

Hearths & Crafts

What's In It for Me, Part Two

by Dr. Richard H. Craft

Picking up right where I left off last month, let me attempt to answer the age-old question that tries to balance our taxes versus services received.

Being the proud owner of that 100-foot road frontage, you automatically become a member of that select group called The Tax Payer. You now not only pay for the road maintenance that allows you to travel, but you also now share in paying for your municipal government. If you are also a resident of the village of Ellenville, your forefathers added the luxury of village government on top of your town obligations.

Therefore many of you are paying for duplication of services which just adds to the burden of taxation.

What are some of the taxes you are paying? There are water & sewer, salaries for municipal employees, health & retirement benefits, supplies, operation & maintenance costs, the cost for maintaining a court, building departments, tax assessor, records-keeping, transfer station (we used to call it "the dump"), parks, recreation, equipment and, for those in the village, the cost of a police department.

This scenario is duplicated in town after town across the country. To complicate matters, it doesn't stop there, for then we have the county taxes which covers such areas as the sheriff's department, the county jail and infirmary, county roads, community college, tourism, economic development, motor vehicle department, welfare, mental health, courts, waste removal, plus those costs of operation.

For all of our complaining, which at times seems to be justified, all of the issues just mentioned are essential for our safety, care in crises, physical & emotional protection, our well-being, our rights as citizens, our mobility, and the assurance of a smooth transition when we all get old.

Is there waste? Possibly. Do citizens have the right to point out areas of waste and inefficiency to municipal boards? They most certainly do, and are encouraged to suggest alternatives. Can we get County, State, Federal agencies to work more efficiently and with less wasted time? Probably not. Will our taxes decrease? Only

on rare occasions, but don't plan on it and don't spend it all in one place if it does come.

Whether we like it or not, each governmental agency that is required to present a budget spends long hours on questions YOU feel have an easy answer when it comes to reducing taxes. Life in general – regulations, special-interest groups, greed, due process – has become so complicated that most public officials at one time or another get just as frustrated, angry, and confused as the taxpayer. You, at least, can call up the Mayor or the Supervisor and vent your feelings, but the public official has no one to turn to for his complaints and those of his/her constituency. The higher you go, the less accessible is the general rule of complaint.

One case in point, and then we'll leave this issue. I know of a township that faced the pleasant thought of receiving a six-figure reimbursement from the State. They would use this windfall to reduce a large indebtedness, thus reducing taxes. By the time investigators were finished with the town, they had "uncovered" two small items which was nitpicking at its worst. The end result was that the town, by default, was now out of the reimbursement, and correcting this minor issue was going to cost the town six figures! You'd like to pull someone's hair out. It was not fair. If the State wants to they can always find something wrong, and boy will it cost you.

So before we make too much of an issue of the lack of service and the amount of taxes we pay for just that 100-foot road frontage, stop and consider what we get for what we do pay. When you stop and think of it, think of the tax burden for those in Orange and Rockland County, the traffic and congestion, the quality of life, the overcrowded schools. Thank you... I'll stay right here even though taxes are horrendous and it hurts.

As my mentor Henny Youngman said, "Just think, when you get your next raise you can then afford to pay last year's taxes." He further added, "After paying your taxes, you now know how a cow feels after milking." 🌱

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