

**To: Ancram Town Board**

**From: Art Bassin**

**Date: 5/17/2011**

**Subject: Supervisor's Report – April 2011**



**Financial Report:** Revenues and expenses are on budget for the first four months of 2011, in both the Highway Department and Town Government. Ancram's total spending for the first four months was \$532,000. The Highway Department's ability to stay on budget is exceptional given a combination of high fuel costs, the costs of the cleanup of the March ice storm and higher than expected snow removal costs during the first quarter.

Cash in the bank as of 4/30/11 was \$1.2 million. We expect to receive an additional \$440,000 in sales and mortgage tax revenues, state highway aid and town fees over the rest of the year, and incur budgeted expenses of about \$950,000 between now and the end of the year which would leave us with about \$ 636,000 in the bank as budgeted. We expect to receive FEMA aid for the December 26 storm, and may get FEMA aid to deal with the costs of the March storms, but the timing and amount of this aid is still uncertain.

In any event, your Town Board has decided to pursue our Highway Department "catch-up" capital spending program, \$175,000 this year, taking advantage of some special "deals" and cost-effective plans: the new front end loader (\$85,000), a salt shed (\$50,000) and two used plow trucks (\$40,000). We expect to fund these capital projects with a combination of spending cuts, contingency funds, unbudgeted revenues, and some allocation from our cash reserves. With this approach, we should end the year with the bulk of the Highway capital spending complete and at least \$500,000 in the bank.

## **Projects & Activities Highlights**

1. **New playground:** It is being installed this week, and should be done by the time we meet on Thursday.
2. **New Ethics Law:** The Ethics Board has dealt with two ethics issues in the last month, and has received a third.
3. **Salt Shed:** The Garage Committee will be coming to the Town Board at the May meeting to recommend a \$50,000 salt shed project.
4. **Town laws on the internet:** General Code completed putting all town laws on the internet. Access is available on the home page of Ancram's web site.
5. **Highway Employee Manual:** The draft of a manual for highway department employees will be sent to the Town Board for review this week.
6. **Zoning Revisions:** Hugh Clark and the ZRC will present the first part of the proposed revisions to zoning at the may TB meeting.
7. **Agriculture and Farmland Protection Plan:** The Plan will be considered for adoption at the May meeting.

8. **Emergency Preparedness Plan:** We will incorporate “lessons learned” from our March 6-7-8 experience in the emergency preparedness plan, and have a draft for the TB to review by mid-year.
9. **Better Cell service:** ATT and Mariner Tower Development have identified a site which meets ATT requirements, and the landowner is agreeable.
10. **Review and revise town fees:** John MacArthur and Madeleine Israel will lead this effort, and will be reporting on progress over the next few months.
11. **2012 Budget Process:** We will start the 2012 budget cycle in June. I will develop a preliminary 2011 budget for your review that assumes no town property tax increase again in 2012.

## County Issues

1. **County Manager:** The County continues to work on developing a proposal for the County Manager position. This position is essential to provide full time leadership and professional management for the County’s 1000 employees and \$150 million annual operating budget. The County Manager proposal will go to the Board of Supervisors in June for a vote. The County Manager committee is developing a document outlining the “case” for the county manager, which should be available to the supervisors and the public before the end of May. By way of background, Columbia County is one of a handful of NY’s 58 counties outside of NYC that does not already have a county executive, county manager or county administrator serving as the chief operating officer of the county. This may be the reason that Columbia County has the highest per capita county taxes among the 20 counties about our size (counties with populations between 40,000 and 80,000). While the cost of a County Manager may be \$150,000 annually, it is likely the County would be able to save at least ten times that cost on an annual basis over the next five years.
2. **HR Department Deputy:** At last week’s meeting, the County Board of Supervisors rejected a request from the head of the County Human Resources Department to hire a deputy at a salary of \$60,000. I voted in favor of this position because it is a key area, like the County Manager spot, where more management resources will lead to lower costs and taxes. Background: the county is an organization of 1000 active employees and 300 retirees. We deal with four Unions. The HR function was just set up and staffed a couple of years ago, and has a Director and one secretary. The Director is a good manager, but this is just not enough staff resource to manage the workforce, provide cost effective health insurance, handle union negotiations and employee grievances and arbitrations, develop a personnel policy manual, and train our managers and supervisors on proper personnel practices to avoid grievances and arbitrations. (Grievances alone cost the County \$100,000 per year.) The HR department needs the additional management help. I will continue to support the effort to hire a good manager into this job.
3. **Wal-mart Consolidation:** The County has decided to manage the Wal-mart project itself and take the Columbia Resources Corporation out of the mix. This should simplify the management of the project, decrease the overall costs of the effort and

result in a better quality building at whatever cost. The next major milestone is to hire an architect to do the design so the project can go out to bid.

4. **County Budget:** The 2013 County budgeting process will start in June.
5. **2011 County Elections:** 18 of the 23 town supervisors are up for election in November 2011. This is likely to slow down the pace of progress at the county before and after the election as new supervisors come up to speed.