

## Concerned Chemung Taxpayers

As many have read in a recent news article in the Morning Times, the Town of Chemung has adopted a budget for 2025 that includes a local property tax increase of 35%. A headline like that is sure to generate a lot of concern among our local taxpayers. The 35% number does not take into account that Chemung's current tax rate is already lower than most every other town in this region. In turn, this has generated to some outrage by some through their Facebook postings. By the way the increase was 96 cents, which equates to \$96 per year on a \$100,000 home.

I might note that no Morning Times reporter attended any of the meetings leading up to this discussion, nor the meeting where this budget was adopted. Had any such reporter been there, they would have noticed that the well-attended meeting had no one speak at the public hearing in opposition to this budget. I suspect that those in attendance are regular attendees that are well aware of the state of the Town's situation. Additionally, that reporter may have learned that almost all of the tax increase was due to pass-through mandates that the Town has no control over. I reference here items like the 12% increase in health insurance costs; and that increase is on top of an already huge number. Then there is the very large increase projected in our New York State Retirement System contribution – another already huge number. In all, almost 72 of the 96 cents went to cover these pass-through costs.

Other items that we have no control over are the costs of fuel, asphalt, salt, parts and new equipment. Also noteworthy is this statistic. In the year 2000 the Town tax rate was \$2.79. We have been proud of the fact that over the past quarter of a century we have kept the rate lower than that rate; and in many cases, much lower. The year 2025 will be the first year in all that time that we will have exceeded that year 2000 rate.

Some of the online commentators have suggested cutting salaries as a means of solving our fiscal challenges. I have calculated that if the total salaries of the Board and supervisor were completely eliminated the tax rate would be reduced by just 22 cents. Others note the current inflation rate is "only 2.5%". Unfortunately, we all have to deal with real-world costs, and not some number generated by the federal government for some political purpose.

Here are some real-world examples to consider. In the year 2021 the Town had asphalt placed on our roads at \$47 per ton; whereas in 2024 that asphalt cost was \$92 per ton. Our new plow truck that was purchased 4 years ago cost \$262,000, which replaced a 2002 model. The 2024 truck cost us \$320,000, which replaces a 2007 model. Both trucks are same make, model and specification. These facts, along with the others already mentioned, are coupled with the fact the Town's sales tax receipts last year were more than \$125,000 *less* than they were in 2012 help to explain the circumstances in which we now find ourselves.

Clearly, we all recognize that most of our businesses and our households have experienced significant financial hardships over last 4 years; and you can see that none of our local governments are exempt. It is our hope that new leadership in our federal government can turn around the disastrous policies of these last 4 years that have severely impacted us. In any event, we in Chemung will continue to monitor revenues and expenses in an effort to control and reduce our tax levy as situations improve. Anyone should feel free to meet with me at anytime for a more in-depth discussion.

George Richter, Chemung Town Supervisor