

# Mayor's Newsletter - May 2015



Dear Residents,

**HAPPY MOTHERS DAY EVERYONE!**



Here is an update on the village, including detail on the final 2015-16 fiscal budget, the Waterfront Park, a moment of local pride, and some dates and events to keep in mind.



## **Congratulations to Police Chief Betsy Gelardi – Woman of the Year!**

We are so proud that our Police Chief Betsy Gelardi was recognized as the **Woman of the Year** by the Westchester County Federation of Women's Clubs. *What a great honor!* Betsy has been the only woman on the Dobbs Ferry police force for the past 30 years, the last 7 as Chief of the Department – the only woman in Westchester County to hold that post. Betsy is an incredible woman, an incredible person; not only in her role as Chief of the DFPD, but also as a person who is dedicated to helping so many of the seniors and youth in our community; as a Eucharistic minister who delivers support to hospital patients in need every weekend; and as a **MOM**. It is hard to imagine how she does all the things she does, but we are lucky to have her. Because of Betsy – and all the officers of the department - Dobbs Ferry is a better place.

## **Waterfront Park**

DOBBS FERRY

**YOU ARE CORDIALLY INVITED TO THE  
REDEDICATION OF THE WATERFRONT PARK**



Village of Dobbs Ferry  
New York  
Waterfront Park



**Saturday, June 13, 2015**

Rededication Ceremony | 12:00 PM

*Featuring:*

Guest Speakers  
Elected Officials  
Waterfront Committee  
Entertainment

*More details on this event to follow as the date gets closer.*





## Final Fiscal 2015/16 Village Budget Adopted

At the regular meeting of the board on April 28, the trustees adopted (7-0) the final fiscal 2015-16 village budget. Here are important details:

The final budget will reflect a **tax rate** of **\$240.92** (per \$1000 of assessed value) which is determined by the total levy (amount of dollars) required to provide all the services to operate the village for the upcoming fiscal year.

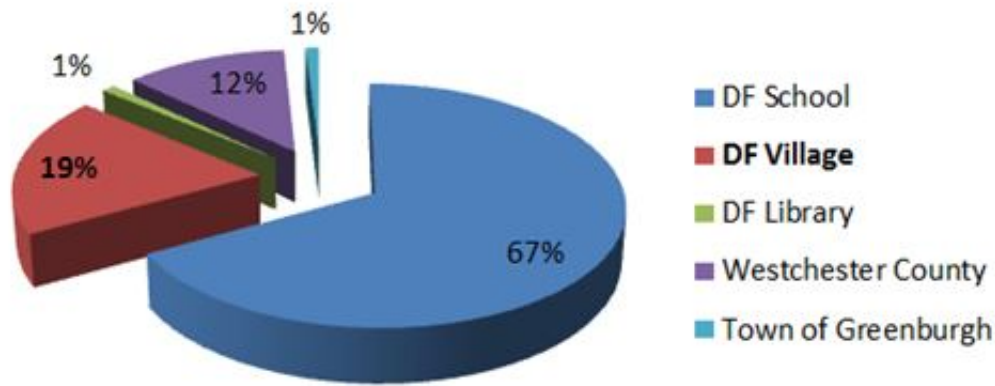
Depending on your property's assessed valuation, the new tax rate will have the following approximate \$ impact on the **village portion** of your total property tax bill:

Assessed Valuation	Tax rate last year (2014/15 adopted) 234.11	Tax rate <b>this year</b> (2015/16 adopted) 240.92	\$ increase per year	% increase
\$15,000	\$3,511.65	\$3,613.80	\$102.15	2.91%
\$20,000	\$4,682.20	\$4,818.40	\$136.20	2.91%
\$25,000	\$5,852.75	\$6,023.00	\$170.25	2.91%
\$35,000	\$8,193.85	\$8,432.20	\$238.35	2.91%
\$40,000	\$9,364.40	\$9,636.80	\$272.40	2.91%

## Village tax as a percentage of your total property tax:

The village portion of your *total* property tax bill is approximately 19 %. Below is a pie chart representing all the components (as a percentage) of your *total* property tax bill:

### Components of *Total* property tax bill



The village tax levy will be under the New York State Tax Cap for the 4<sup>th</sup> consecutive year since the inception of the law, which this year allows a tax levy growth rate of 1.68 %. The village was able to accomplish this with a prior year carry-over of ~ \$31,000 and growth adjustment factors which are mandated into the formula. Dobbs Ferry is also participating with other river town municipalities to submit an efficiency report under the NYS Tax Freeze Credit Law. This submission will allow qualified property/homeowners to receive a refund check from New York State for the portion of the village tax increase last year up to the cap rate. **Costs**

Treasury, Department Heads and Staff have worked hard to improve operational efficiencies keeping year-on-year departmental budgets mostly flat. Overall costs however continue to rise. Total expenditures increased 1.7%; medical benefit costs increased \$105,000, and workers compensation was up \$32,000. Other additional costs included \$45,000 for major storm sewer repairs, \$15,000 in major street repair, and increases of \$15,000 each for new radio equipment and maintenance contracts for the Police and Fire Departments. An increase on the Police personnel line of \$232,544 attributed to the arbitrator's 2-year union contract settlement was off-set by contingencies which had been set-aside by the village as part of long-term planning; while the village has continued to make contingencies for police and teamster contracts still under negotiation, as well non-union levels which are related, these are yet to be determined and therefore present a risk to tax rates and costs in the future.

Some costs went down; including a reduction of \$23,000 in the village's *mandated* contribution to the NYS Employment Retirement System (thanks to higher stock market returns); and a decrease of ~\$73,000 in debt service bond interest. Recently the village took advantage of very low interest rates to refinance outstanding debt; this this will significantly reduce the village's interest expense in future budgets with no increase of principal or term. Village legal and special counsel expenses decreased by \$20,000.

Believe it or not, snow removal costs were \$10,000 *lower* as the DPW did an excellent job in delivering efficient plowing and removal services this winter, and securing salt supplies at favorable prices (Dobbs Ferry's state-of-art DPW facility includes a large salt dome which gives the village an inventory cost advantage). Energy costs continue to decrease as a direct result of the actions taken by the village in

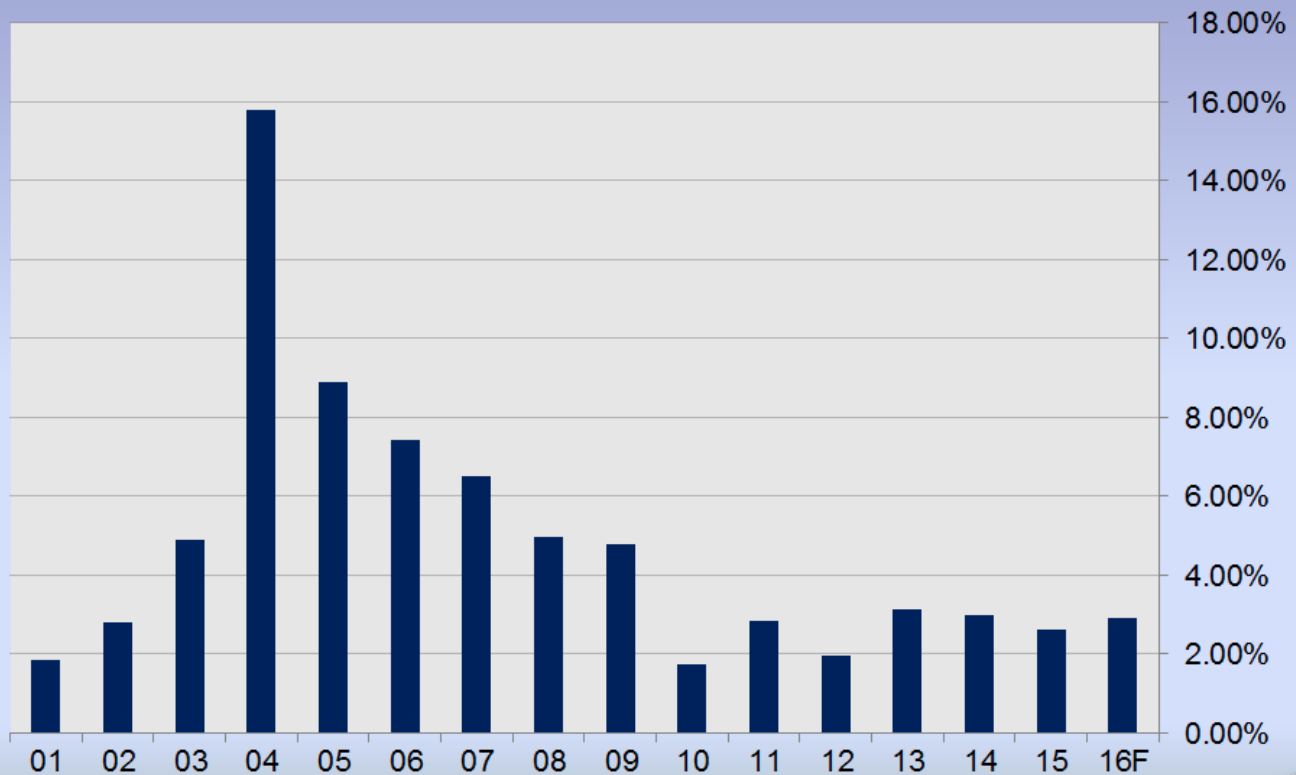
energy efficiency and sustainable projects and initiatives; with the leadership of the *Energy Task Force*, Dobbs Ferry earned the highest award *EVER* given by **the NY State Climate Smart Community Program**. The village's strong environmental record is benefiting tax payers, and proves that *what is good for the environment can also be good for business ... and the budget too!*

## **Revenues**

On the revenue side, there were slight increases in utility receipt taxes, franchise fees, parking permits, and mortgage tax; building department revenues continued to be robust as more homeowners are doing work to improve their properties. There was a disappointing reduction in total assessed valuations of \$246,000 due to the settlement of an old (and large) tax certiorari which was inherited. This was unfortunate but there was no choice in the matter as delaying would have only been more costly. The prudent decision was made to settle and move on. Going forward, the village's main redevelopment projects in process - including *Rivertowns Square* and several downtown business district properties – will have significant positive impact on the village's revenue stream, including new building permit and one-time fees, and higher taxable valuations in the longer run.

Here is an historical picture of the village tax rates, which have been stable and relatively low for the past 7 consecutive years:

# % Change in Tax Rate



## **Priorities in the Budget Process Going Forward** Control Costs, Promote Shared Services, Long-term Planning

The village has worked hard to control and cut costs, including natural attrition, consolidation of workforce, and shared services. Dobbs Ferry has been formally engaged with Hasting-on Hudson in a study to look at a partial-to-full consolidation of the DPW operations. While the study's final results do not yield a compelling argument for *full* consolidation, there are nevertheless good opportunities where the 2 villages have mutually agreed to work together on potentially meaningful shared service initiatives. Working through the Village Officers Committee ('VOC') and the river town municipalities the village is finding new shared service opportunities to save money. Through the Energy Task Force and with a prudent investment return model, the village is realizing large energy savings - money back into the tax payers' pockets. We will look to do more high-energy-return projects when presented. The village has a long-term capital budget plan for future requirements and funding strategies to replace old equipment.

## *Tax Exempts as Sources of Value and Support*

The large tax exempt institutions are a big part of the fabric of Dobbs Ferry; they play important roles within the community, and beyond. In fact, almost 40% of property in Dobbs Ferry is tax exempt. The village has



spent time and developed stronger relationships with the institutions on many levels, seeking ways in which we can help each other in more ways. The formation of the Dobbs Ferry Local Development Corp ('DFLDC') has allowed Children's Village, Masters School, and Mercy College to secure beneficial tax-exempt funding for important campus projects, at no risk to the village or tax payers and separate from the village's operating budget. From this funding significant fees have been received which the DFLDC will re-invest back into the village to promote economic development and improve the quality of life for residents. New fields and courts and facilities have been created on campuses which are of benefit to residents. St Christopher's provides much support to the youth and senior programming in Dobbs Ferry. It is all important and it makes a difference and it is greatly appreciated. Steadily rising municipal costs and economic realities justify continuing discussion and dialog on other ways and strategies the tax exempts can directly contribute to help support the village. We will be doing this.

### Balanced Approach to Redevelopment

For the village's long-term fiscal health, it is important to maintain a balanced approach to re-development. Empty lots don't do anyone any good; they are ugly and they attract rats and weeds. They also generate a *negative* financial return to the village; and the longer they stay empty the longer it takes to improve things. Improvements underway in the Gateway and recently approved building lots on Main and Cedar Street will help support a downtown revitalization underway. The improved structures attract investment, new families, and new foot-traffic to support the local merchants. *Rivertowns Square* will be a unique draw along the parkway while contributing significant new economic benefits to the village treasury. A beautiful new *Waterfront Park* is to be unveiled soon, attracting visitors to support economic activity and opportunities. Balanced approach also means not everything gets approved; the board has rejected projects that do not meet balanced criteria, or which don't meet a need of the village. The board is also supporting a review of *Historical Districts in Dobbs Ferry*, to promote, protect and maintain unique and important historical qualities of the village. The reclamation of the historic *Little White Church Cemetery* – and the memorials and restoration work done to preserve this important place in history, and other initiatives underway to *enhance open spaces* – are important and paid for by development fees. More families and investment are coming to Dobbs Ferry – attracted to great schools, and an energetic pulse that comes with balance and diversity. A balanced redevelopment approach will have the most benefit to the *majority* of residents, which is the right approach for Dobbs Ferry in the long run.

### Union Contracts

Employee benefit costs make up the highest single cost of the village budget – approaching 39% this year. This level of benefit costs is unsustainable, which is why the village has continued to take a realistic and financially prudent approach with regards to negotiations of new union contracts. Through arbitration, the village and PBA (police union) were able to settle 2 back years; negotiations remain in process to get fully caught up and consider future terms. The two sides are still apart. Last year the village was pleased in the contract negotiated with the Teamsters Union, which included higher benefit contributions from new hires; this was fair and in the best interests of both sides, for our workers and for tax payers. It is important the village maintain a strong position in regards to a more realistic sharing of benefit costs going forward. This

is also the fairest approach for both sides – one that protects the viability of our local workforce, and is affordable to taxpayers, long-term

The board recognizes all the effort and work that goes into the planning and execution of the village budget. To start, Village Administrator **Marcus Serrano**, overseeing the operations of the village and planning and execution of the fiscal budget. The village Treasurer, **Jeff Chuta**, who has the responsibility for the fiscal management of the Village's finances in accordance with New York State law and the Village Code and serves as the Receiver of Taxes. *All* **Department Heads** and **Village Staff** who are dedicated and work hard to deliver services efficiently and with pride to the residents. Finally, the **ad hoc Citizens Budget Committee**, a group of volunteers working positively with the village to help find ideas that can save the village money.

Dobbs Ferry tax payers should feel good about the efforts that go into the fiscal planning of the village. The village's tax rates have been consistently on the lower-end of the peer municipal range. The village recently received one of the **best** (lowest) fiscal stress test as reported by the New York State Comptroller; and the village's bond rating was recently confirmed by the rating agencies as 'A' quality. In combination, these facts support the serious work and efforts which go into the village budgeting process ... helping to make Dobbs Ferry an attractive, affordable, and more sustainable village into the future.

### **Annual Seniors Week**

When: May 11 – 15  
Where: The Embassy Community and Senior Center  
Time: 11 am – 1 pm each day (Dinner Dance on May 15 from 5-7 pm)

Nutritional program lunches will be free for seniors for the week.

Activities and Events include: Photo-booth DJ by Rooney Tunes, Tai Chi, and Flower planting by Ellen, Card games, Exercise with Elaine, Bingo Bridge, Zumba Gold, Origami, Yoga, and the Garden Club

Vendor Day Weds May 13 includes – St Johns, Dr. United, PACE, Home Instead, Mercy College, DF Police, Livable Communities, Atrin, Bereavement Group, Nutritional Diane, and Marinella's Angels

To register for lunch call **693-0787** at least 2 days before – This week gets sold out!  
To register for all other events or more information call **693-7792**, or **693-0024**

This is a great event for seniors and many other people in the community who want to get involved. Come on down!

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Well, that is it for now. We hope everyone is enjoying a beautiful Mothers Day. We will be in touch with

another update soon. Don't hesitate to contact us if you have an idea, suggestions, or you want to get involved. Mayor Hartley Connett