Hi All.

Last Thursday (November 6th) I attended the Public Hearing on the Southeast 2009 budget.

Gosh, remember the good old days when budget time rolled around? There'd be maybe three interested souls in the audience. Now the place is packed.

Trouble sleeping? Typically those meetings were far more effective than a cocktail of Ambien and Lunestra chased by a shot of Tequila and, as an added bonus, probably had fewer side effects. Back then I asked questions, made suggestions and was ultimately ignored. Now I get to ask questions, make suggestions and then listen to pointless unresolved bickering, obnoxious gavel banging, and endless finger pointing. But, after the dust settles, tradition prevails, and I'm still summarily ignored.

Most of the 'Public Hearing' consisted of the 'Old Guard' and 'Team SOS' going at it tooth and nail. In a stroke of genius there were visual aids. Councilman Honeck passed out fancy pie charts (in color, no less!!!) and Supervisor Rights held a professional looking poster aloft (actually causing him to lose 'gavel control' for an instant), to illustrate how totally hosed we are by our Town Attorney (more on this later) compared to every other town in Putnam County.

The coveted 'Hindquarters' award was won by Councilman Yee. I knew we'd hit rock bottom when Yee once again mentioned Joe Vera of town website/garage-built-computer fame. Audience members did give Yee a run for his money as those in favor of restoring library funding went on and on and on... While the love and interest in the library is well-founded and the restored funding imperative, the Supervisor could have saved us all a lot of time and angst had he informed the audience that a majority of the Board would be voting in favor of the full funding.

I momentarily wondered about this complete time waster until I realized this gave Yee a bully pulpit to 'blackmail' (oops, illegal, figure of speech, make that 'pressure') pressure the present Library Board. Yee kept insisting he'd back '09 funding if, and only if, a Library District was formed. Note to Dwight: Your vote wasn't needed so the bluster was entirely wasted. Anyhow, the 'logic' used under the guise of reducing our taxes was truly hilarious. In point of fact, forming a district can result in higher taxes as a separate 'Library Line' on all tax bills is created- just as garbage and fire are broken out now. Of course, the best part for incumbents... any increase in funding can then be blamed on the Library Board rather than your friendly elected officials.

Oh, and don't miss 'The Case of the Missing Videographer' and the intrigue of purposely covered mics. You'll be breathless with suspense.

And there's more, lots more.... I'll leave it for the recap itself.

As always the jaded, fed-up, eye-rolling views expressed are mine alone. They represent no organization to which I belong.

Work Session/Special Meeting:

1) Dunmore Corporation:

Paul Sullivan gave a presentation of Dunmore Corporation planned addition. The blue building between Route 6 and Route 84 (East) had been before the Architectural Review Board and approved. I asked why the blue building color had not been changed as this had been repeatedly requested. Mr. Sullivan said that it was too costly to redo the siding and that painting the building wouldn't last. Some of the ARB agreed although Eric Cyprus stated that he felt the color should be changed and the ARB had been split on this. The Town Board asked Mr. Sullivan to look into replacing the siding and attend the next ARB meeting and the December 4th TB meeting.

2) Storm water Remediation at Croton Falls:

This referral from the Planning Board was tabled.

3) Certiorari Settlements:

- a) Quinn v. Assessor
- b) Keramidas v. Assessor
- c) Allison v. Assessor

All were passed 5-0 with no fiscal impact to the town.

4) Base Proportions for 2009

Proposal from Tax Assessor accepted. No discussion. 5-0

PUBLIC HEARING:

2009 Preliminary Budget:

Supervisor Rights said that he and Councilman Yee had cut the budget by 10.12% (approximately \$60 per average household)- as they had promised during their campaign but that the budget now submitted cut taxes by only 1.4% (a savings of about \$7).

The original cuts to the Library (\$18,000), Museum (\$10,000) had been restored. As had \$100,000 to the Highway Department and funding to underwrite possible litigation.

Because of the global fiscal crisis the renovations at Lakeview Manor and Old Town Hall will have to be carefully watched. The Landfill closure would be very expensive as well.

It was noted that the garbage contract had increased by 3%.

Councilman Honeck passed out a pie chart and comparison of SE taxes compared to other towns in Putnam County. This chart illustrated how much lower our taxes are than any other towns. For example (according to the statistics provided) the average home (\$400,000) in SE pays \$491.06 while Kent (the most highly taxed town in Putnam) pays \$2,057.58.

There was a great deal of bickering about the tax cuts with Councilman Gross insisting that now was not the time to 'raid the fund balance' as credit is so tight. Yee pointed out that they would be using only \$500,000 of the balance leaving us with \$4,000,000. Road safety and the Town Attorney's fees were discussed. Rights said that Willis 'does a commendable job' but then held up a poster with the following stats comparing Town Attorney fees in other towns.

2006 Town Attorney Fees (including outside counsel):
Carmel: \$125,000 Southeast: \$246,176
Kent: \$119,000 Patterson: \$202,142 Putnam Valley: \$95,000

Pawling \$45,000

There was more back and forth re. the global financial crisis, a 10% raise for the Fire Inspector, a letter on why the fund balance should not be touched from an accountant who audits SE. In addition Supervisor Rights said that that the town hired videographer was mysteriously missing from the meeting and that the mics (placed by his personal videographer) for Honeck, Gross, Johnson, Mazzei and Stephens had all been covered over so as not to record.

The audience then asked the Board to restore funds to the library and Museum. Audience members also chastised the Board for their continued poor and embarrassing behavior. One speaker said she had heard that Councilman Yee had recently run-down Southeast at a Pawling Forum. Matt Neuringer spoke about Dick Honeck's lack of initiative in bringing business to Southeast.

I asked questions and stated I felt the revenue projection of \$225,000 from the Planning Board was still too

high. Rights felt the increased fees would account for this.

I asked if the Supervisor and Board salaries would increase. Ans. Yes. 2.5% like all other employees.

I also mentioned the large increase for the Peaceable Hill Water District and thus the hike in administrative fees. The Board felt the increased administrative fees were justified.

There were several other comments regarding the Board's dysfunction and the Public Hearing was closed.

Supervisor Rights then tried to revert to his tentative budget. This failed 3-2. The preliminary budget was passed 3-2 (with Yee and Rights voting no).

Comments/Opinion:

Dunmore Corporation:

This project has taken months and months and months. Dunmore was told to beef up their landscaping and then illustrate it as it would look when first planted. They did. Dunmore was given variances and when in front of the ZBA was requested to try to change the building color from blue to a more neutral tone. They didn't.

It kills me when companies are granted variances and then completely ignore requests to improve the way they look. Frankly, this is the only time we can request aesthetic upgrades. Companies are awarded a variance/ 'favor' so that they can continue to do business in this town. The least residents should receive in return is a more attractive site. Honestly, it's not a whole lot to ask. Particularly with a company who deals with toxic chemicals. Scheesh- how'd Fields Lane escape this biz?

Public Hearing:

This devolved rapidly into Old Guard/SOS finger pointing. It was both tedious and exhausting. Although I must say the new use of 'visual aids' was really fun and upped the circus ante.

The most remarkable part was the length of time the Board spent backbiting while the public wasn't allowed to speak. And when the public was finally included and either asked a question or made a statement this led to yet another barrage of endless back and forth. Did not, did too, did not, did too... well, you get the point. How do these guys have the stamina? And if this skill were marketable would we become richer than Dubai?

Look, we all know that the 10% 'tax reduction' was simply a scam to keep a Rights/Yee campaign pledgeand thus not have to cut their salaries as they had indicated in one of their fib-filled campaign mailers. It shouldn't escape anyone that Rights and Yee didn't turn down their 2.5% pay raise because they wanted 'everyone's increase to be consistent'. Yeah, thanks for leading by example. Too bad hypocrisy isn't marketable- we'd own the world.

Of course, 2.5% is merely symbolic but next time the Board throws 'global financial crisis' at us we should remember all *their* sacrifices. And we should all remember Dwight and DMR throwing our non-profits under the budget bus. Still, I take some small solace in the Board's salary increase- because even if they'd voted themselves a 50% pay hike, given the length of these meetings, they'd still be making way less per hour than they did in '07.

As for those attorney's fees... I've ragged on the Town Board and Willis for years about this. Still, does anyone really trust Rights' figures? I'd bet Temple Beth Dunford there's some component missing. I have some calls in to determine if we're really comparing apples to apples and then I'll vent.

In 'The Case of the Missing Videographer' I have to say that I too found it odd that Mr. Rotchford was MIA. That aside, Rights went completely over the top when he 'unveiled' the covered microphones in front of everyone but Yee. The flair with which he overturned tape and other assorted mic cover-ups was only lacking a top hat, wand and rabbit. But really, who wants to be recorded for some sh*tty SOS infomercial that'll be used in robo calls next month or our local elections next year. I don't blame the 'Old Guard' because there'll undoubtedly be lots of tape left on Mr. Miller's cutting room floor when these recordings are finally 'used'.

The rarely awarded 'What's **HE** doing here?' trophy unsurprising went to Matt Neuringer. Neuringer is always great fun at these meetings. He slithers in like he owns the place then proceeds to text message his little ('little' being the operative word) heart out. At some point he decides it's time to make a point and

last week he went into attack overdrive against Honeck. Hmmmm, Honeck's up for re-election next year. Uh oh... do I smell another Neuringer candidacy?

On another disconcerting note when I mentioned that Planning Board revenue estimates seemed high, Rights indicated that there might be a large project coming to SE next year- and he didn't mean Stateline. I'm betting on Leplerville- but this bears watching.

Finally, while most of you probably live outside a Special District you should know how our town handles them- often not well. For a complete horror show check out the Springhouse District. Anyhow, the Peaceable Hill Water District is going up an astounding amount (from \$208,943 in '07 to \$240,000 in '09). This is because the village has increased their cost per gallon for residents outside the village. So, despite no planned infrastructure improvements the town is increasing their 'administrative fees' from \$10,392 in '07 to \$20,000 in '09. This increase is based solely on a percentage- it is *not* based on a heftier workload but merely sending out higher bills. This is a ridiculous way to do business. Basically the Town Board is inflicting additional increases on a district that's getting clobbered by new water rates.

All in all this was another hideous meeting. It really convinced me that the new court metal detector parked in the hallway might better serve as a Lysol shower on the way out. Because honestly, these meetings make you feel dirty-like some really creepy voyeur.

That's finally it from my desk. Please feel free to e-mail me any questions or comments that you may have.

With Best Regards, Lynne Eckardt