

Milan board looks to fix 'financial mess'

Review showed inconsistencies in (former Supervisor Talmage's) records

BY COLIN DEVRIES - FOR THE POUGHKEEPSIE JOURNAL - JUNE 15, 2009

MILAN - After months of contentious debates over the town's finances, officials are working out solutions to correct the fiscal discrepancies.

Supervisor Richard Barrett said the town's fiscal problems have "snowballed" for several years and it has finally "come to a head."

Barrett said, "I was rather taken aback when the senior examiner from the state told me that the '07 figures did not agree with '08."

A few weeks ago, Barrett said, Joe Notro, senior examiner with the state comptroller's office, visited Wilcox Memorial Town Hall to review the town's financial records. He found, in addition to the QuickBooks software lacking the proper calibration for municipal accounting, **the year-end financials reported in 2007 by former Supervisor John Van Talmage did not match the annual update document filed in spring 2008**, or an audit conducted on the town's finances.

Notro also told Barrett the only report they should base financials on is the audit, because is it the only certified document.

Barrett said the 2008 annual update document that will be filed with the comptroller's office would use the audit's figures as a base.

Alternate software proposed

To help remedy the accounting software issues facing the town, Barrett said he would like to explore purchasing alternative municipal accounting software, specifically RDA.

An early estimate of the first-year costs of software, including the necessary hardware and servicing, is \$21,500, Barrett said. Subsequent annual costs are estimated at \$4,000, which includes technical support from the Georgia-based RDA Systems Company.

Councilwoman Diane May (**who was Talmage's bookkeeper before running for the town board**) said the accounting software was not the issue.

The issue, she said, was Barrett, the town's chief financial officer, does not have accounting experience.

"(I am) asking that we not do anything further to complicate the financial mess that we now have in this town," May said at a recent meeting. "You (Barrett) have offered your opinion of other people's opinions, you have reduced nothing to writing and I'm telling you we're looking at a May financial report that is once again inaccurate and incomplete." **(NOTE: As the former bookkeeper Mrs. May knows about financial messes, as her reports to the board were riddled with mistakes, many of which created the problems the Comptroller mentioned.)**

May and Councilman Ross Williams have abstained from approving the town's monthly financial reports for 2009, saying they are based on an inaccurate December 2008 report.

"To continue in this fashion is irresponsible of this board and supervisor," May said.

Councilman David Byrne said he believes Barrett is making the right moves in trying to fix the problems.

Williams said he is concerned about going forward without proper financials. "I share Diane's concerns," he said. "We don't have good books to the point where I don't have confidence in financial reports." **(NOTE: Mr. Williams have never offered any suggestion or constructive ways of addressing the issue, he merely carps and gripes.)**

No decision was made by the board to purchase the RDA software or hire an accounting consultant firm.