

BROOKHAVEN TOWN

'Minimal' tax hike in '19 budget plan

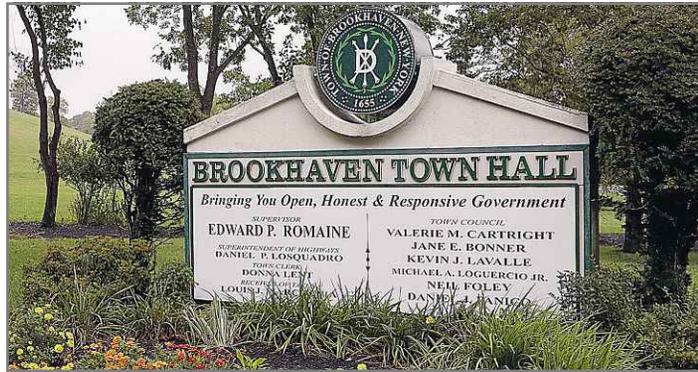
Worker payments, snow removal drive \$8M increase

BY CARL MACGOWAN
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Brookhaven's proposed 2019 town budget includes a "minimal increase" in property taxes and increased spending for snow removal, employee salaries and benefits, town officials said last week.

The tentative \$302.4 million spending plan would increase spending overall by about \$8 million, or 2.9 percent, if the town board approves it in November.

The largest share of the spending increase is related to \$5.4 million in salary increases for the town's unionized employees, Supervisor Edward P. Romaine said Friday during a



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The \$302M budget includes a 2.3 percent pay hike for employees.

news conference at Brookhaven Town Hall in Farmingville. The employees are due a 2.36 percent raise next year, he said.

He added town officials are anticipating a possible wave of retirements next year, when a 10-year contract with the Civil Service Employees Association union expires.

Health insurance premiums

for town employees are expected to go up about 9 percent next year, officials said.

Romaine said the budget is "structurally balanced" for the first time in at least a decade, meaning surpluses will not be used to support spending. He added that the town plans to eliminate more than \$45 million in debt, including \$15.8 mil-

lion in pension debt.

"We have ended deficit spending, which is about time," Romaine said. "We put money aside in a savings account for future expenses."

Brookhaven Director of Operations Matt Miner said tax increases would vary, depending on whether homes are located inside or outside villages. He said all tax hikes would be less than the 2 percent maximum increase allowed by the state tax cap. The town did not have available more specific figures on individual property tax increases.

Garbage district fees would remain flat at \$350 per home, Miner said.

Romaine said funds for snow removal would increase by about \$300,000, and the town would set aside an additional \$3 million for road maintenance.

"We have a heck of a lot of roads in Brookhaven Town," he said. "I want to make sure

[Highway Superintendent Dan Losquadro] has the resources he needs to do the job."

Town Councilman Neil Foley of Blue Point said the budget was "very fair," though he acknowledged some residents may be disappointed that the town doesn't plan to spend more on park upgrades and other improvements.

"We are making tough decisions now because we don't want to kick the can down the road," Foley said. "We do have to make tough decisions every year."

In addition to the operating budget, town officials are proposing a capital budget that includes \$60 million in new projects, Finance Commissioner Tamara Wright said.

Miner said public hearings on both budgets would be held at 5:30 p.m. on Nov. 8 at town hall. The town board is expected to adopt the budgets on Nov. 20, he said.

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