getting from County government?"

Approximately two-thirds of the County government's operating budget (\$1.358 billion) pays for services mandated by the State. Chief among these are social services costing \$548 million in categories including Medicaid, child protective services, homeless aid and housing placement. The second largest mandated expense category is \$164.5 million for public health services, including communicable disease control, environmental health and a health inspection system for restaurants, hotels, camps and water systems.

The County also provides the vast infrastructure for the judicial system. Your tax dollars fund the County Jail, Family and Criminal Courts and the District Attorney's Office including special bureaus such as narcotics, child abuse and domestic violence.

The final category of mandated services funds a Board of Election which runs most local elections and conducts voter registration drives, and a County Clerk's Office which handles land records, legal documents and passport services.

Another \$25 million of your tax dollars goes to the MTA as a mandated surcharge and \$24 million funds our local community college.

This leaves a third of the funds, or \$41.4 million, for discretionary services under headings including Law and Research, Planning, Public Safety, Parks and Recreation, Emergency Services and Transportation. This category includes such services as the Bee Line Bus System costing \$101 million annually and the ownership and maintenance of 18,000 acres of open space encompassing 17 parks, 6 golf courses and Rye Playland.

One theory behind the formation of County governments is that they can be an effective agent for the State in delivering services at the local level. All states, save for Connecticut and Rhode Island, have some form of County government.

One of the major factors causing our County taxes to be so high is that New York State is only one of only six states to require a local property tax share

to pay for Federal and State social service programs. For example, the Federal program, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), is paid for with 50% Federal money, 25% State funds and 25% raised through County property taxes. The same payment ratio is true for Medicaid costs. This payment structure is an extremely important and costly distinction that separates us from most of the rest of the country.

The structure of the County government consists of 17 legislators and a County Executive. Each elected legislator represents 50,000 residents vs. the Federal government system of 435,000 plus residents represented by each member of Congress.

Though many County services are vital, I believe they are delivered via a bloated bureaucracy with unnecessary committees and duplication of services, offering vast opportunities for achieving savings.

Village Administrator, Harry Porr, and I recently attended an “Officials Meeting” with County Executive Rob Astorino and Chairman of the Legislature Ken Jenkins of Yonkers as well as several other County Legislators. Our primary interests were to be updated on the status of the Affordable Housing Plan and to learn if there were any opportunities to have County money directed Bronxville’s way. On a positive note, we did learn that our grant application for flood monies is still in the pipeline, though we did not make the cut for the first round of funding in the next capital budget.

For example, since the County administers an Office of the Aging, we were looking for some County support for our local seniors program to mitigate the reductions necessitated in our local budget.

As per the Housing plan, it remains in an extended limbo. The Plan has still not been approved by HUD and the County has now hired a consulting firm to run community meetings throughout the County to get citizen input on housing issues. The meeting nearest to Bronxville will be held on April 20<sup>th</sup> from 6:30PM to 8:30PM at the Eastchester Community Action Program’s Center at 142 Main Street in Tuckahoe.

One of our goals as a government this year is to better acquaint ourselves with County spending programs with the hope of bringing some of the \$8 million property tax funds we send to White Plains, back home here to Bronxville.