

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF 2024 PRELIMINARY BUDGET**

### **Introduction**

In the 2023 budget, the Town planned for particular projects and provided funding for those projects. The budget worked quite well. With increased costs after the pandemic, we exceeded costs on the Cold Storage Building but we acknowledged that and will use funds from our Capital Improvement Reserve Fund later this year to make up the shortfall. Meantime some of the projects we anticipated did not materialize this year, and so we will end 2023 in very good financial shape.

Anticipating 2024, when there will be a new Supervisor and a new Town Board, we have written a budget which will be flexible enough to fund projects which the Town Board may choose to support. While it is impossible to predict emergencies or unforeseen expenses, this budget is structured so that the Board can embark on new projects without amending the budget.

This budget is meant to serve as a planning tool for 2024. That said, it should be noted that this Budget gives the incoming Board the flexibility to pursue projects- or not. The current Board is not dictating to the new board what they must do but giving them sufficient funds to pursue whatever projects and policies they may choose.

### **OVERVIEW OF PRELIMINARY BUDGET**

#### **REVENUE**

This Budget keeps taxes flat. The amount to be raised by taxes is \$1,129,856. This amount has remained unchanged for at least the past eleven years.

The 2023 budget appropriated \$687,000 from Fund Balance. In the 2024 budget we have decreased the amount being taken from fund balance to \$410,759. To put this in context, in the past four years the Town has increased its Fund Balance considerably. In compliance with a Fund Balance Policy adopted in 2022, the Town has increased "restricted" funds by depositing generously into the Town's reserve funds. Our accountant projects that by the close of 2023 the Town will have just over 3 million dollars in unassigned funds and over 3 million dollars in restricted funds, for a total of over six million dollars in fund balance.

It should be noted that the Town has just awarded a contract for the expansion and paving of the Church Street Municipal Lot. This work will be completed this year. It is a part of the Hamlet Reconstruction project- and will be paid for with funds from the Capital Improvement Reserve Fund. The Town anticipates paving a Main Street Lot in 2024 but that will be paid for by ARPA funds. (The Town still has \$264,965.51 in

unspent ARPA funds which must be spent or committed in 2024). If the lot exceeds the Town's ARPA funds, the balance will be paid from the Reserve Fund.

The Town has received some contributions towards the Bicentennial, as detailed below.

## **APPROPRIATIONS**

### **.1 Lines (hourly rates)**

In the 2024 Budget the hourly wage for employees in Town Hall making less than \$20 per hour will be raised by \$1. The hourly rate of employees making \$20 or more will be raised by 3%.

#### **Highway Department**

This budget provides for a raise for the members of our Highway Department above the rate negotiated in the 2021 contract with the Teamsters. The Town's three year contract from 2021 with the Teamsters provided that in 2024 Motor Equipment Operators (MEOs) would receive a raise of 1 ½ %. The 2024 Preliminary Budget would give the highway staff a 5% increase.

The cost of living has increased dramatically since the 2021 contract. Over the years other area Towns have raised the rate for Highway employees, and Copake has fallen behind. This has made it difficult for Copake to retain current employees and to attract new employees. Accordingly, Highway Superintendent William Gregory has asked the Town Board to raise the 2024 hourly rate to \$25.00 to match Hillsdale and compete with other area Towns.

The Preliminary Budget supports Superintendent Gregory's request.

### **.1 Lines- Salaried Employees**

The 2024 budget would raise the salaries of employees by 3%. This would include Town Clerk, Judges, Town Custodian, Dog Control Officer, Code Enforcement Officer and Assessor. The budget does not raise the salary of the Supervisor, Deputy Supervisor, Budget Officer or Town Board members. In accordance with the Copake practice that the Highway Superintendent receives the same increase as his staff, the Highway Superintendent would receive a 5% raise.

## **SPECIAL PROJECTS**

### **COPAKE BICENTENNIAL- A 7550 4 Celebrations - \$52,000**

The 2024 Budget provide for \$52,000 for the celebration of the Bicentennial. This will fund the events planned by the Bicentennial Committee as well as the Historic Markers Project.

***Note:** The Town has received a \$30,000 contribution from Rheinstrom Hill, to be received over two years. We have already received \$15,000 for this year, and none of that has been spent. We are promised another \$15,000 for 2024. See A 2705. We have received \$500 from the Columbia County Board of Tourism and they have indicated that they can send more towards the end of 2023.*

### **UPGRADES AND MAINTENANCE IN TOWN HALL A 1620 2 \$50,000**

Lighting Upgrades- \$35,000

New Sound System for Courtroom - \$15,000

***Note:** The 2023 NYSERDA Flex Tech Program Energy Audit listed the upgrade to LED lights in Town Hall would cost \$21,000+. The 2024 budget includes \$35,000 since our experience is that the Audit underestimated the cost of improvements.*

*Sound system: The sound system in the Courtroom has failed in the past 12 months and must be addressed.*

### **PURCHASE OF SOFTWARE\_ A 1680 4 \$4300**

This is software which will allow the Planning department, ZBA and Code Enforcement to share data.

### **COPAKE MEMORIAL PARK IMPROVEMENTS A 7110 2 \$121,000**

Repair of Basketball Court \$18,000+

Completion of Bandstand- \$103,000

***Note:** The Bandstand was put out to bid and came in at \$131,290. In 2023 we will pay an \$8000 deposit (2023) and \$30,000 for pouring of concrete. The balance will be paid in 2024.*

## **COMPREHENSIVE PLAN- A 8020 4 \$60,000**

**Note:** *The Planning Board requested that the Town review and update the Comprehensive Plan which was adopted in 2011. The current Town Board agreed that the review of the Plan was appropriate but recommended that it should be done by the new Board.*

*If the Town applies for a Department of State Grant, the Town can get up to 90% covered.*

## **RESTRUCTURE and EXPANSION OF CODE ENFORCEMENT OFFICE**

**Note:** *As a result of the Affordable Housing law already passed, there may be more work for the Code Enforcement Office in 2024- or in subsequent years. The Short Term Rental law when passed will also impose added responsibility on the office. The 2024 budget gives the 2024 Town Board flexibility to: increase the salary (hours) of the Code Enforcement Officer, or to hire more staff, and or to increase the hours of the current clerk. This budget also provides funding for hiring a company to do oversight on Short Term Rentals. The budget increases are as follows:*

**Contingency A 1990 4** The budget increases the contingency by \$30,000 (giving that line a total of \$70,000)

**A 3620 1.1 Line- \$11856.** The 1 .1 line for the Code Enforcement is increased substantially to allow for more hours of a clerk or assistant.

**A 3620 4 \$15600** This reflects an addition of \$14000 to cover hiring a company for STR oversight.

**A 1670 4 - Central Mail-** An increase of \$15000 to \$30,000 to allow for a mailing for STR

## **CONCLUSION**

The Town of Copake is in excellent fiscal health. In the past four years, the Town has made significant improvements to infrastructure: paving the Park parking lot, installing new generators, constructing the Highway Cold Storage Building, repairing the Ice Rink and constructing four pickleball courts, constructing a Bandshell in the Copake Park, rebuilding the Copake Park Memorial Garden, and in the next month expanding and repaving the Church Street Municipal Lot. All of this has been accomplished without raising taxes. And in spite of all of these expenses the Town has increased its fund balance.

To repeat what we said last year, “No budget is clairvoyant. But this Town Board is putting forth a budget which is fair to employees, honest with taxpayers, and

responsible. This budget seeks to address both delayed maintenance as well as projects which taxpayers have told us they want us to pursue”.

This 2024 budget does not bind the 2024 Town Board, but it gives the Board the freedom and flexibility to continue to maintain Town properties responsibly, embark on upgrades and improvements to infrastructure, and mount a wonderful bicentennial celebration befitting this wonderful town.

If you have any questions please feel free to contact me at [CopakeSupervisor@Town of Copake.org](mailto:CopakeSupervisor@TownofCopake.org) or by calling (518) 329-1234 Ext 1.

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Supervisor

October 4, 2023