

Town of Copake 2021 Preliminary Budget

Executive Summary

The 2021 Budget is mainly the same as the 2020 Budget. Taxes will remain flat. The Town of Copake tax levy will remain \$28,3581.03- which it was last year. There are some changes to the Budget however, and the highlights are set forth below.

Revenue There has been much focus on the fact that the federal government has not yet given funds to the States, and Columbia County has been anxiously awaiting funds from New York State. Meantime, the economy has been uncertain and it is difficult to forecast 2021. We have been conservative in our estimate of Sales Tax. We have also been conservative in our estimate of Mortgage Tax, though the number of house sales in the Town indicates that we will not suffer in that regard.

Appropriations There are two areas of the budget where we have made significant increases in expenses- first in the Building Department, and second in the salary for the Town Clerk.

Building Department The Town Board has received feedback- with which we agree- that the Town should provide more service in the Building Department. We have been in a shared services agreement which worked well enough, but did not provide enough hours to handle Copake's active construction industry. The Town Board also sees the need for more pro-active Code Enforcement.

For these reasons, and now because our Code Enforcement Officer has resigned effective January 1, 2021, we will be making changes of personnel in the Building Department. We have not yet decided what structure we will choose, but we want to be prepared to deal with the increased need in this area. We have therefore increased the salary line from \$19,750 to \$39,000. This increase will give us flexibility as we move forward.

Town Clerk's Salary The salary of the Town Clerk/Tax Collector has been \$29, 544 for nine years. There was no increase because, for personal reasons, the Town Clerk did not want to receive a higher salary. In 2020, numerous Town employees- both hourly and salaried- received increases, but the Town Clerk salary remained static.

Meantime, the job of the Clerk has expanded. In addition to all of the statutory duties of a Town Clerk, Lynn Connolly also publishes the monthly Copake Connection, helps to maintain the Copake website, sells garbage bags and permits for Columbia County, and sells licenses for DEC. Additionally as of January 1, 2021 she will increase her hours from 27 to 35- the office will be open M-Th 8:00 am to 4:00 pm and Saturday 9:00 am to noon.

The Town Board is proposing an increase to \$43,000. This is not a "raise" per se; it is an adjustment to bring the salary in line with other clerks in the County and to make it commensurate with the amount of service and responsibility which the Clerk position entails.

Other Miscellaneous increases

There are some other increases in the Budget which are less significant than those set forth above. We have budgeted \$37000 for legal fees for the attorney who is representing the Town on the Article 10 proceeding. We will receive \$21,000 in Intervenor Funds to help pay those legal fees. Part of the Intervenor Funds will subsidize the fees of an Environmental Engineering firm which the Town has hired to assist with the Article 10 proceeding.

This year we have created a new Copake Economic Development Advisory Committee. We have budgeted \$2500 for Economic Development which will be available upon application to the Town Board.

We have increased the amount budgeted for Insurance since that cost went up this year. We have also increased the line for the bookkeeper by \$1000. This will allow for more hours if needed, including hours for training since we are changing software companies next spring.

Reducing Costs

We have managed to make these increases while keeping taxes flat because we have identified some budget lines where there has been surplus. These are not significant cuts and will not interfere with service, but these cuts do give us the flexibility to increase some lines in the budget. Examples of areas where we are saving are: reducing the line for upkeep of the Town Hall where there has been a surplus, elimination of a line for records management which has not been used in recent years, and reduction in the cost of advertising and office supplies where there has been an unexpended balance.

Highway Department

We are giving the 2% increase to the staff which is required by our Union contract, but Highway Superintendent William Gregory has been frugal in the management of his Department. We will make up the difference of any increases in expenses through unexpended fund balance.

Jeanne E. Mettler
Supervisor

Copake New York
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