

December 20, 2005

Dear Editor,

2005 is coming to a close and I have learned as a new Commissioner that this means the budget season is in full swing. Many of you may recall; I campaigned on more public involvement in the budget process. As part of that promise, I would like to brief the public on some of the issues that the Borough faced with the 2005 budget and some of the issues that we will be facing with the 2006 budget. I would also like to invite all of you to attend a Budget Information Forum to be held at the municipal building on January 4th beginning at 7 pm. We hope to explain the municipal budget process and discuss ideas and areas of concern with all interested parties.

When I took on the responsibility as Director of Revenue and Finance this past May, one of my first duties was learning the mechanics of a municipal budget. During that process, I found that many aspects are beyond our control. Costs continue to rise on committed items such as liability insurance, health insurance and pension costs. Many of these items are directly related to existing contracts or payments regulated by the State. The Borough has also been faced with the same problems as the average resident in dealing with the dramatic increase in costs associated with gasoline, diesel, natural gas and heating oil, but to a much larger extent. Several unanticipated items also will affect the 2006 budget including professional services regarding Bancroft and the reassessment ordered for Haddonfield by the Camden County Tax Board.

As we begin to discuss the 2006 budget, I find that those same issues continue to challenge us. In addition there is a constant demand for improvement of existing services and funding of new services. Some of the demand is based on requests for expansion of successful programs such as the senior citizen program, the community information center and recreation improvements including maintenance and/or replacement of existing public facilities that our residents depend on. Others center around improvements to the infrastructure of the town including the continual funding of the road program, traffic calming and funding for sidewalks to ensure the walkability of our community. Yet others relate to the implementation of various studies including the open space report, planning, visioning and affordable housing issues.

All of these issues have merits yet, as Commissioners, we must weigh those merits against the costs. One important lesson I have learned is that the budget cycle is relatively short for the physical work of creating the actual budget yet the actual process of studying the effects and implications is a continual year round project. Everything that is done in one budget year has an impact on the future. To that end, the Borough has been working throughout 2005 to determine areas where possible changes could be made to decrease costs without affecting the service. Some of those items have included reduction of staff through attrition in various departments, the privatization of the Borough Hall custodial services, placing the trash collection service out to bid for possible privatization and aggressively applying for County, State and Federal grant

opportunities. A review of the Borough borrowing practices is also taking place to determine appropriate bonding strategy.

As we enter the physical part of creating the 2006 budget we will continue to look at ways to provide the current high standards of services at the lowest feasible cost without affecting those services. I am interested in your ideas and hope many of you will attend our meeting on January 4th. If you are unable to attend please send your thoughts to boroughmail@haddonfield-nj.gov.

Neal Rochford
Commissioner
Director of Revenue and Finance