

# Budget has 2.1-cent tax increase

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"How stupid can you be?" Costello asked.

Costello said after the original pension deferral, municipalities have been gradually getting increased pension obligations for the past five years until they got to 100 percent of their obligation.

"After six years of increased pension costs, to slide back down to 50 percent because I want a tax decrease?" Costello said, incredulous. "It makes absolutely no sense."

MacLeod's recommended budget contained the full 2009 pension payments.

MacLeod said the city is under two caps - one on the budget and another on the tax levy. He said with the current budget the city is under the Tax Levy Cap by just two dollars, and the city is under the budget cap by \$45,000. He recommended the creation of a cap bank that would allow for a cushion in case the city had to exceed the cap.

MacLeod said of the total \$15,121,100 budget, \$6,361,358 is for salaries and wages, and that includ-

ed all the contractual obligations. It also covers \$30,000 for seasonal employees in the police department and a fifth employee in the fire department during the summer months. MacLeod said 16 non-discretionary appropriations account for \$6,217,265. He said there are 42 line items in the "discretionary" category totaling another \$2,032,477, which is a reduction of \$110,000 from 2008.

He said of the 42 line items, only five see an increase, totaling \$24,415. The city clerk's budget is being reduced \$15,589 from 2008,

which was an election year.

MacLeod said the city was able to end 2008 with a \$3.2 million surplus, of which \$2 million can be applied to the 2009 budget.

MacLeod said only about 48 percent of the budget would come from local property taxes. The remainder comes primarily from parking meters, interest on investments, license fees, etc., state aid, the inter-local agreement for police services, grants and delinquent tax payments.

The bottom line to the local tax rate is a 2.1-cent increase, which equates to about \$120 more per year

on a \$500,000 home.

MacLeod said the tax collection rate in 2008 was 98.7 percent - the 11th consecutive year the tax collection rate was above 98 percent. He said given the current economic condition that trend might be broken. MacLeod referred to the economic downturn of 1989, when the city saw a 3 percent drop in tax payments.

# Businesses stay open in winter

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es currently open. Karen, a cashier who declined to give her last name at Dellas 5 and 10, said it's about being a year-round business.

"The owners of the store are very committed to keep it open for the locals. They're committed to being a year round business," she said. "Besides, it's good to be working."

Helene Kaelin, a sales representative of the Fudge Kitchen, agrees.

"I think it's a good idea to stay open because it would bring people here. It would bring money into the area. It also helps people to have jobs over the winter. It's such a hard time now. People really need the work."

As she did her duty as fudge sample distributor, standing outside the Washington Mall store and offering samples of fudge to passers-by, Kaelin said, "I wish more stores would stay open. It's a shame that they don't. I think they're losing out. We stay open for both tourist and locals. We have a big local base that comes in during the winter."

"Besides, the owner, Joe Bogle, also feels it's his obligation to give his employees full time work. He could

choose to close if he wanted to, but he doesn't. He is good to work for. It's nice someone cares for us."

When asked if they are surprised at being open during the winter, many employees are more than happy to point out winter work has been company policy for years.

"I've worked here for 16 years. We've been open during the winter the whole time I've been here," said Denise Newton.

Newton is a waitress at the Pilot House, one of the many eating establishments open year round.

"It's the consistency of it. Locals know there's someplace to go. Sure there are good days and bad days, but you have to take the good with the bad," she said. "We notice when someone has never been here or they haven't been here in a while. We hear 'We never knew you were here. I'm so glad you're open. This place is wonderful.' We have been hearing this a lot this time of year."

Elizabeth Basara, a bartender at the Pilot House, said, "My favorite customers come in the winter. You actually have more time to talk to people."

Misty Hunter, another waitress, said, "Where else are

people going to go? It's more relaxed in the winter."

"That is until Happy Hour. Then we get mobbed," she added with a laugh.

Kate Roman, the "go to" person who does everything at "Cheeks Apparel" on Ocean Street, expressed concerned stores aren't remaining open.

"We're noticing a huge change," she said. "The town is starting to return to what it was a few years ago when it was a ghost town and you wouldn't see anybody for a few weeks. It's kind of starting to become like that again."

However she is still hopeful.

"When Cape May does events like the candle light tours or Sherlock Holmes weekend, this stirs things up for a lot of people. We need it. It's not bad staying open in the winter. It's better than unemployment."

Bonnie Mullock, owner of Bath Time, which has been open all year round for 15 years, puts everything in perspective.

"It drives me up a wall to hear people say the town closes in winter," she said. "I love this time. We get a chance to really get to know our customers, especially those who have never been here. People come in with questions about what to do, what's open, where to eat. We make reservations for them or call to see who is open. It's fun. You can come in out of the cold to a nice warm place."

"Besides when do you get a merchant all to yourself?" Mullock said. "I don't care if you don't buy anything. I'm just happy to see you."

# Inauguration

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ened.

In general, however, Cromer seemed pleased with what he saw.

"Looking good," he told the company.

The recruits were then addressed by Capt. Cari B. Thomas, commander of Training Center Cape May.

"Don't forget your long johns," was Thomas' first piece of advice to the recruits.

Thomas took part in the 1980 inauguration of President Ronald Reagan. According to Thomas, the inauguration was held up for two or three hours due to something related to the hostage situation in Iran. She said they wanted to have the situation resolved before the inauguration and a lot of people were left waiting in the cold.

Thomas also took the opportunity to remind the recruits whom they were representing.

"You are not only representing the Coast Guard, but you are representing this

command and TRACEN," she said.

She told them to adhere to the principles that are the watch words for the training center: courage, commitment, character.

"Maintain a military bearing at all times," Thomas

shipmates - to make sure no one got lost or took any wrong turns in what could be a confusing situation.

But she also encouraged the recruits to enjoy their time in the nation's capital.

"I want you all to go and have an amazing time. Have

*'I'm very, very proud of you.'*  
-Capt. Cari B. Thomas,  
Commander, Training Center Cape May

said. At the same time, Thomas encouraged the recruits to take in glimpses of what was around them.

"Learn something while you are there," she said.

She likened the inauguration to a change of command in the Coast Guard. She said a change of command was a public ceremony indicating continuity in leadership and the inauguration was a change of command of the civilian leadership.

She also admonished the recruits to look out for their

fun," she said. Thomas concluded her remarks saying, "I'm very, very proud of you."

She also told the recruits to think of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., who is remembered Jan. 19 with a national holiday. She told the recruits to think of how proud King would have been to see the inauguration of a black president.

The recruits will return to Training Center Cape May and are scheduled to graduate on Jan. 29.

# Recruits honored

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ical technician, but is up for anything the Coast Guard offers him.

Recruit Simey Luerano of Los Angeles is prior service and at 31 is older than many recruits.

"I am excited as well as honored," he said of taking part in Inauguration Day.

"I am prior service Air Forces, and though I had many honors and beautiful times there, I never marched in a parade like this, so it's going to be a beautiful experience."

Luerano served in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Recruit Angelina Tacconelli of College Park, Md., knows the area she will be visiting on Inauguration Day.

"Even though I'm from the area it's just awesome seeing everything on TV knowing you are going to be a part of that," she said.

Tacconelli graduated high school in 2004 and had been attending the University of Maryland before joining the Coast Guard. She also has a brother in the Coast Guard.

"He had nothing but a positive impact on me, his career, and his character," she said.

Recruit Martin Jetchev is 25 and only became a United States citizen about five months ago. He emigrated about 13 years ago from Bulgaria, graduating high school in 2002 and taking a degree in fire science before deciding to move on.

He entered the Coast Guard to be part of its search and rescue operations and is proud to be part of the Inauguration Day activities.

"I joined the Coast Guard as part of serving my new, adopted country and now have a chance to march in the inauguration for our new president. I couldn't be more honored," he said.

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# Water rates

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million gallons less than anticipated in 2008, creating a \$300,000 reduction in water bill revenues.

Adding non-discretionary increases, the utility needs to bring in an additional

\$555,000 in 2009.

MacLeod said the last water rate increase was in 1999, but the sewer rate was adjusted in 2007. He said he would have a recommendation on the rate increase by next week.

MacLeod said the utility is

looking at a number of capital projects including another phase of automated water meters, the road and utility program, improvements to the Desal Line silo and Desal calcium hypo system, improvements to the Delaware Avenue Pump Station and Well House No. 3, and stats and fittings for the city's fire hydrants.

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