

2024 BUDGET MESSAGE



The annual Town budget has two principal components: the operating budget and the capital budget. The operating budget is the fuel that runs the Town for the coming year. The capital budget serves as a waypoint plotting the Town's future course.

The operating budget pays our employees and sets appropriate staffing levels. It runs our parks and beaches. It funds our police and public safety departments. It keeps our roads and other critical Town infrastructure safe and secure. It supports vital Town programs such as our senior and youth services programs. It maintains our vast and vital IT infrastructure. The capital budget supports long term projects such as facilities improvements or equipment acquisitions. The two budget components work in complement to support the Town's priorities.

As supervisor, it is my responsibility to create and to publish a tentative budget for the public and my colleagues on the Board to review and to recommend changes before the budget is adopted later in November. In this Tentative Budget, three principal priorities are supported:

1. Prioritizing public safety. In addition to increases in staffing in the police department and the bay constable division, this tentative budget adds meaningful funding to traffic safety and traffic mitigation programs. Although the solutions to this problem will require support from many levels of government, the Town, must, and will, play a leadership role.
2. Protecting the taxpayer. Keeping the tax rate low so as not to unduly burden the taxpayer has been a guiding principle for every budget I have submitted as a Supervisor. This budget is no exception. The 2024 Tentative Budget tax rate of 1.3905 a 1.04% tax rate increase over the 2023 tax rate.
3. Sustaining the level of services, programs and facilities needed to best serve the community. Southampton has seen a rise in its year-round population and a surge in its appeal as a vacation community. The costs for goods and services continue to rise. The needs of our Town continue to grow. Our beaches, our parks, our roads and the many other services the Town provides must be prepared to meet that growing demand and the increased operational costs.

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PRIORITIZING PUBLIC SAFETY

The 2024 Tentative Operating Budget adds four (4) new police officers and funds two promotions to the rank of sergeant. These additions will also allow the Police Chief to create a dedicated traffic control and traffic mitigation unit and also allow for increased patrol supervision, a vital component of effective policing. In addition, the budget funds one (1) additional Bay Constable position to enhance safety operations throughout the Town's waterways.

The operating budget has also allocated \$225,000 across the Highway, the Police Department and Municipal Works to fund traffic control staffing and to implement traffic safety improvements.

Providing for public safety, of course, is not limited to the Police and Highway departments. Life guards, Code Enforcement officers, Fire Marshals, Animal Control officer and other Town departments contribute to the effort to provide public safety. These departments must coordinate their efforts and be able to rely on effective communications. The current communications technologies used by these departments are antiquated and unreliable. To improve that communications technology, the 2024 Tentative Capital Budget includes \$700,000 to fund the first phase of a multi-phase, Town wide communication upgrade across all of the relevant departments.

The 2024 Tentative Capital Budget includes \$150,000 for the acquisition of a fire and investigation response unit to better equip the Fire Marshal to respond to and investigate both fire and hazardous material events.

The Capital Project Budget also includes \$1.3 million for the Highway Department toward town-wide road improvements plus an additional \$500,000 in the Operating Budget. The Capital Budget also includes funding of \$500,000 in Municipal Works for sidewalks and other pedestrian enhancements.

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In addition, the 2024 Tentative Capital Budget allocates \$500,000 toward the modernization of the Police Headquarters facility so that the facility can better address the changing demands of modern policing needs.

PROTECTING THE TAXPAYER.

Protecting the taxpayer has been a guiding principle for each of the Town budgets I have submitted as supervisor. The 2024 Tentative Budget sets the tax rate at 1.3905, an increase of \$14.30 for a home valued at \$1,000,000. However, creating a budget that can keep that rate as low as it has been is the result of many factors. High on the list of those factors is the Town's ability to retain the highest rating from the Moody's credit rating agency. The rating not only affirms the budgeting strategies utilized by the Town but also allows the Town to borrow at a very low interest and to develop strategies for retiring debt. All factors beneficial to the taxpayer.

Moody's, in its investor report dated August 18, 2023, re-affirmed the Town of Southamptom's Aaa rating, the highest rating issued by the investment service, and specifically noted particularly the Town's:

- Very large and stable tax base which continues to grow
- Ample reserves and liquidity
- Manageable debt burden
- Strong fiscal management and conservative budgeting

The Moody's report went on to comment that, "The stable outlook reflects the town's conservative fiscal management practices, which will support continued healthy operating performance and maintenance of a strong financial position."

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SUSTAINING THE LEVEL OF SERVICES, PROGRAMS AND FACILITIES NEEDED TO BEST SERVE THE COMMUNITY.

As the Town's needs continue to grow, it is imperative that Town's programs, services and facilities are not only maintained but expand to meet those new demands. To that end, the budget includes funding to make interior improvements to the Crohan and Hampton Bays Community centers as well as improvements to the Old Noyac School House. \$1.3 Million has been earmarked in the budget for improvements to recreational facilities at Red Creek, Hampton West and North Sea parks.

Sustaining services, programs and facilities also requires people. The 2024 Tentative Operating Budget funds one (1) additional Parks Department groundkeeper, one (1) additional office assistant for the Trustees and one (1) additional office assistant in Risk Management, the Town's insurance and employee safety division.

A budget message is a broad overview highlighting a few core elements of a very detailed and complex document. Once this tentative budget is filed with the Town Clerk September 30, as required by municipal law, the entire budget will be available online for public review. The tentative budget is converted to a Preliminary Budget at a special meeting on October 5. Public hearings are scheduled on October 24 and on November 14. The budget must be adopted on or before November 20th.

As always, the Tentative budget is the work of many hands. Town staff, department heads, the Comptroller's office, my colleagues on the Town Board and the questions and concerns expressed by members of the community all play a role in providing the input required to construct this budget. To each and all of you, my sincere appreciation. Thank you!

Jay Schneiderman
Supervisor

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