

PRELIMINARY REPORT OF THE 20/20 ADVISORY COMMITTEE



Town of Bethlehem, New York
May 2009

THE 20/20 ADVISORY COMMITTEE

- ▶ Formed by Town Board in January 2008
- ▶ Consider strategic direction of Town government, its programs and services and its fiscal sustainability
- ▶ Cultivate community leadership
- ▶ Identify issues and opportunities
- ▶ Build consensus, focus efforts, guide decision making



TOWN OF BETHLEHEM COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

- ▶ Adopted August 2005
- ▶ 2004 Community Survey
- ▶ The Vision Statement for the year 2020
- ▶ Focused on land use and growth management
- ▶ Assisting the Town government to achieve the Comp Plan vision



THE CHANGING OPERATING ENVIRONMENT

- ▶ Positive economic development initiatives
- ▶ Major planning initiatives
- ▶ Effect of economic downturn on Town government
- ▶ Softened real estate market
- ▶ Need to modernize aging infrastructure and facilities

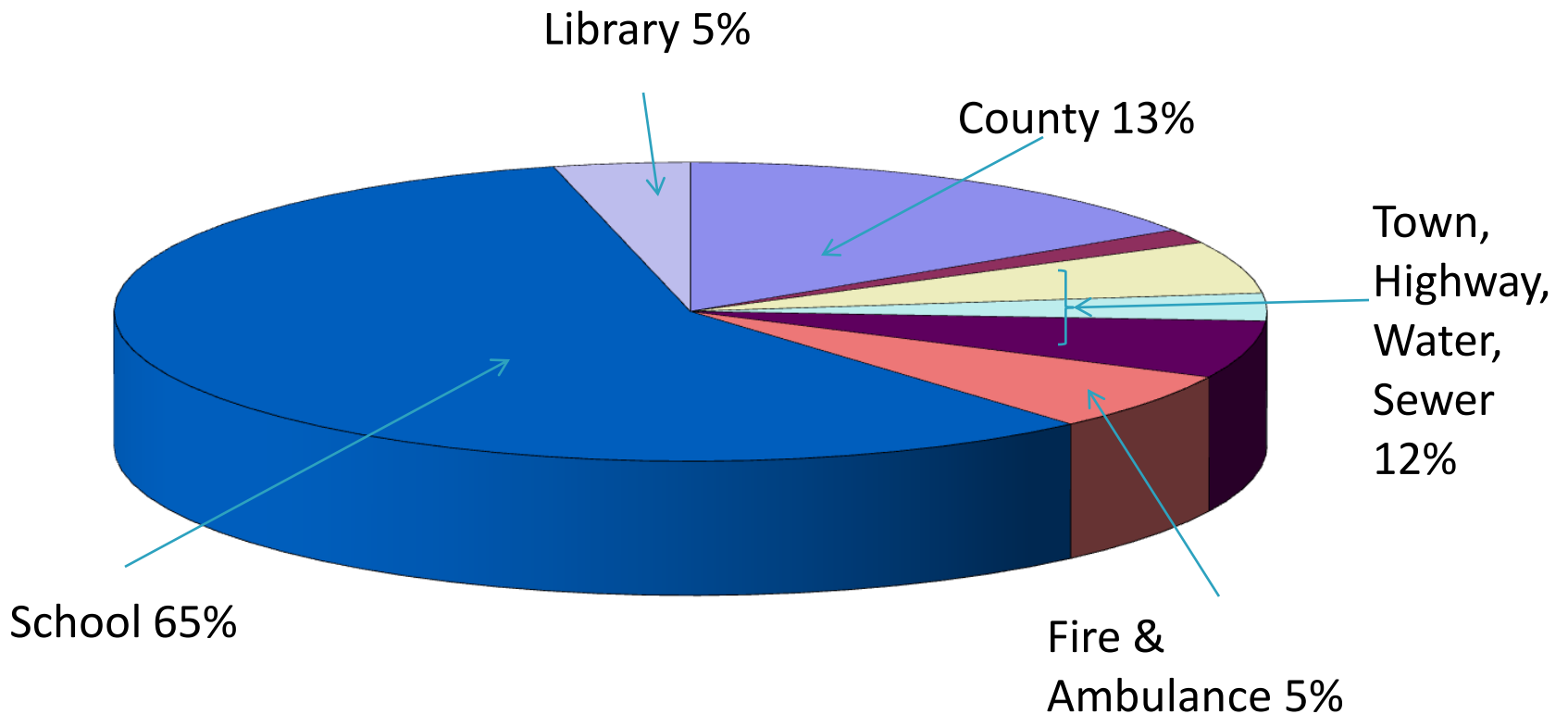


CHALLENGES TO THE TOWN'S SUSTAINABILITY

- ▶ Undervaluing the essential services provided by Town government
- ▶ Over-dependency on residential assessments
- ▶ Lack of diversified business base
- ▶ Unsustainable operating trends
- ▶ Deferral of capital improvements
- ▶ Changing community demographics
- ▶ Economic development alone not a solution

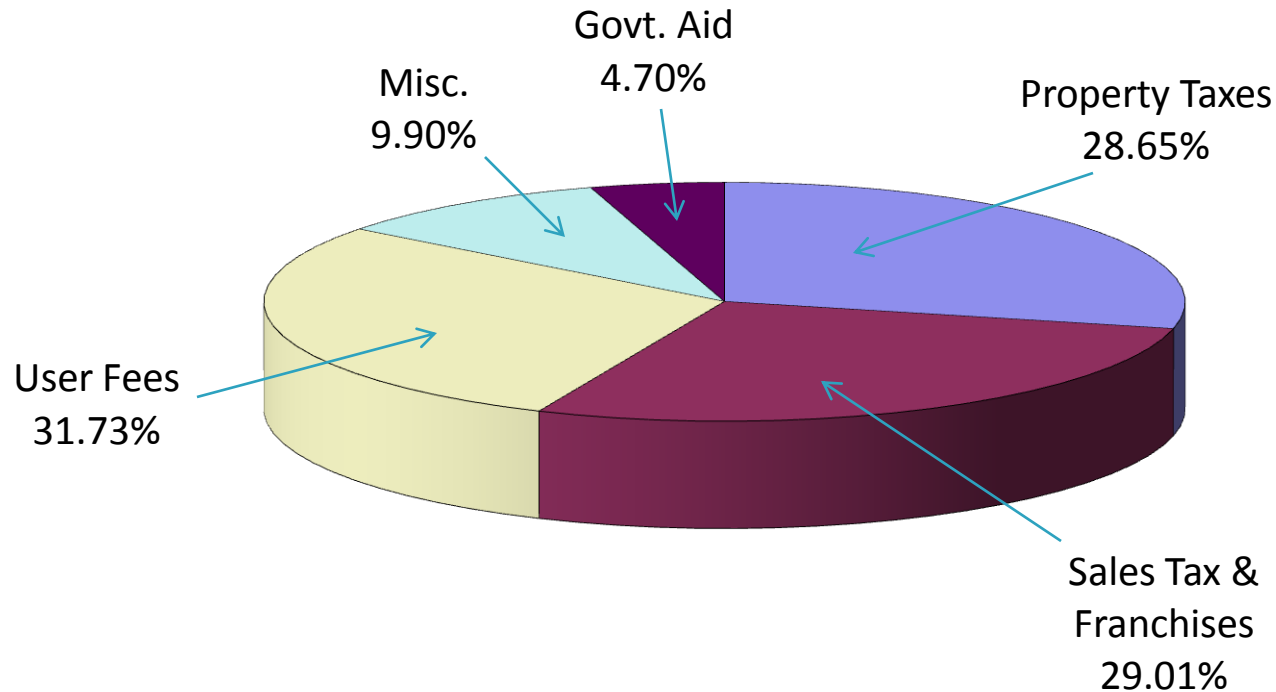


WHERE YOUR OVERALL TAX \$ GOES



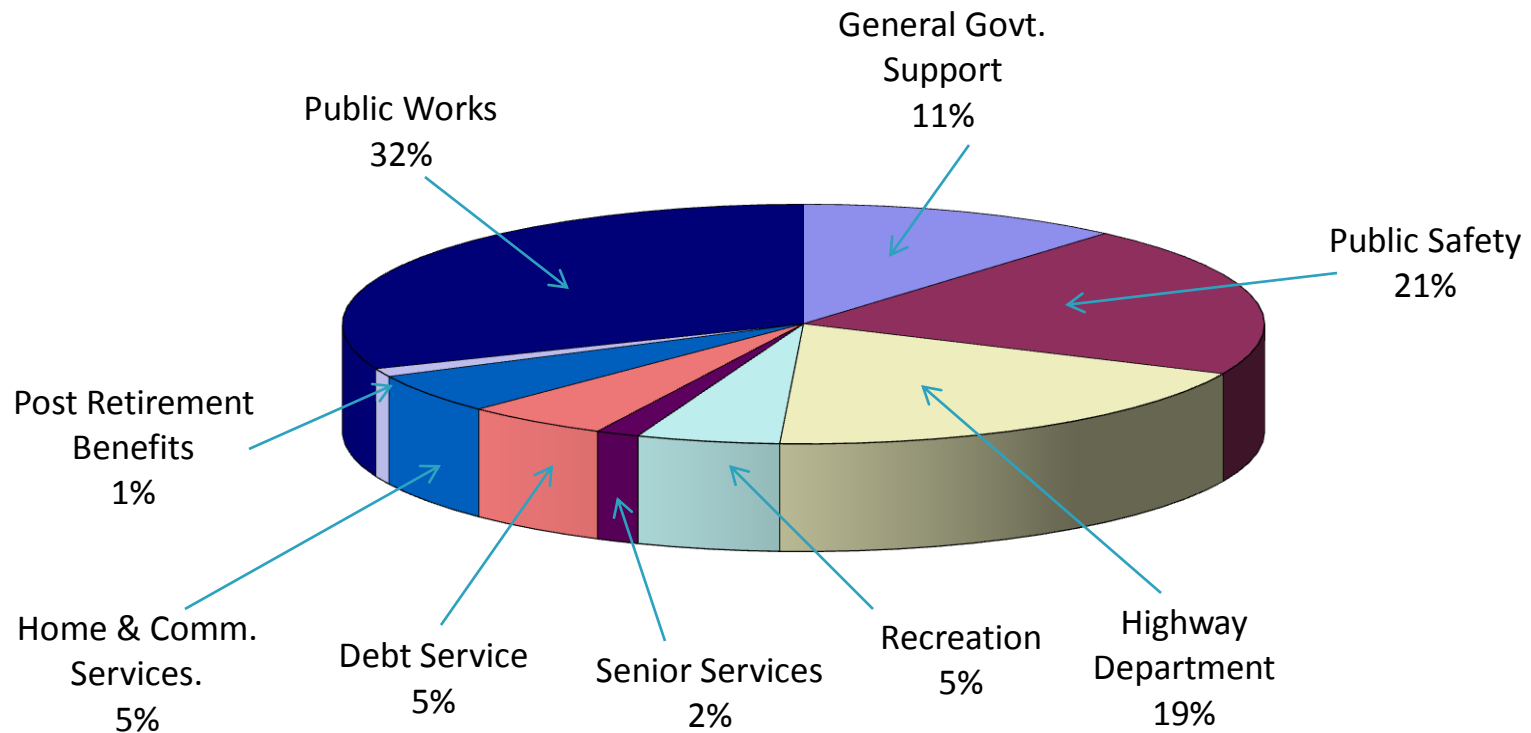
WHERE YOUR TOWN REVENUES COME FROM

2009 Budgeted Revenues



WHERE YOUR TOWN TAX \$ GOES

2009 Budgeted Expenditures



POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS

- ▶ Highly focused economic development
- ▶ Consider resource sharing opportunities based on relative costs and benefits
- ▶ Leverage Town resources
- ▶ Reduce program and services costs
- ▶ Explore structural changes to Town government



POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS

- ▶ Distinguish between primary and secondary programs and services
- ▶ Explore opportunities for shared municipal services with other taxing jurisdictions
- ▶ Encourage a more collaborative environment among the various taxing jurisdictions to foster greater accountability and equity to the community



THE IMPORTANCE OF PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

- ▶ Recognizing the need for public understanding and involvement
- ▶ High level of citizen involvement has dissipated since adoption of Comp Plan
- ▶ Random sample community survey
- ▶ Obtain public input for final report



COMMUNITY SURVEY 2009

- ▶ 20/20 subcommittee developed content and methodology, Policy Research Associates, Inc. provided data input and analysis
- ▶ Survey content
 - Overall impressions of Bethlehem
 - Ratings of Town services and performance
 - Opinions on important issues facing the Town
- ▶ Survey sample- Random sample of 1500 Bethlehem recent (local election) voters
- ▶ Return/Response rate- 22%



COMMUNITY SURVEY 2009

- ▶ Overall impression of Bethlehem very positive for vast majority (78%)
- ▶ Positives included services, small town feel/ neighborhoods and location
- ▶ Few negatives included taxes, some types of development and some services



COMMUNITY SURVEY 2009

Services

- **High Importance**
 - Providing 911 and police response to emergencies and traffic incidents
 - Reliable sewer system
 - Water taste, quality and pressure
- **High Satisfaction**
 - Brush and leaves collection; keeping streets plowed
 - Police response to emergency calls
 - Parks and Recreation Services and Senior Services
- **Low Importance**
 - Providing information via website, email newsletter and channel 18
- **Low Satisfaction**
 - Supporting business and economic development
 - Making improvements for pedestrians and bicyclists



COMMUNITY SURVEY 2009

Services- continued

- ▶ **The majority (72%) felt that services should be maintained at the current level**
 - **Eliminate services**
 - Only 23% could identify a service for elimination
 - Sidewalk plowing, police and Town communications were most frequently –but still rarely- mentioned
 - **Additional services**
 - Only 18% listed a service to be added
 - Garbage pickup, Other services and recycling/going green were top nominees.
- ▶ **If new services were to be added, most respondents felt this should be paid for by seeking new revenue and should not involve a property tax levy increase**



COMMUNITY SURVEY 2009

Important Issues Facing the Town

- ▶ **Investment Alternatives- Prioritize the major investments that the Town may need to make in the near future with limited resources**
 - Invest in aging Town infrastructure such as sewer and water- 64% had this as #1
 - Invest in farmland and open space conservation- 26%
- ▶ **Paying for Needed Public Improvements**
 - Distinguish between essential and non-essential services and charge user fees for non-essential- 30% had this as #1
 - Encourage new non-residential development- 43%
 - Evaluate programs/services and reduce expenditures- 29%



COMMUNITY SURVEY 2009

Important Issues Facing the Town- continued

▶ **Consolidation or sharing of municipal services**

- 91% think the Town should continuously be evaluating opportunities for improved services and reduced costs through consolidation
- 79% would be willing to give up Town control of services only if there were significant cost savings or improved services
- Only 31% preferred that Town services remain under Town control



THE 20/20 FINAL REPORT

- ▶ The 20/20 final report to the Town Board will provide recommendations with respect to:
 - Fiscal sustainability
 - Municipal infrastructure
 - Facility needs
 - Programs and services

