

## **Haledon, Prospect Park Putting State Aid to Use**

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HALEDON -- Extraordinary state aid has been approved for Haledon and Prospect Park that is equivalent to about \$700 in taxes on the average homes in both revenue-strapped boroughs.

The aid announcement paves the way for the boroughs to adopt their 2009 municipal budgets later this month, closing a budget season that has been one of the longest in recent memory. The deadline to file extraordinary aid applications was April 1, and the decisions took more than four months to arrive, leaving otherwise-completed budgets on hold.

Haledon will receive \$450,000 and Prospect Park \$250,000 in extraordinary aid, which the state Department of Community Affairs grants to municipalities with unusual expenses to avert extreme tax hikes.

"It's in recognition of the town's unique position — we're particularly hard hit by the economy, with really no ratables to speak of," Haledon Mayor Domenick Stampone said.

"We're ready to go," he said, confirming that the Borough Council will vote on adoption of the budget at its next meeting, on Aug. 20. "It's just a matter of plugging in the new numbers and adjusting the [tax] rate."

Prospect Park Mayor Mohamed Khairullah said the Council would aim to vote on the budget on Aug. 17.

"We thank our legislators for pushing and the governor and his staff for sending help to the residents," Khairullah said.

The extraordinary aid in Haledon is equivalent to \$699 in taxes on the average home, assessed at \$160,168; in Prospect Park, \$708 on the average home assessed at \$148,223.

The relief was necessary in large part because of drastic cuts in regular state aid to Haledon, Prospect Park, and other municipalities with populations under 10,000. Governor Corzine is urging such municipalities to consolidate or share services.

Both boroughs have had to take tough measures to balance their budgets, though officials maintain those are preferable to layoffs or cuts in municipal services.

Prospect Park employees accepted six days of furloughs this year, and the mayor and council members each forfeited one month's salary. The furlough days will be scheduled before the council adopts the budget.

In Haledon, personnel levels have been made through attrition. The number of police officers has fallen from 21 six years ago to 15 today, and the borough has not hired a Department of Public Works employee in more than 12 years, Stampone said.

The boroughs began sharing code enforcement and library services on July 1. But Prospect Park terminated the library agreement when an internal dispute in Haledon led to Prospect Park

residents being barred from checking out books, and it will re-enter an agreement with Hawthorne.

Both Prospect Park and Haledon said they were open to further service-sharing — a willingness the Department of Community Affairs took into account in making the extraordinary aid decisions.

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