

THE TAX ATTACK

Chapter XI

For the third time in as many years, Gates Mills voters have rejected a Councilmatic proposal for additional tax revenue. In the most recent elections, voter turnout was low even though Ohio law now allows every registered voter to utilize the absentee ballot and even though the forms necessary to obtain such a ballot were sent to every home. About one quarter of eligible voters decided, by a roughly 55% NO vote, to reject the 1.9 mill levy which was dedicated to road and culvert repair/replacement. The messages are clear: (1) Most residents are not interested enough to cast their ballot and (2) among those who do vote, the preference is that, in the face of inflation, service be curtailed rather than maintained at current levels.

Why those harsh conclusions?

Earlier Tax Attacks have described the Village fiscal oversight and budgeting processes. While meetings of those committees (most members of which are residents but not members of Council) are posted and open to the public, rarely did any resident choose to attend, listen, question or comment. When the conclusion of the oversight review was reported, and when Council subsequently voted the 2008 budget, only one citizen rose to question any aspect of those two complex reports. Under those circumstances, it is not unreasonable to assume that no one else took issue with the reports. Yet the recent vote signals that there are hundreds who think the conclusions of those processes were flawed. Further, one might assume that, because none of our elected officials were opposed for election to their current term, their judgment is respected. Obviously both assumptions are erroneous.

The NO vote means that members of Council must now address providing as much service as revenues available will allow. The necessity for change is further exacerbated by current inflationary trends in Northeastern Ohio, which are about 60% greater than prior Village estimates. Make no mistake, there will be changes.

A continuing priority is to insure that monies are being spent only for necessities. Expenses dedicated to the health and safety of our citizens and employees will be of high priority. The funds which would have been received from the failed levy beginning in 2009 equal about 10% of the Village operating budget. Council will likely consider service cuts in every department, but all costs are not susceptible to ratable downsizing. Some of Council's options would reduce service. Others may transfer costs such as garbage removal directly to residents or bill residents for individual services, such as security alarm monitoring. Perhaps closing a road with an unsafe culvert will suffice until resources become available.

The next several months will be interesting as Council devises their response to the attitudes of their constituents.

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