

Core Services Working Group Makes Presentation to Town Board

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Pictured above is Chief of Staff Brian Beedenbender (standing) giving the presentation to the Town Board.

Farmingville, NY - On Thursday, March 1, 2012, the Core Services Working Group presented its review of core and discretionary Town services and recommended various policy options for public-private partnerships. The Core Services Group was formed by Brookhaven Supervisor Mark Lesko and announced in his State of the Town address in January. The Core Services Working Group is chaired by Chief of Staff Brian Beedenbender and includes representation from each Council district.

Supervisor Lesko said in his speech, "First, the Working Group will conduct an analysis of what our core functions are and what our discretionary functions are. Second, out of those discretionary functions, I'm asking the Group to make a presentation to the Town Board at our public work session on March 1st and provide us with a set of policy choices regarding which functions should remain, which we should end, and which one would be appropriate for public/private partnerships."

The Town is facing a \$6 - \$10 million gap to fund balance in its 2013 budget. The Town's major revenues, including mortgage taxes, have dropped 73% since 2004 and remain stagnant. Fixed costs like pensions and health insurance continue to increase, and the Town cannot continue to rely on surplus to plug its budget gaps.

"I thank the Core Services Working Group for their hard work over the past six weeks. With the financial challenges ahead, it's time for the elected officials to have a realistic conversation about what core services we are mandated to provide and our options for entering into public-private partnerships," said Supervisor Lesko.

"The Core Services Working Group has done a great job of identifying areas where we can streamline operations and save money," said Deputy Supervisor/Councilwoman Kathleen Walsh. "During these tough economic times, everyone needs to tighten their belts and the Town is no exception. I will continue to review their recommendations."

"I have long supported consolidating services to create a more efficient and less costly government. I think there is tremendous opportunity for Brookhaven to examine its discretionary and duplicative services and look forward to discussing these public-private partnerships with my colleagues," said Councilwoman Jane Bonner.

"This process is critically necessary for our Town Board to reasonably consider all options on behalf of our taxpayers. How can we provide our core services while holding down our Town property taxes? Our options must include possible privatization, public-private partnerships, shared services between municipalities, such as our County government, or simply going out to the market via an RFP (Request for Proposal) process," said Councilman Steve Fiore-Rosenfeld, "Hard choices are likely necessary by our Town Board, going into our next few budget cycles. This information will assist us in making the right fiscal and quality of life choices on behalf of our citizens. I thank Mr. Beedenbender and our participating Council staff."

"The Town must consider every opportunity to help save the taxpayer's money, especially through the benefit of public/private partnerships," said Councilman Tim Mazzei. "I commend the efforts of the Core Services Working Group and look forward to examining their findings more closely."

"It is my hope that the economy will make a strong recovery in the coming years, but we can't bank on it. As legislators we need to confront the difficult economic reality that we are currently faced with and today's presentation was a starting point for exploring ways to address the \$6 - \$10 million gap to our fund balance in the 2013 budget," said Councilwoman Connie Kepert.

"In tight times we need to expand our horizons and consider the possibility of public/private partnerships to provide services and potential savings for our residents," commented Brookhaven Town Councilman Dan Panico, "I applaud the work of all and look forward to exploring these options."

The Core Services Working Group met several times a week since the State of the Town to examine the Town's core and discretionary services and develop policy options for the Town Board. The working group presented the following options:

Policy Option 1: Create a Department of Public Works. This is a consolidation that would transfer functions from the Planning, Parks, Public Safety, and Waste Management Departments into one Department of Public Works and could result in \$180,000 savings. It would also move the Building Department's functions in the Planning Department and the Fire Prevention functions into Law, which means that all code enforcement would be more effectively coordinated.

Policy Option 2: Partner with a professional company to run the Brookhaven Amphitheater. Since 2007, the Town has lost over \$2.5 million at the Amphitheater.

Policy Option 3: Explore public-private partnerships at our marinas, replicating the Davis Park model. Last year, the Town partnered with a private marina operator at Davis Park. The Town could send out RFP's to operate its other marinas. This could save a minimum of over \$460,000.

Policy Option 4: Re-invent the Jitney program by partnering with private taxi companies. The Working Group examined the Town of North Hempstead's Project Independence Model, which partners with taxi companies. If the Town transitioned to a partnership with a local taxi company, this could result in extended service hours to seniors. The Working Group prepared an RFP for the Jitney program and estimated savings at \$250,000 to \$820,000, depending on the selected option.

The Working Group also researched costs relating to the Animal Shelter, Calabro Airport, Shellfish and Wetlands programs, and the Holtsville Ecology Center, and examined the Town of North Hempstead's third-party lockbox model for the Tax Receiver's office. The working group will prepare and send out RFP's for the various policy options. It will also spend more time researching the additional services mentioned above, which are estimated to cost the Town over \$4.5 million.

To view the Core Services Working Group's full presentation, visit www.brookhaven.org.

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