



Office of the Mayor

An Important Property Tax Message from Mayor Michael Melham

Dear Taxpayer -

Today you are receiving your 2019 Final/2020 Preliminary Tax Bill. Since the Township is responsible for the billing of property taxes, your tax bill is inclusive of School taxes, County taxes, Municipal property taxes and other assessments. The increase is \$132 for municipal purposes on the average assessed house. Please do not take this increase and multiply it by four quarters, this amount reflects the total increase for the year. The \$132 equates to raising an additional \$1.2M for municipal purposes.

Last year, in the first budget during my tenure, the Council approved a tax increase of \$99, which was inclusive of County, Municipal and School Board. However, some residents saw their taxes increase more than that... It was the combination of the State mandated revaluation and the added, \$50 Million School District Referendum (November 2017) assessment.

Speaking of the School District referendum from a few years ago, please know, the Township Council **DID NOT** vote on this, nor did the School Board. Rather, this was a question presented to voters at the polls. This may shock you, but of Belleville's 36,000 population and 19,000 registered voters; it was less than 2,000 residents that decided to increase all our taxes, automatically, every year, for the next two decades. That's why I always encourage voter participation.

While this year's total municipal budget is up \$6.07M from last year, please do not be fooled by this number. Better yet, don't let others fool you. Much of this increase is from an anticipation of additional revenue (income). For example, we will have an increase in construction code permits income directly related to several large scale redevelopment projects. The good news is that we receive a windfall in permit fees. Then, eventually, we finally receive the much needed annual revenue those projects pay to the Township. The overall lack of development and lack of new tax ratable's continues to plague us. Hopefully, not for long.

Back to the here and now. If you have been following our progress, you would know that we have been doing more with less. Our new, full-time, professional Township Manager, who earns the exact same amount as his part-time predecessor, has made an immediate impact.

- As of October 2019, we have fewer municipal employees, then previous years.
- DPW overtime has dropped significantly; from averaging \$22,000/biweekly to approximately \$2,400/biweekly
- Lower salaries of all new employees; starting at \$38K, which is 1/3 that of retiring employees (\$110K in total)

I remain committed to all our residents, especially children and seniors. I fought hard for free PreK, which came by way of a \$900,000 grant from the State at no cost to Belleville. In the past few weeks alone, we delivered a new bingo board to our senior clubs and a new 'Dial a Ride' bus. I'm also still committed to a 'Senior' newsletter to keep our seniors informed.

That said, I've been in office for 15 months, and our residents must still deal with past sins... Our great Fire and Police Departments went nearly four years without a contract. This was an injustice if you ask me. This budget includes more than \$1 Million in contractually obligated retro-active pay. Between the 2018 and 2019 budgets, taxpayers spent nearly \$800,000 in lawsuit losses and payouts mostly stemming from political retaliation. While we continue to pay for it, thankfully the individuals who perpetuated this are gone, and we haven't had a similar type of lawsuit filed in years.

There is good news. Property values in Belleville are way up, meaning your house is worth more today than a few years ago!

Sincerely,

Mayor Michael Melham