

Conversation with the Mayor February 6, 2008

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Budget Crunch

You may have heard me say last year, the year before, or the year before that, that I hate budget time. We are in budget prep season again and my attitude has not changed. It isn't the work, although there is a lot of time and effort required in the process. It is having to pick and choose and say no to worthwhile projects which would be beneficial to the village residents because we simply cannot afford them. We are always aware that we are dealing with other people's money, not our own.

The process starts officially in mid-December when each of the department heads receives a packet of budget forms which have to be completed and returned to the Village Clerk/Treasurer by mid-January. In the next step, the Board meets with each of the six department heads to review his budget. The departments are Buildings & Grounds, Fire Department, Highway, Justice Court, Police, and Water & Sewer. We have been doing it this way for the last several years and have found it to be an excellent use of time. Once again, this year, the department heads have planned well and have demonstrated an understanding of our financial constraints in spending. Cooperation between departments in ordering, manpower and equipment use is of tremendous assistance in budget planning.

While this is going on, the Village Clerk/Treasurer and our financial advisor work with this year's numbers to project where we will be at the end of the fiscal year, May 31st. They also identify set expenses like salaries and contracts. They project, as closely as possible, anticipated increases in insurance and pension costs. We did the same with the cost of fuel in our discussions with department heads. Revenues are also analyzed and included.

The next step, which we took at the last meeting is to put all these numbers together - and then gasp. The first look at the budget is with absolutely every request included, financially, a worst case scenario. Having recovered, we start the incredibly hard job of pulling everything together to create a budget which maintains the services that the residents of Palmyra want and expect and, at the same time, sets a realistic tax rate. We will keep working toward that end during the Village Board meetings leading up to the Public Hearing on March 17th, St. Patrick's Day. All meetings are open to the public, are in the Village Hall, and will begin at 6:30 PM. The regular Board meeting will follow.

Do you know about Palmyra's Antique Trail? That's the name a writer for an area newspaper has coined to describe the four antique shops in Palmyra, all on East Main Street. Starting on the east side, up opposite of Breen's at 610 East Main Street is Douglas Hare Antiques. Moving west, you come to Dean George's Palmyra Canal Shop & Antique Center at 323 East Main. Just down the street, also on the north side, is Brickhouse Antique Center at 247

East Main. Cross the street and walk just another half block and you will come to DJ's Variety at 220 East Main. What is particularly nice about these four intriguing shops is the fact that they complement each other in offerings and the owners work together to provide the shopper with information and advice as well as one of a kind treasures. They themselves are a treasure. If you have not traveled our Antique Trail, plan a day and do so. And when you do make a note of our other fine shops and plan a second day to browse, buy, and chat with the owners. And don't forget lunch in the village! You will be too busy to cook.

Sometimes Breen's has white bags; sometimes Breen's has blue bags. Right now you can get a green bag, a re-useable green bag available for a nominal amount for taking your purchases home. The green bags are sturdy, more commodious than plastic, and, in general a very good idea - and not just for groceries. I have four, one more than I needed for my last shopping trip, so I took the extra into Family Dollar to carry home what I bought there. They will live in the trunk of the car for convenience. The only real trick, to begin with, is to remember that they are there. Old habits are hard to break, but it can happen.