

For immediate release

From: William J Weber

Date: December 13, 2016

Subject: **11% TAX RATE INCREASE & FINANCIAL CONDITION OF RAMAPO**

The Ramapo Town Board unanimously adopted the 2017 budget on November 19<sup>th</sup>. I requested a copy of that budget via a FOIL request on November 21<sup>st</sup>, but the Town denied my FOIL request by not responding within the prescribed 5-day timeframe. Therefore, I had to appeal the request for the budget to the Town attorney and the NYS Committee on Open Government. The Town finally turned over a copy of the adopted budget to me, and other media outlets, on December 7<sup>th</sup>. Once I got a copy of the budget, I could see why they were reluctant to turn it over. The adopted budget for the year 2017 has a nearly **11% tax increase**. These major tax increases are poisonous to everyone here in Ramapo, especially our seniors on fixed incomes, all homeowners, and all our commercial property owners.

Included with this large tax increase are other items in the adopted budget that are concerning to me, namely:

1. The CSEA contract expired in 2015. What is the progress of negotiations and how will that impact this adopted budget?
2. The Town has hired SEC attorneys to defend the Town and Town employees currently under SEC enforcement action. This could easily amount to tens of thousands of dollars (or more) and seems to not have been addressed in this budget. Please note that the auditing firm paid fines in excess of \$500,000, and one could reasonably assume that the Town will also be liable for significant amounts in fines during this upcoming year.
3. The 2017 adopted budget shows \$1,400,000 in anticipated revenue from tax collectors fees. This is a dramatic decrease from previous years, mainly due to the anticipation that the governor would sign the bill allowing Ramapo Central School District to collect their own taxes. Now that the governor, in my opinion, has wrongly vetoed that bill, will the town amend the budget to put this revenue back in the budget and what is their plan for the impact on spending?
4. The 2016 adopted budget included \$1,850,000 in anticipated revenue for the sale of 24 Grosser Lane. This sale, however, was blocked by local residents in an Article 78 filing. The claim is that the Town doesn't own that property and therefore can't sell it.
5. There is \$2,013,000 in anticipated revenue in the 2017 adopted budget related to the sale of Town property. Is this new property that the Town is selling or did they put the anticipated sale of Grosser Lane from the 2016 adopted budget back into the 2017 adopted budget along with another anticipated property sale? Why is the town continually selling property to fill budget gaps?
6. Why is the Town only allocating \$101,600 for code enforcement, especially in light of the rebuke they got from the NYS Secretary of State for shoddy and non-existent inspections?

7. The police budget reflects a nearly \$4,800,000 increase, when a recent 2016 Town press release noted that Ramapo was one of the safest towns in NYS to live. I am an ardent supporter of maintaining our safe community and deeply respect the members of our police department. My father and uncle are retired NYPD and my two brothers are active NYPD. In light of the recent media reports regarding the overtime abuse by the former Chief, has this number been properly scrutinized?

### **FINANCIAL CONDITION OF THE TOWN**

The year 2017 is just three weeks away and the Town has still not completed and issued any audited financial statements since 12/31/2014. That means that the NYS Comptroller's office and the public at large have no information about the financial condition of the Town for nearly two whole years. That should be unacceptable to everyone and is just bad practice. The Town and public are relying on budgets for years 2015, 2016 and now 2017 without knowing how these numbers line up against actual numbers for 2015 and 2016. Everywhere else, other municipalities and private business alike, budgets are based on actual income and expenditures from the most recent years, not solely on previous budgets.