

TOWN OF BETHLEHEM

Albany County - New York

OFFICE OF THE SUPERVISOR

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John H. Cunningham
Town Supervisor

March 31, 2009

As a resident of the Town of Bethlehem, you have been selected at random to participate in a survey that will help provide constructive information regarding the future of our Town.

Bethlehem town government is committed to serving the needs of our community by providing valuable services such as; our water and sanitation systems, parks facilities, recreational programs, road maintenance, sidewalks, police and public safety services, a nationally recognized senior's service program and various operational and administrative functions. Currently, these programs and services account for 12% of a property owner's tax obligation, but these costs continue to rise.

In the coming years, the Town must prepare to address growing infrastructure issues and improvements that have been created from normal usage and deferred maintenance. We also need to address many of our facility deficiencies, which continue to challenge our ability to operate efficiently while meeting the needs of our residents. These issues are not unique to Bethlehem. What is unique is our effort to plan now for our future needs so that we can maintain property values and provide for a viable and sustainable community. To this end the Bethlehem 20/20 Committee was created. The Committee, which is comprised of individuals from many diverse occupations and interest groups here in Town, has been meeting over the last year to strategize about the future direction of our Town Government, and help provide guidance to our Town Board on how they might best manage these issues.

As part of this process, we want to hear your opinions on the important issues facing our Town. This survey has been developed to help the Bethlehem 20/20 Committee and others in Town Government evaluate key budgeting and service issue, as well as consider how the Town should proceed relative to our future needs.

To ensure that results are representative of resident opinion, it is important that your survey be completed and returned by April 10, 2009. Surveys should be returned by refolding and sealing this mailer so that the Town of Bethlehem postage paid address is displayed. Tabulation of survey results will be completed by **Policy Research Associates, Inc.** who has donated their time and expertise as a service to the Town.

Thank you for your interest and involvement in this project. We appreciate your willingness to help shape the future of our community.

John H. Cunningham
Town Supervisor

Town of Bethlehem – Community Survey 2009

Please take a few minutes to complete this survey.
After completion, please return the survey by April 10, 2009 following the directions on the front page.
Thank you for your participation.

INSTRUCTIONS:

Please read each question carefully.

Some questions require you to choose only one answer, but others allow for two or more answers.

IMPORTANT! *If you mark more answers than allowed, none of your answers to that question will be counted.*

A. YOUR OVERALL IMPRESSIONS

1. Taking all things into consideration, how do you rate the overall quality of life in the Town of Bethlehem compared to other areas in the Capital Region?

- Better in Bethlehem than in other places
- About the same in Bethlehem as in other places
- Worse in Bethlehem than in other places
- No opinion

2. How would you rate the quality of life in Bethlehem compared to five years ago?

- Better
- About the same
- Worse
- No opinion/I did not live here five years ago

Why? _____

3. What do you like most about living in Bethlehem?

4. What do you like least about living in Bethlehem?

B. TOWN SERVICES AND PERFORMANCE

The following section lists specific services provided by the Town of Bethlehem. Please rate how important it is that the Town provides each of these services. Then rate how satisfied you are with how well the Town is providing that service.

On the 1st scale, 1 is the lowest rating and 5 is the highest. If you have no opinion, leave blank. On the 2nd scale, 1 is below expectations, 2 meets expectations, and 3 exceeds expectations. Please circle one answer for importance and one for satisfaction, for each specific service statement. If you have no opinion, leave blank.

	How important is it this service be provided					How service compares to your expectations		
	Low				High	Below	Meets	Exceeds
ROAD AND SIDEWALK SERVICES								
Improving neighborhood streets and intersections	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3
Maintaining existing streets and sidewalks	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3
Keeping neighborhood streets free of snow and ice	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3
Making improvements for pedestrians and bicyclists	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3
Brush and leaves curbside collection	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3
WATER AND SANITARY SEWER SERVICES								
Water billing and payment services	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3
Water taste and quality	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3
Reliable and consistent water pressure	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3
Reliable sewer system	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3
POLICE SERVICES								
Enforcing traffic laws (Speeding, D.U.I., etc.)	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3
Policing of the community through patrols	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3
Police response to traffic incidents and other citizen calls	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3
Police response to medical emergency call	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3
Providing prompt and courteous 911 operations	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3
TOWN COMMUNICATION								
Providing information via quarterly "Bethlehem Report"	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3
Providing information via monthly E-Mail newsletter	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3
Providing information to citizens via website	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3
Broadcasting Town meetings on cable channel 18	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3
OTHER PROGRAMS, SERVICES AND FACILITIES								
Building & code enforcement services	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3
Maintaining public lands, buildings and facilities	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3
Beautifying the community with landscaping	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3
Transfer station/ Recycling Program	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3
Supporting business and economic development	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3
Senior services	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3
Youth services/ Youth employment	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3
Parks and Recreational Services	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3

5a. What Town program(s) or service(s), if any, do you believe requires the most improvement?

b. What improvement(s) do you believe should be made? _____

6. What Town program(s) or service(s), if any, do you believe could be eliminated? Please list.

7. What additional service(s), if any, do you believe the Town should provide? Please list.

8. If the Town were to enhance an existing service or institute new programs or services that were needed within the community, how do you believe these programs and services should be funded? *With 1 being the funding method you would support the most and 6 being the funding method you would support the least please rank the following list from 1-6.*

- _____ Increase property tax levy
- _____ Seek new outside revenue sources to supplement Town funding
- _____ Use existing funds but decrease funding for other programs and services
- _____ Fund through fees for service and/or user fees
- _____ Charge additional fees to access Town facilities and parks
- _____ Do not enhance existing or add new programs and services

9. Which statement is closest to your view regarding the current level of Town programs and services knowing that the level of programs and services is directly related to the need for property taxes?

Please choose one.

- Decrease programs and services
- Keep programs and services at current levels
- Increase programs and services
- I don't know – no opinion

10. The 20/20 Committee believes that the Town will be faced with challenges on how it focuses its resources in the coming years. For each Town service listed below, please indicate where you believe services should be increased, decreased, or maintained.

For each listed Town service and facility, check the one box that you most agree with:

TOWN SERVICES AND FACILITIES	INCREASE SERVICES/ SPENDING	MAINTAIN SERVICES/ SPENDING	DECREASE SERVICES/ SPENDING
Highways (sidewalks, roads, snow/ice removal)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Public Works (water, sewer and storm water systems)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Public Safety (Police and Town Court)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Parks & Recreation, Youth Services	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Planning & Economic Development	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Senior Services	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Facilities (Town Hall & Annex)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other: _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

C. YOUR OPINION ON IMPORTANT ISSUES FACING THE TOWN

11. Investment Alternatives facing Town Government. The 20/20 committee has identified several major investments, listed below, that the Town may need to make in the near future despite the fact that it has limited resources to invest.

With 1 being most desirable and 4 being least desirable, please rank the following list of investment alternatives that you believe the Town should consider and please identify any other alternatives that you believe should be considered:

_____ ***Invest in aging Town infrastructure*** including water and wastewater treatment plants and hundreds of miles of underground pipe

_____ ***Upgrade outdated or inadequate public facilities*** including Town Hall and the Town Hall Annex (Justice Court and Police Department), the Elm Ave. Park Pool facilities, and the need for community meeting room facilities

_____ ***Invest in farmland and open space conservation*** to protect and preserve our community's natural resources

_____ ***Other:*** _____

12. Paying for Needed Public Improvements: The Town has historically used current operating revenues from sales tax, mortgage recording tax and property taxes as its primary funding source for both ongoing operations and also capital expenditures. Unfortunately, this has resulted in deferred maintenance of certain Town infrastructure and facilities and the growing need for major capital expenditures. By way of example, over the next ten years, the Town's primary water and waste water treatment plants both need major upgrades estimated to cost more than \$30 million. The Town will need to borrow to pay for these improvements and will need to consider financial alternatives, like those listed below, to enable it to make the debt service payments on the bonds.

With 1 being most desirable and 6 being least desirable, please rank the following list of financial alternatives that you believe the Town should consider to pay for needed public improvements and please identify any other alternatives that you believe should be considered:

_____ ***Increase property taxes*** to the level necessary to pay the debt service on the bonds;

_____ ***Defer maintenance*** on Town infrastructure and buildings and only pay for the needed improvements to the extent that they can be supported by existing budget and tax levels;

_____ Evaluate programs and services and ***reduce or eliminate existing expenditures*** and re-allocate the funds to pay for the needed improvements;

_____ Distinguish between essential and non-essential Town services and ***charge reasonable user fees*** for non-essential services using the proceeds to pay for the needed improvements;

_____ ***Encourage new non-residential development*** in appropriately planned and zoned locations and utilize new tax revenues to pay for the needed improvements

_____ ***Other:*** _____

13. Consolidation and shared services among the governmental units providing services to Town residents: Municipal services are provided by various taxing entities in the Town of Bethlehem. They are New York State, Albany County, the Town of Bethlehem, three school and library districts (Bethlehem, Ravena-Coeymans-Selkirk and Guilderland), five fire districts (Delmar, Elsmere, Selkirk, Slingerlands and Elmwood Park), and three ambulance districts (Delmar, Bethlehem and No. Bethlehem). Each unit provides specific services to the community and (with the exception of New York State) is funded in whole or in part through a property tax levy. The 20/20 Committee believes that there is potential to improve efficiencies through the consolidation or sharing of certain public services that have similar purposes and characteristics. Some examples of ways we might work to combine operations, eliminate layers of government and share municipal services are listed below:

- The shared purchase and utilization of specialized and heavy equipment
- Lawn mowing and landscaping; Snow plowing and snow removal
- Consolidation of Emergency Dispatch, Assessment and Tax Collection services at the County level
- Participation in a regional water authority

Which of the following statements best represents your view on how the Town should approach consolidation or the sharing of municipal services?

For each of the statements below, please indicate if you agree, disagree or have no opinion by putting a check mark in the appropriate box next to each statement:

STATEMENT REGARDING CONSOLIDATION & SHARED SERVICES	AGREE	DISAGREE	No OPINION
I prefer that all services currently provided by the Town government remain under Town control			
I would be willing to give up Town control of services only where there are demonstrated and significant cost savings or improved services			
I would support municipal consolidation or shared services with other municipalities where residents of the other municipality benefit, even if there was no clear benefit to Bethlehem residents			
In general, Town government should continuously be evaluating opportunities for improved services and reduced operating costs through consolidation of programs and services both within Town government and with other governmental units			
Other: _____			

D. RESPONDENT PROFILE

14. What is your age?

- 18 – 35
- 36 – 50
- 51 – 64
- 65 or older

15. What is your gender?

- Male
- Female

16. How many people are in your household? ____

17. How many years have you lived in the Town of Bethlehem? ____

18. Your current work status is:

- Work in the Town of Bethlehem (not at home)
- Work elsewhere in Albany County
- Work outside Albany County
- Work at home
- Currently unemployed
- Student
- Retired
- Disabled
- Other: (please specify: _____)

19. Do you...

- Own your residence
- Rent your residence
- Live with parents or relatives

20. In which "neighborhood" within the Town of Bethlehem do you live?

- North Bethlehem
- Slingerlands
- Delmar/Elsmere
- Bethlehem Center/Glenmont
- Feura Bush/Houcks Corners
- Riverfront District
- South Albany
- Selkirk
- South Bethlehem

21. Do you have any additional thoughts, comments or suggestions you would like to share with the Bethlehem 20/20 Advisory Committee?

Thank you!

Please complete and return the enclosed survey by refolding this mailing so the Town of Bethlehem Business Reply mail (postage paid) address is displayed and mailing the survey by April 10, 2009.