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PRESS RELEASE

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WARD CALLS FOR SUSPENSION OF TOWN OF AMHERST REASSESSMENT PROGRAM; ADJUSTMENT TO REALITIES OF THE ECONOMY; COMMON SENSE

Daniel J. Ward, Amherst Town Councilman, today called for a total suspension of the controversial Town of Amherst reassessment program and its readjustment to the realities of the most significant economic meltdown since the Great Depression.

“Enough is enough,” said Ward, a former Town Supervisor, “and I have heard enough.” Reassessments or revaluations are periodic and often painful as long as we are cursed with this antediluvian method of taxation. But, if you have been around for awhile, you develop a sixth sense of where government is right up against the wall in terms of its credibility, and the flexing of its power to tax; of where it should not go.” One of the first crises I weathered as Supervisor was a reassessment community challenge, but we took it straight on, and listened to the public, as we should have. We had a monster meeting at Williamsville South High School to communicate about the issue, and in the end, we told the Assessor (then, as now, Harry Williams) to go fix it, and he did. These crises are man-made, and have solutions, if you are willing to work towards them,” said Ward.

“The current administration has bungled this issue from the get-go. It should not have, as the previous administration got itself in trouble over the precise same issue: he raised assessments to raise taxes! Adding insult to injury, that Supervisor (Grelick) then told the public she was cutting taxes, when all she really did was cut the tax rate, and the tax levy increased. In the same way, this Supervisor is doing the

same thing, and offering the same excuses. Doesn't he remember how he got elected?"

"This whole fiasco has its origins in at least the last two (2) phony budgets. I refused to vote for them, and warned all who would listen that we were building in deficits by that ancient governmental budgeteering artifice: smoke and mirrors. We dummied up revenues, ignored certain costs that were apparent, and should not have been, and, the classic, stole money from our surpluses (fund balance). You can't administer a town fiscally this way without getting caught."

"Now we enter an election year in fiscal trouble within government, and economic turmoil without. We need to make up monies to balance the budget – what better way to do so than to increase assessments?"

"Don't get me wrong, I know government is expensive, and taxes must be raised to do so. However, I have been preaching we need tax reform for local taxation in New York State, and have had for decades now. We simply must get off the real property tax system as a method for funding local government. It is medieval, anachronistic and inherently unfair. It is a regressive tax system, punishing those who buy well, and maintain their homes and neighborhoods, while concomitantly rewarding those who do not. It does not measure true wealth in today's modern world economy. While not perfect, the income tax system is much more progressive. We should be moving (with STAR, we sort of are) toward a third level of income tax to fund local government, instead of, and replacing the real property tax. It would be more realistic, enforceable, and, piggy-backing on the Federal, and State income taxes, much easier to administer and collect. We would not have to go through the pain and agony of these periodic reassessments. It would relieve the roller coaster affect of this policy. Taxes are never easy to levy, or fun to collect, but government only has so much corporate good will with the citizenry. Foolishly expending it in annual revaluation battles, depletes what is left when it is necessary to call upon it for the really big challenges of policy change and reform. By doing so, government is squandering its own ability to lead."

"That said, we need to fix this crisis. We need to hold another monster meeting to listen to the public on this issue alone. I propose next Thursday, March 19th at Williamsville South High School (again)."

"Next we must suspend the current reassessment program until we get it done right. This is essentially a mathematical exercise, an algebraic formula of sorts, not

brain surgery or rocket science. We are paying an outside firm (KLW Municipal, Inc.) to help the Town do this project. They can change their formula, their contract if the Assessor tells them to. The Assessor works for us, not Albany, or just the Supervisor who wants to raise taxes by raising assessments. The Town Board has the power to provide relief. We are not just passive pawns, riding along to our doom with the townspeople. I call on the Supervisor, and my fellow Town Board members, to have the courage to act to resolve this crisis.”

“The math is not working, when we have so (too) many complaints; the math is not working when we have people with homes that are disabled with fractured foundations getting exorbitant reassessments. Sure, if everyone’s property assessment went up proportionately, there would be no beyond pro rata tax increase. But the public can do the math, knows something is wrong, and fully believes new, hidden taxation is on the way. The public is right! The math is not working when value, increased exorbitant value, of one’s home and property does not match the current market place. An adjustment must be factored into the equation to take into consideration the great economic situation. If you don’t, like this Administration has, value becomes meaningless. If government just takes without a meaningful nexus to value, and its own laws, it becomes confiscation. We had one Revolution in this country over that issue, and another may not be far behind.”

“While we are changing the formula, we must as a board return to the budget table to pare down the cost of government wherever possible. There are limitations on budget adjustments between actual budgets but we must do, and been seen to be doing, every form of conservation, saving and ingenuity possible on behalf of our constituents to provide reasonable government at an affordable cost. There are no Tent Cities in Amherst yet, but we on the battlefield of government cost and expense daily must redouble our efforts to make this enterprise work. Bloated and phony budgets are clearly passé. Unfortunately poor budget making over the last several years has put us in a fiscal hole we will have to crawl out of, but we can’t do it on the backs of the taxpayers, or misusing their wallets. This nonsense and nightmare has to end.”

“To summarize, therefore, we need to immediately:

- 1) suspend the current reassessment program;
- 2) conduct a huge, town monster meeting on the issue;

3) adopt a Home Rule message to the New York State Legislature to transform our local method of taxation from a real property-based system, to some other, preferably income-based system;

4) Until the system changes, change the algebraic assessment formulae for more market-sensitive factors (sinking homes), and overall economic considerations (low or no housing market at all);

5) return to the mid-year budget table to cut costs and expenditures, to engage in honest and transparent budget making for a change;

6) [good suggestions from citizens who positively want to help].”