

THE TAX ATTACK

Chapter III

Last month in Chapter II of this series on Village taxes, I discussed the personnel component of the annual budget that amounts to 53% of all operating expenditures. Now I'd like to highlight some of the other costs.

Operating the business of the Village, i.e., communication equipment, heat and light, motor fuel, trash collection, legal services, and maintenance and periodic replacement of operating assets (exclusive of roads and culverts) and a myriad of other costs, consumes another 42% of all operating costs. As we evaluate the cost of operating our community it is helpful to recall that in the 42% are such items as the look-around provided by the Police when our homes are unoccupied, our well equipped and very responsible Volunteer Fire Department, our efficient trash collection which facilitates the State mandate for handling of recyclables, the seasonal beautification of the Village and the maintenance of Village properties such as the community building to mention just a few. Like payroll and budgets, these costs are reviewed monthly by my office, the Mayor, Council and the professional staff. Greater detail on all these costs can be found on the Village web site (www.gatesmillsvillage.com) or you may pose your questions to me at rsform@core.com.

Perhaps the largest of the "all other" costs incurred annually by our Village are for roads and culverts. While \$200,000 plus of those costs are the missing 5% of the operating budget, they are only a small portion of the road and culvert challenge experienced by all communities. We rarely stop to think about the age and useful life of roadways (including adjacent shoulders and guard rails) and culverts and in Gates Mills there is no comprehensive record of the age of most of those assets. But it is fair to say some are quite mature and they take constant wear and abuse from traffic and the elements, particularly in winter.

Our Service Department's current estimate of the necessary capital expenditures for roads and culverts over the next five years, above an almost like amount that will be provided by the Federal and State governments and the operating budget, exceeds \$2.8 million. While at times we think of the Village as an out-of-the-way community, there are literally tens of thousands of vehicles daily which pass through the Village and add stress to our roads and culverts, and that wear takes its toll. Through periodic inspections, the Service Department maintains a long-range plan to address wear and deterioration, but even those estimates have no contingency for surprises which occur frequently.

Training and equipment for Village safety forces are an ongoing expense. Did you know that Gates Mills is a partner with seven other communities in a SWAT team? Its armored vehicles and special equipment are expensive to maintain and technological obsolescence is a frequent occurrence. The infrared body heat sensing equipment maintained by the Fire Department, while not used frequently, can be life saving during a smoke-filled house fire. The Village regularly invests in training for the safety forces to insure residents can have the most efficient services.

And so it goes. Looking at Village costs, I'm struck by the ever-growing challenge to sustain our safe and comfortable way of life in Gates Mills without overtaxing our citizens. With that thought in mind, when I next address the tax subject I plan to share with you the income side of Village finances. There you will see both opportunities and challenges.

Bob Reitman
Clerk & Tax Administrator