

## Should We Wish For More Hurricanes?

This year, the Town Board budgeted \$0 for road paving but will actually spend at least \$880,000 thanks to a FEMA reimbursement of \$500,000 to the Highway Department for Hurricane Sandy and \$383,000 from Albany for the annual state CHIPS road paving program.

Last year, not counting the \$296,000 we received in CHIPS money, the Town Board budgeted \$0 for paving but spent an additional \$318,000 thanks to a FEMA reimbursement of \$113,000 for Hurricane Irene and a \$200,000 savings in the snow budget line because we had less snow than budgeted for.

In a perverse sort of way, after enduring the damage and discomforts associated with two hurricanes, we now find ourselves thankful for the very same hurricanes because they brought us a \$613,000 windfall, paid for with our federal tax dollars, plus \$138,000 more than expected in CHIPS money, paid for with our state tax dollars and distributed by our politically attuned state lawmakers.

What should we wish for for the next two years? More hurricanes and more paving — or good weather and minimal paving using only state CHIPS money?

(The snow budget is always a crap shoot and more often than not, the Town has spent more for snow plowing than it budgeted.)

There's also a third alternative: pay for more paving ourselves. That, of course, would mean increasing our town tax bill.

Supervisor Grace has repeatedly criticized past supervisors and town boards, dating back to 2009, for not including any town paving money in their budgets. But then, neither did he in his one and only budget, the 2013 budget — even though he increased the town tax by 4.5%, the largest percentage increase since 1995.

Like past supervisors and town boards, Supervisor Grace faced the unpleasant truth that the paving budget was one of the very few discretionary items in the town budget: by eliminating or reducing the paving line, he could limit the increase in the town tax rate. When wages and other employee related costs like pension and health benefits account for 78% of the budget, and the remaining 22% of the budget has to cover an array of essential overhead costs and snow plowing, there's precious little left to fund discretionary expenses like paving or, for that matter, major neighborhood drainage improvements.

At a recent Town Board meeting, outgoing Highway Superintendent DiBartolo advised the Board that next year the Town would need between \$720,000 to \$840,000 for paving — in addition to the state CHIPS money — in order to catch up on deferred paving.

To put that number in perspective, he gave this example: paving Stony Street, from Judy Road to Quarry Road, would cost \$311,000. What he didn't say was that adding just \$311,000 to the budget would increase the town tax rate by approximately 1.8%.

Adding \$500,000 to the paving budget — the same amount as this year's FEMA reimbursement — would result in an approximate 2.94% increase in the tax rate — or about a \$40.00 increase in our town tax bill.

Short of wishing for more hurricanes, how much are you willing to pay for better roads?

But taxes and paving aren't the only issues. Before the Town Board decides to fund more paving, or any other capital project, the Board, with community input, needs a capital plan. A REAL plan, not a wish list. A plan that prioritizes needs: do we relocate the highway garage or repair/replace leaking roofs in the police building, town hall and the YCCC? Do we plan new fields at Granite Knolls or complete the Hunterbrook fields? Do we address the underlying drainage issues that are eating away at the roads or simply pave the roads?

Do we take control of our town's future by planning ahead — or do we let the vagaries of nature and the uncertainties of Albany and Washington politics determine the future level of town services?

For information about other town issues, visit [www.yorktownbettergovernment.org](http://www.yorktownbettergovernment.org)