

MAYOR MARVIN'S COLUMN

Village Administrator Harold Porr and I will be in Albany this week to attend the New York State Conference of Mayors and Municipal Officials annual meeting to lobby our elected officials on issues of importance to the Village. It is critical that our voices be heard especially during this economic downturn with the resulting disparity between our local fiscal capacity and the cost of providing needed services.

Westchester County needs to have a stronger more coordinated voice in decision making in Albany, much like the power exerted by our neighbors in Long Island and New York City. As one of my colleagues has said, "Westchester has too long been the ATM machine for the rest of the State."

The issues of greatest priority for Bronxville at the upcoming meetings include:

- Urging support for legislation that would mitigate the impact of rising pension costs. The State and by extension the Village operate under a defined benefit plan guaranteeing employees a certain level of benefits. This is financed in large part by local government. Over the years, the cost of benefits have become increasingly difficult to sustain and actually increased ten-fold just in the two year period from 2003 to 2005. This year, because the State pension fund incurred significant losses, the Village is required to contribute to make it whole resulting in a new Village expenditure of \$164,000 or 2 percentage points in taxes. We will also petition to require the State to undertake a thorough analysis of the benefits system, funding methodology and oversight structures.

Additionally, we seek legislation to allow us to amortize a portion of our pension costs.

- We support legislation to constitutionally prohibit unfunded mandates that would impose a direct financial burden on local governments without a corresponding appropriation that would cover the costs to undertake these new initiatives.
- We will lobby our State officials to maintain our local highway improvement monies so we can continue to make the necessary

infrastructure repairs. Currently, the Village received \$99,108 to aid in our road resurfacing program.

- Encourage the continuation of the revenues sharing program with an added component of a multi-year commitment once the State's financial picture improves. The original revenue sharing formula intended to redistribute State tax revenues to municipalities that do not have the tax bases or taxing authority to generate these revenues on their own has been annually disregarded. As a result, 100% of all villages currently receive less aid than they did in 1989. Our current aid of \$66,768 is projected to decrease by 5% in the proposed State budget.
- Of enormous importance to our Village is the current legislation proffered that would permit villages to increase the local gross receipts tax on utilities from 1% to 3%. Under current law, we are authorized a tax on the sale of utility services equal to 1% of their gross income earned within our boundaries. The ability to raise it to 3% would generate over \$200,000 for the Village or almost three tax points. Also, the legislation provides for the inclusion of cellular services as taxable entities for purposes of this legislation.
- We continue to support the repeal of the Wick's Law which mandates that school districts and municipal projects be subject to a multiple bidding requirement. Requiring separate plumbing, heating and electrical contracts has been the effect of increasing project costs anywhere from 8% to 30%.
- A very important adjunct to the Wick's Law legislation and for procurement services in general is the new proposed law that would allow a school district or municipality to be allowed to award contracts on the basis of "best value" rather than "lowest bid."
- Another very important piece of proposed legislation that we support, especially in light of the economic climate, is the requirement that a substantial weight be given to a municipality's ability to pay "when a union contract goes to binding arbitration." In other words, before awarding salary and benefit increase, the ability of the municipality to fund the economic

costs imposed by the arbitration award without burdening local taxpayers with multi-year property tax increases must be given substantial consideration in the decision making process.

- Finally, we support legislation that authorizes local governments to purchase clean and green technology without violating State competitive bidding laws and include State subsidies to close the gap between the sometimes higher price of green technologies vs. conventional methods.

Victory on any one of these fronts will translate into real dollars to alleviate some of the property tax burden on our residents so it is crucial that we make the effort with our colleagues to have our voices heard.