

Municipal Budget Cuts Will Affect Services

By Mayor Frank Gatti

The Readington Township Committee held its first 2011 Municipal Budget meeting on Feb. 28. In order for the township to meet its goal of stabilizing the tax rate while dealing with the drop in revenues and a shrinking ratable base, it must continue to make significant cuts in expenditures. Unfortunately, these cuts will affect service to the residents of the township. Areas to cut will be identified as budget discussions continue. On the positive side, Governor Chris Christie has indicated that state aid to municipalities will be "similar" to last year.

During this year's budget process, the Township Committee will continue to examine all expenditures on a line-by-line basis. This is an effort to identify potential items which can be further reduced with minimal impact to municipal services. Prior to the start of the current economic downturn which began in 2008, the committee recognized the need to reduce staff and began the process of examining the staffing of all departments. In an effort to keep the tax rate stable year-to-year the committee began looking

at the budget process in two-year increments. It was through this process that we began to make necessary staff reductions through attrition and job consolidation. As a result, the township reduced its work force by approximately 8 percent. There were also reductions made in operating expenses for most departments while at the same time reducing expenditures for legal and engineering services. Our budget is at the same level today as it was in 2007 and it has been reduced by 5.8 percent since 2008. The township will be looking at additional shared service opportunities as a way to further reduce costs.

It is clear that the preparation of the 2011 budget will present challenges as we move forward, but the Township Committee remains committed to doing our best to keep our tax rate stable. Visit the township website at www.readingtontwp.org/mayor-scorner for supplementary information on township services and expenditures. If you have questions or would like to comment on this process or make recommendations please email me at mayor@township.readington.nj.us.