

2 Monmouth County Towns Awarded Property Tax Relief Aid

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**Graelyn Brashear
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MATAWAN -- Matawan and Allentown are among 39 New Jersey towns that will receive so-called extraordinary aid awards from the state for property tax relief.

The state Department of Community Affairs announced Friday that Matawan will receive \$105,000 and Allentown, \$30,000. No Ocean County municipalities received the aid.

The awards are granted to municipalities that would otherwise have to substantially increase property taxes to keep essential services, the department said in a prepared release.

Matawan Mayor Paul Buccellato said he was "very pleased" that the state recognized his town's need. Buccellato said that when the borough submitted its budget to the department for review in the spring local officials knew they would need the state to provide aid or waive the 4 percent cap on tax levy increases.

The borough received just over half of its request of \$200,000 in aid to fill the budget gap, said borough Administrator William Garofalo. That's enough money to balance the budget while keeping the property tax rate stable, Garofalo said, and residents may even see a drop in the tax rate of about half a cent.

The borough's 2009 budget had called for a tax rate increase of 4.4 cents, which translates roughly to a \$152 increase, to \$2,223 annually in municipal taxes, for the average assessed home of \$347,473.

"It takes away half our problem," Garofalo said of the aid, "and we'll have to solve the other half internally."

Buccellato and Garofalo said the new tax rate would likely be announced at the next Borough Council meeting, scheduled for Aug. 18.

Allentown Councilman Michael Schumacher said the Borough Council there was pleased to receive aid, although last year's award was larger.

"We could have hoped for more," Schumacher said, "but we certainly won't turn it away."

He said the council will have to examine its budget again to look for places to cut expenses.

The state Community Affairs Department said that the state budget this year provides \$500,000 less in extraordinary aid funding than last year.

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