

**February 13, 2018**

**Supervisor's report**

As I try to compose my thoughts on this cold February day, the sun is shining brightly into the windows of Oswego Town Hall. I'm taking this as a good omen of bright days ahead for the Town. Fiscally, 2017 was a rough year for the Town. Early in the year we were informed by the NY State Comptroller's office that the Town was likely in fiscal stress. This lead directly to a field audit from NYS, which began in June, and to a formal letter confirming the status of fiscal stress in September. Meetings with the auditors over the course of the summer repeatedly revealed areas regarding the Town's record keeping, financial controls, bookkeeping and budgeting that were in need of improvement. Further, predictions were made that the Town was likely to continue to be in financial difficulty for the remainder of the year and indeed, likely for several years to come.

As a result of this, ALL of the Towns' elected officials began to work in earnest to correct our problems. One of the main needs was a 'tightening of the belt' for all departments within the Town. Further, it was evident that successfully resolving the problems would require good team work and a constant scrutiny of the budget and all revenues and expenditures. Happily, our Town officials were up to the task, and I am pleased to note that all this hard work is beginning to show results. We have closed the books for 2017, and despite the dire predictions we appear to be fiscally headed in a positive direction. Our bookkeeper has closed the books for 2017, and the result is that the Town will have a surplus this year. In fact, while this is a small surplus, this will be only the fourth year since 2006 that the Town has contributed to the Fund Balance instead of relying on this Fund Balance to maintain basic operations. A hearty thanks to all involved!

This is not to say that there isn't more hard work and fiscal monitoring to be done in the future. The Town is working to develop long range planning as well as better controls and procedures regarding budgeting, record and bookkeeping, and Information Technology. All of the officials of the Town of Oswego are committed to our Town and continuing to have the Town be a good place to live and to raise families.

As I have repeatedly stated in the past, in this era of fiscal constraints at all levels of government, it is no longer sufficient to rely on the local populace for taxes to maintain the essential services of the Town. While we will do all we can to try to maintain low tax rates and to cut expenses where possible, it is necessary to look for additional sources of revenues and services. The Town is committed to examining ways to share services with our neighboring municipalities and will actively participate with the County of Oswego as they work on a County Shared Services Plan. Included in this month's agenda are several requests to pursue grants or alternative funding sources. While there is always an expense related to seeking grants, there are also hidden costs to the tax payers if property taxes continue to be the only means for maintaining the equipment and services needed for the Town to operate efficiently. One key is to monitor all associated costs and to ensure that any additional funding secured also reimburses for expenses incurred.

One good example of this process is the Town's continuing efforts to secure FEMA funding for damages to roads and culverts as a result of last year's flooding due to the high-water levels of Lake Ontario. Initial review of damages indicated that the Town hadn't incurred major damages. Given the workload already being carried by a highway department that every year must 'try to do more with less', it didn't appear worth the extra man-hours needed to inventory all possible damage and to maintain all the seemingly needed need for paperwork and documentation. As the highway superintendent and Town supervisor reviewed the requirements, it was jointly decided to move forward and to seek damage claims. After discussions and several meetings with FEMA, it was learned that likely damages, as estimated by FEMA were about \$10,000. The highway superintendent continued to work with FEMA and with the appointed Town Engineer. In doing so, it was determined that we likely had damages that were not visible, and issues, that if not corrected, would result in expenses to the Town far greater than initial estimates indicated. As a result, the Town of Oswego is currently pursuing damages and mitigation efforts likely more than ten-fold over initial costs. By establishing good documentation and resources the Town is in line to recover all expenses incurred and to further provide needed improvements to several town roads and culverts.

Additionally, this month, we have met with representatives from Lakeside Commons and are moving forward with the plans and agreements for the replacement of the Ontario Heights pumping station. This is just one more indicator of growth within the

Town of Oswego. As we prepare for the coming year and work on formalizing long-range plans and goals, it is easy to feel positive about the future of our fine town.