

Mayor's Column  
December 11, 2017

Many of you have inquired but unfortunately the Village is unable to accept payment in advance for taxes due in future years because the Village is required to follow the procedures set forth in the New York State Real Property Tax Law. Specifically, taxes can only be collected after the Tax Receiver has issued a tax warrant, published appropriate notices with due dates and filed a tax roll identifying the amount due from each property. These steps follow after the Village Board has established a budget, tax levy and tax rate for the ensuing year and after the assessor has published an assessment roll. The Village of Bronxville is even more unique than all other Villages in Westchester County since the Village collects School taxes and therefore cannot issue a tax warrant until we also receive a tax levy from the School. In other words, the Village cannot simply accept payment since we are required by law to follow collection procedures consistent with State Law and on a schedule consistent with all Villages in Westchester County.

The following is a compilation of issues that have crossed my desk in the past few weeks. Though no unifying theme, they are germane to day to day governance.

As a follow up to my last week's column on food waste, our forward thinking neighbors in Scarsdale and Larchmont most recently launched a food composting program in lieu of hauling food waste to landfills at a substantial cost to the community thereby depositing rotting food that releases methane, a more potent greenhouse gas than carbon dioxide.

Food scraps are collected in counter top pails and transferred to the municipal recycling centers at no additional cost. Pretty much everything is accepted including cut flowers, paper goods and coffee grinds. The only items forbidden include, plastics, pet waste, diapers and styrofoam.

Food composting makes sense because it returns the nutrients back to where they came from – the soil. Worldwide, there currently is a soil crisis because organic materials from the earth are being removed at a rapid rate leaving our

soil degraded and impoverished. Compost is so important because it enhances overall soil health as organic rich earth retains moisture better and mitigates the impacts of drought. Nearby Anne Hutchinson School in Eastchester was a pioneer in separating their lunch room food waste from garbage.

The Bronxville Green Committee is looking into the logistics of starting a program in the Village with the major obstacle being space near the DPW complex to collect and store the compost.

The following is a recurring issue that comes up every year as a provision in New York State law that virtually every elected official wants repealed. It demonstrates how just a few paragraphs inserted by special interests can literally add billions of dollars to state and local governments. Yet another reason why we have to be alert to virtually every piece of legislation that makes it to the Governor's desk.

It's hardly news that New York roads, bridges, tunnels and pipelines are crumbling. Governor Cuomo himself pointed out that 60% of our roads and 6,000 of our bridges statewide are in need of immediate repair and the MTA, LIRR and subway system are in beyond deferred maintenance condition.

Clearly an infusion of funding is needed but there are also obvious steps that can be taken to maximize the current use of allotted resources. New York has costly barriers, the most notable the "Scaffold Law", that make it truly the most expensive place on earth to build.

Under the law, unique to only New York State, the courts hold contractors and property owners, including municipalities and public agencies like the MTA, absolutely liable for gravity-related construction injuries, even if the contractor or owner had nothing to do with the accident.

The effect is astounding. The New York School Boards Association estimates the scaffold law wastes \$400 million in construction costs statewide.

Researchers for the Regional Plan Association confirmed that this law was a major driver in making the Second Avenue Subway the most expensive subway project in the world.

The law literally drives insurers out of the New York market or forces them to hike rates, now the highest in the Country. As example, the Port Authority pays, on average, more than twice as much for “losses” on the New York side of a bridge vs the New Jersey side – same project, same contractors, same laws of gravity – just different liability rules.

A unique and heartening coalition of groups including local governments, tax payer groups and affordable housing advocates including Habitat for Humanity – just about everyone but the trial lawyers – have called on Albany to reform this. We are hoping for success in this legislative term.