

Who Paid for the Town Board's New Shirts and Jackets?

By Susan Siegel (6/3/2013)

It's not about the money. It's about the right of taxpayers to know how their tax dollars are being spent.

Or, put another way, it's about transparency in government and the integrity of our elected officials.

More specifically, it's about why the town may be hiding the relatively minor cost of purchasing tee shirts and jackets for the supervisor and councilmen (and possibly another elected official) by charging the expense to another department's budget.

The issue is best set out in a factual timeline that dates back to last year's budget discussions. Taxpayers can draw their own conclusions.

- In November, when the Town Board was reviewing the supervisor's 2013 Tentative Budget, a councilman suggested that approximately \$750 be added to the budget for uniforms (shirts and jackets) that the four councilmen and the supervisor could wear during parades and when Board members were dealing with emergencies. At the meeting, Town Clerk Alice Roker stated that she also wanted a jacket.
- But — later that month, when the Board agreed on a Preliminary Budget, no funds were added for Town Board uniforms. (The town purchases shirts, jackets, pants and work boots for employees in several departments and this expense is typically assigned to the "uniform" line item in each department's budget.)
- At the December 5 budget hearing, when a member of the UTY why Board members needed special jackets, Councilman Paganelli and Highway Superintendent DiBartolo explained that when Board members were out at night during Hurricane Sandy they needed jackets to identify themselves as town personnel and also for safety reasons.
- When the 2013 budget was officially adopted two weeks later, it did not include funds for Town Board uniforms.
- But — at the March 19, 2013 Board meeting, Supervisor Grace announced that Board members now had jackets they could wear in emergencies to identify themselves as town employees. And subsequently, the supervisor and at least two councilmen were seen in public wearing two different style official tee shirts.

Which leads to the question: If there was no money set aside in the 2013 budget for Town Board uniforms, how was the uniform purchase paid for?

Typically, when a department needs funds to cover an unanticipated expense that's not in the budget, the town does a budget transfer that moves funds from one budget line to another. That way, there's complete transparency and taxpayers know what their tax dollars are being spent for.

But — according to the latest online expense reports for both 2012 and 2013, there's no record in either the supervisor's budget or the Town Board's budget for any uniform purchases. And, repeated Freedom of

Information (FOIL) requests for copies of invoices, vouchers or purchase orders related to the tee shirts and jackets have gotten the following response from the Finance Department: *As I have stated before, to date I have not received any vouchers for shirts/jackets for Town Board members or issued any purchase orders for same.*

But — it turns out that there is a December 31, 2012 entry in the Recreation Administration budget for \$473 worth of shirts and jackets for the “Recreation Commission” — although, as of November 30, 2012, there was no money budgeted for this expense. The voucher, from the Sports Barn, was paid on March 18, 2013.

Could this uniform payment, identified as being for the “Recreation Commission,” possibly be for the Town Board’s uniforms?

Alas, the answer to that question won’t be known until the town responds to a new FOIL request for documents related to the 12/31/2012 “Recreation Commission” order.

As I said, this isn’t about the money. It’s not even about whether Town Board members should have official shirts and jackets. It’s about integrity and transparency.

- If, in December, 2012, a majority of Town Board members believed they should have shirts and/or jackets, why didn’t they openly vote to add the money to the 2013 budget?
- And, if it turns out that the “Recreation Commission” uniforms are indeed for the supervisor and councilmen (and possibly another elected official), then why wasn’t the expense assigned to the proper budget codes?

Taxpayers have a right to know how their tax dollars are being spent. Every dollar.