

Town Board Unanimously Adopts 2012 Budget, "Freezing Taxes...Three Years in a Row"

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Unanimous budget vote is the first since 2004

Budget freezes taxes for the third year in a row and continues to cut spending

Farmingville, NY - On November 17, 2011 the Brookhaven Town Board voted unanimously to adopt the 2012 proposed budget, which has a zero percent property tax increase. This was the first budget to be unanimously adopted since the 2004 vote to adopt the 2005 budget.

"Freezing Taxes...Three Years in a Row" freezes taxes in the General Whole Town and Part Town funds, Highway Whole Town and Part Town funds, and Street Lighting District. The budget also cuts taxes by 1.32% in the Special Refuse funds and cuts spending by \$2.7 million. The new budget complies with the State's 2% tax cap, as well as the Town's tax, spending, and debt management caps.

The 2012 budget also introduces Supervisor Lesko's new job creation program, Jumpstart Brookhaven, which will reduce building and planning fees for large revitalization projects already approved by the Town to ensure they get shovels in the ground in 2012. It is estimated that Jumpstart Brookhaven can potentially create more than 1,600 construction jobs and between 1,400 and 4,000 permanent jobs in the Town.

"I am proud that we are freezing taxes for the third straight year even with the challenges of rising fixed costs and plummeting revenues. These dire economic times require us to maintain a conservative fiscal discipline. We made some difficult choices, but we were able to meet our goal of not burdening our residents with additional taxes," said Supervisor Lesko. "I am proud that the Town Board voted in a bipartisan matter to hold the line on taxes and make tough decisions together." Deputy Supervisor/Councilwoman Kathleen Walsh said, "This is a budget that reflects the wishes of our residents by holding the line on taxes. Families across Brookhaven are struggling to make ends meet and our board worked very hard so residents could keep more money in their pockets and not be financially burdened any more than they already are."

"This year's budget process was a much more cooperative and inclusive process than last year. As a result, in tough economic times we were able to come together in a bipartisan fashion to craft a fiscally conservative budget that prioritizes spending across all funds," commented Brookhaven Town Councilman Dan Panico. "It is my sincere hope that this spirit of cooperation will continue as we craft what will undoubtedly be an extremely difficult budget for 2013."

"As promised we have held Town taxes frozen for three years in a row. As parents, homeowners and taxpayers ourselves we know how hard it is to make ends meet," stated Councilman Steve Fiore-Rosenfeld.

"Our residents made it clear time and again that they would not accept a tax hike and we kept our promise to freeze taxes," said Councilman Tim Mazzei. "These are challenging economic times, and we had to make some tough decisions and cut spending just like every family has had to do."

"I am cautiously optimistic that funding will be restored to desiring youth programs well as our Public Safety Division by January. I am also very pleased that the resolution which I co-sponsored will provide the town with funding to acquire and preserve important parcels of open space without raising taxes," stated Councilwoman Kepert

"This board had one goal in mind; to work together as a bipartisan unit and adopt a budget that would not adversely impact the taxpayers of Brookhaven Town," said Councilwoman Bonner.

Several amendments were introduced that did not increase spending in the budget. The \$2.7 million in spending cuts were accomplished through:

- Defunding nearly all vacant positions.

- Elimination of three management positions.
- An additional week of lag payroll for management making over \$75,000 and elected officials in 2012.
- Across the board cut in part-time employee costs, as well as reductions in seasonal employee costs.
- 22% reduction in funding for the Supervisor's office from 2010, or \$210,000.
- 50% reduction in salaries for some appointed board members and bingo inspectors.
- Cuts to the Supervisor's and Town Council's public information budgets.
- Reduction in supplemental funding to Youth Agencies.
- Reduction in part-time salaries in the Department of Public Safety.

The Preliminary Budget included the elimination of the Department of Public Safety's budget for the part-time Park Rangers program. The Town Board restored it while reducing the budget for part-time code enforcement employees. However, no Code Enforcement positions were eliminated. The Park Rangers are peace officers who patrol the beaches, marinas and parks, while code enforcement officers handle a wide variety of duties ranging from resident complaints of code violations to special events security and traffic safety.

Working together, the Town Board was able to find off-sets through reduction in salaries of vacant management positions to restore partial funding to three Town-wide Youth agencies, the BACAC Youth Court, Response of Suffolk, and Lifeline Mediation. In addition, the Town will advance six months of State and County funding and 12 months of Town funding to all organizations in order to give them time to find alternate sources of funding.

The Town Council also worked with the Supervisor's staff to use off-sets from management salaries to keep West Meadow Beach, Corey Beach, and Cedar Beach open on weekends from Memorial Day to July 4th.

The Town Board also voted to authorize a \$9 million bond for open space. Repayment of the bond will be through a separate line on the tax bill. This new line, to appear in 2013, will be offset by a decrease in the Special Refuse line, which is paid by residents in garbage collection districts of the Town. This will allow the Town to purchase strategic pieces of open space and protect the environment. Since 2009, the Town of Brookhaven has preserved over 223 acres of open space and is in contact to purchase an additional 175 acres.

The budget also includes programmatic efficiencies through the Quality Initiative including the reinvention of the Jitney program. By computerizing records, establishing waiting lists, and utilizing GPS and routing software, the Town will be able to provide better and more efficient Jitney service.

The Town Board previously accepted Supervisor Lesko's 2012 preliminary budget, "Freezing Taxes...Three Years in a Row" on October 4, 2011.

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