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MILTON

# Board sharpens budget pencils

## Plan to nearly double taxes sparks outcry

BY KATHY BOWEN  
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Milton's Town Board is taking an extra week to work on its 2009 budget after being quizzed for an hour and a half by upset taxpayers Thursday night.

Michael Ertelt said he left the

public hearing more upset than when he arrived with questions about the proposed \$6.6 million budget proposal.

"I didn't feel I got a good answer to any of my questions," he said.

Property owners in Milton would see taxes increase from 32 cents per \$1,000 of assessed value

to 59 cents per \$1,000, and in the portion of Ballston Spa that's in the town, the jump would be from 22 cents to 41 cents under the budget as presented Thursday.

The increases do not include funding for special districts including water, fire and ambulance service.

The average property is valued at \$200,000.

Several citizens said pay hikes for town employees are out of line with the economy.

"They're talking about increasing salaries by 4 percent when people are losing their jobs," Ertelt said of the proposed across-the-board salary hike for town employees.

Town Board member Joseph Miranda said the town has histori-

cally followed Saratoga County's contracts with public employees, and next year county workers will be getting a 4 percent raise.

"We may have to cut that back, I don't know," Miranda said.

Other areas of the preliminary budget that drew criticism were the parks and building budgets.

The board added significantly

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to the cultural and recreation department budget, raising it from \$288,396 this year to \$512,361 in the proposed spending plan.

The money includes parks, the community center and the historian's office.

The largest single item, under building and improvements, would jump from \$10,000 to \$100,000 under the proposal. Board members said that money would be spent on playground equipment and other park improvements.

Miranda said that overall, the proposed parks budget would likely be cut \$150,000 to \$200,000.

"We all like kids, but this may not be the time to buy more equipment," he said.

Another \$150,000 that will likely be removed from the final budget, he said, is money for an architect and related costs for

a study of expanding or replacing the Town Hall and highway garage.

"With the economy like it is, people don't want to hear about a new Town Hall. They want us to make do and fix up what we have," he said.

John Olenik is a regular at town meetings and often questions decisions made by the board. He said Thursday that he was one voice in a chorus complaining about the proposed budget.

He said that as an insurance broker, he was concerned that the town did not solicit bids on insurance for next year.

"Insurance is three-quarters of a million dollars, and they didn't shop around at all," he said. "The market for property and casualty insurance is very soft right now, and I think the town could do better by going out to competitive bid."

The board is scheduled to continue its public hearing on the budget at 7 p.m. Thursday.

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