June 8, 2011  
Farmingville, NY - On Wednesday, June 8, 2011, Supervisor Mark Lesko made his 2012 "budget call" at a meeting with all Town department heads to kick off the 2012 budget process.

Supervisor Lesko introduced a new budgeting approach to the Town called programmatic budgeting, which will establish benchmarks and set quantifiable goals for departments. The programmatic budgeting technique is part of Supervisor Lesko's Quality Initiative, designed to improve Town services and increase efficiencies. Programmatic budgeting will result in departments being held accountable for their budgeted expenditures and revenues, as well as the quality and level of services that they provide. It will also allow elected officials to better prioritize spending needs in a challenging fiscal environment.

"Over the past two years, the Town of Brookhaven has acted quickly and responsibly to address unprecedented loss of revenue. We have cut spending in our general fund by 26%, slashed annual borrowing by more than 57% and cut our full-time employee headcount by 107 since January of 2010. We did all of this while maintaining our high bond ratings, not reducing services and, most importantly, freezing taxes two years in a row," said Supervisor Mark Lesko, "However, given the continued volatility in the economy, we must remain vigilant if we hope to maintain fiscal stability. In order to institutionalize principles of fiscal responsibility, we must change our budgeting method and engage in long-term strategic thinking that is based on quantifiable data and hard decisions."

"The Town of Brookhaven has been very proactive in managing through fiscal challenges while at the same time holding the line on property taxes, and now we need to concentrate on our long-term financial health," said Deputy Supervisor and Councilwoman Kathleen Walsh, "I believe that this new system of budgeting will not only ensure fiscal responsibility for the future, but will also improve service delivery."

Previously, the Town utilized the traditional cost-to-continue approach for budgeting. The Town has drastically reduced spending, but in order to institutionalize fiscal responsibility the Town is re-designing its budget process through programmatic budgeting to look long-term. Programmatic budgeting has three simple principles: 1) If a program works, we should know how well it works and why; 2) If a program does not work, we should know how bad the problem is and why; 3) If we have to make a hard fiscal decision we should have data to support it. On a quarterly basis, Commissioners and department heads will be required to present their progress on benchmarked items to the Town Board at work session.

The Town has responded to continued instability in the economy over the past few years. For example, since 2006, the Town has experienced a $24.8 million dollar reduction of mortgage taxes. In addition to cutting spending, slashing borrowing and reducing the workforce, the Town has also extended the collective bargaining agreements with the White and Blue Collar bargaining units, yielding an expected savings of approximately $8 million over the next two years and $25 million over the life of the contracts.

The Town's fiscal responsibility is also exemplified by the property tax cap, spending cap, and debt management cap it put on the ballot as referendums in November 2010. All three measures were approved by voters by overwhelming margins.

The department heads will submit their operation budgets for next year in June, and over the summer the Department Heads will meet with representatives from the Supervisor's office, the Finance Department, and the Town Council to review their budgets. Supervisor Lesko will file the 2012 proposed budget with the Town Clerk on September 29. There will be a public hearing on the proposed budget on November 10, 2011 and the Town Board will be scheduled to vote on the budget on November 15, 2011.