



# BUILDING MOMENTUM: Peekskill Moves Forward

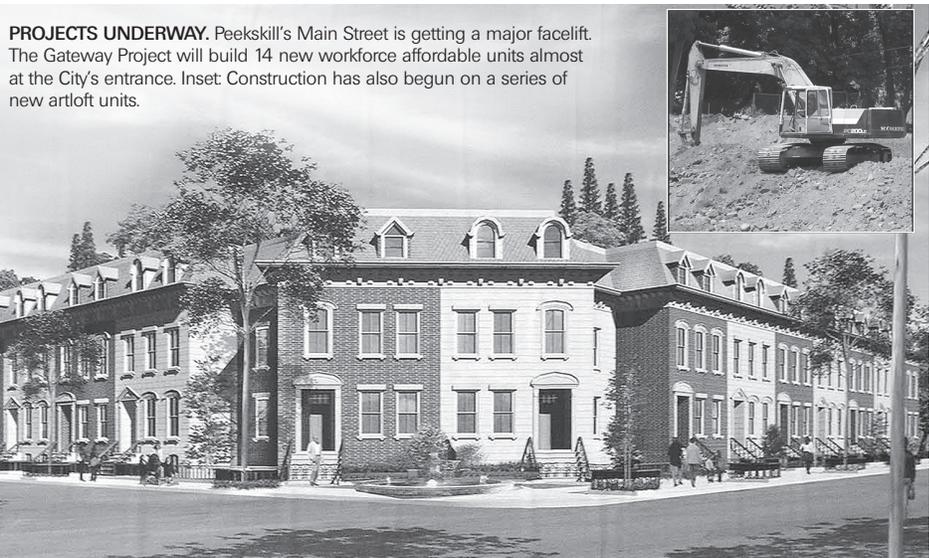
Once known as “the Gem of the Hudson,” Peekskill is rapidly moving towards a true renaissance that will transform the lives of all of its citizens for the better. Years of intensive planning and aggressive negotiation by the city has created a self-reinforcing web of premium projects.

These projects are drawing hundreds of millions of dollars into our city. They are enabling the city to dramatically increase the services it offers parents and children alike while making 2006 a zero percent tax increase year. From the gleaming new Stop 'N Shop at the Beach Shopping Center to the beautiful green fields at the Peekskill Stadium ballpark, the city is both doing its own projects and reaching out to developers

Accomplishing this has required a willingness to reach out and take significant risks. The driving force behind this is a plan and vision composed of many different elements, including:

- **Reinforcing** the city’s hold on its already strong and vital middle class by offering a broad and deep menu of services and resources for adults and children alike.
- **Filling** a key gap in the city’s demographics by working with leading developers to attract more affluent residents to the City.
- **Making** downtown Peekskill a destination worth taking an extra effort to visit by creating an energetic artists’ community

*Continued on page 11*



**PROJECTS UNDERWAY.** Peekskill’s Main Street is getting a major facelift. The Gateway Project will build 14 new workforce affordable units almost at the City’s entrance. Inset: Construction has also begun on a series of new artloft units.

## Strong planning creates Foundation for Success



*By Mayor John G. Testa*

Revitalizing a city is not something that happens quickly. It takes years of planning, huge amounts of cooperation and tremendous amounts of money. If you look at downtown Peekskill today, you'll see all the elements of a downtown revitalization coming together more efficiently and effectively than ever before. This is no accident. It is the result of years of intensive planning, aggressive outreach, successful cooperation and plain and simple hard work.

Some of the changes are not physically visible. They are part of the financial and management structure that helps hold our city together. After the explosive increases in retirement funds mandated by the state, the City could have backslid into debt or frantically made excessive cuts in taxes and services. Instead, we did something extraordinary. We trusted that our citizens would be patient and that our City staffers would put in extraordinary performances, giving us far value for our dollars. It turns out we were right in having faith in both Peekskill's residents and its workers and managers.

Biting the bullet two years in a row has placed the City in a strong financial position, something that will do everything from reducing our interest costs to making us an attractive place for businesses, investors and developers alike. Well-planned and executed growth is paying off for Peekskill; it is one of the primary reasons that the City tax increase for 2006 has been kept to zero. What's great news is that momentum is building on virtually all fronts. When you drive along Main Street, you'll see heavy equipment at work and construction fences in place at two key sites. One, across from the Kiley Center, is the Gateway Project, which will place 14 appropriately designed townhouses constructed. These homes are dedicated as “workforce housing” which is targeted at the middle income families of Peekskill. We want to make sure we help hard-working families realize the dream of owning their own homes.

As you proceed east through the City, you'll see that construction has begun on an \$8.3 million *Continued on page 11*

### inside

- 2... A Wealth of Opportunities
- 3... Living With Diversity
- 5... Finance Update
- 9... As the Seasons Change, Take Basic Precautions
- 10... A Hard Working Artist

**and more!**

# A Wealth of Opportunities for a minimum of dollars

**Getting a lot done with a little money is an art form at the City of Peekskill's Department of Parks and Recreation. It's also one reason the City has been able to offer a zero percent tax increase for 2006 while continuing to provide a full menu of services for families, youths and adults alike.** One of the primary reasons for Parks and Rec's high productivity is its director, Francis X. Brunelle. Upbeat and enthusiastic, Brunelle loves his work and is totally dedicated to Peekskill and its residents.

Both of Brunelle's parents were born in Peekskill, and so was he, but he grew up in Yorktown Heights. Still, he couldn't resist coming back to the City, and he's dedicated the last 21 years of his life to making sure the City's recreational facilities and programs were second to none.

What's most important to Brunelle is that

**WORKING SO OTHERS CAN PLAY.** Parks and Recreation director Francis X. Brunelle prepares for a busy weekend with staffer Ray Glashoff.



Peekskill's residents and the City's staff get to have a fun and rewarding experience. "I do like to enjoy myself," he says, and it shows. The smiles of greeting in the Department's headquarters at Depew Park seem natural and unforced.

Indeed, Brunelle says his most important accomplishment is creating an environment

that generates high morale, great results and a willingness to take risks. "We have a good chemistry here. We have a very versatile staff. They're not afraid to do new things and not afraid to take chances," he says.

"Some people get wrapped up into fearing about failing before they go out and do anything, and I think I have a staff here that's confident in what they do. They try their best and if it work, it works, and if it doesn't they try something else," Brunelle says. That "something else" can vary widely. There are, of course, the Parks. Peekskill has X of them, and many are considered among the most beautiful in Westchester. But that's just the start of Park and Rec's responsibilities. "We provide recreation program for ages from infants through seniors for all Peekskill residents," Brunelle says.

Yet there is more on the agenda as well. Through the City's nutrition program, Brunelle's department feeds seniors in Peekskill and Cortlandt. Though the City of Peekskill and the Peekskill City School District are totally separate entities, Parks and Rec mounts a number of educational programs as well.

"We work closely with the school district," Brunelle says. "We're mutually supportive," he says. One example: Peekskill High School plays its games in Peekskill Stadium, while many of the City's swimming classes are held on School District property. Parks and Rec also offers a number of pre and after school programs that provide homework help, storytelling and other activities.

A quick look at the recently mailed fall recreation schedule shows the scope and depth of Park and Rec's creativity. Brunelle recruited City Manager Dan Fitzpatrick to teach a class on Aikido. There is a Hatha Yoga course.

*Continued on page 3*

## Peekskill/Cortlandt Community CALENDAR

### OCTOBER

- 8 **Peekskill Downtown, Farmer's Market**, Bank Street, rain or shine, 8 A.M.-2 P.M.
- 15 **Peekskill Downtown, Farmer's Market**, Bank Street, rain or shine, 8 A.M.-2 P.M.
- 15 **Robert Klein**, Paramount Center for the Arts, 8 P.M., \$35 to \$40. For tickets call 1-877-840-0457
- 22 **Peekskill Downtown, Farmer's Market**, Bank Street, rain or shine, 8 a.m.-2 p.m.
- 22 **Little Feat**, Paramount Center for the Arts, Saturday, 8 P.M., \$35. For tickets call 1-877-840-0457
- 28 **Full Moon Horror Road Show: The Films Of Charles Band**, Paramount Center for the Arts, 8 P.M., \$27. For tickets call 1-877-840-0457
- 29 **Peekskill Downtown, Farmer's Market**, Bank Street, rain or shine, 8 A.M.-2 P.M.
- 29 **Pumpkin Design & Hayride**, Peekskill High School Parade Field, Course #31501, 11 A.M.-1 P.M., Grades Pre K-6<sup>th</sup>, Peekskill residents only, \$5.00, pre-registration required. Call 914-734-4228
- 29 **Safe Halloween**, Peekskill High School Cafeteria, 11 A.M.-1 P.M., Grades Pre K-6<sup>th</sup>, free.
- 29 **Joan Baez**, Paramount Center for the Arts, 8 P.M., \$40 to \$45. For tickets call 1-877-840-0457
- 31 **Live From Peekskill, It's Halloween Night!**, Nelson Avenue between Main St. & Diven St., 5 P.M.-8 P.M., Pre K-6<sup>th</sup> Graders, free.

### NOVEMBER

- 1 **First Friday**, Peekskill Downtown, Live music, shops, restaurants and artists studios open, 5 P.M.-8 P.M.
- 5 **Peekskill Downtown, Farmer's Market**, Bank Street, rain or shine, 8 A.M.-2 P.M.
- 5 **Music From Copland House (Wednesdays in Paris)**, Paramount Center for the Arts, 8 P.M., \$35. For tickets call 1-877-840-0457
- 12 **Peekskill Downtown, Farmer's Market**, Bank Street, rain or shine, 8 A.M.-2 P.M.
- 12 **Bluegrass Explosion w/ Railroad Earth, Crooked Still & More**, Paramount Center for the Arts, 8 P.M., \$30. For tickets call 1-877-840-0457
- 19 **Peekskill Downtown, Farmer's Market**, Bank Street, rain or shine, 8 A.M.-2 P.M.
- 19 **Foul Shooting Contest**, Peekskill Middle School, 9 A.M. 8-10 yr olds & 30-39 yr olds, 9:45 A.M. 11-13 yr olds & 40-49 yr olds, 10:30 A.M. 14-17 yr olds & 18-19 yr olds, 11:15 A.M. 20-29 yr olds & over 50 yrs olds, free.
- 19 **Fred Garbo Inflatable Theatre**, Paramount Center for the Arts, 4 P.M., \$15 to \$25. Call 1-877-840-0457

### DECEMBER

- 3 **Peekskill Holiday Tree Lighting**, Gazebo on Division Street & Park Street, 5 P.M., Entertainment begins at 4:30 P.M., free.
- 3 **Don Mclean "Classic Holiday Show"**, Paramount Center for the Arts, 8 P.M., \$40 to \$50. For tickets call 1-877-840-0457
- 10 **Holiday Trip To New York City**, Bus leaves Depew Park at 9 A.M. and leaves the City to return home at 5 P.M. sharp, Course #33450, See the department stores festive window displays and the famous Christmas tree at Rockefeller Center, \$10, Pre-registration required. Call 914-734-4228
- 16 **The Snow Queen (Hudson Vagabond Puppets)**, Paramount Center for the Arts, 7 P.M., \$10 to \$20. For tickets call 1-877-840-0457
- 17 **9th Annual Holiday Show**, Paramount Center for the Arts, 12 P.M.-4 P.M., Doors open at 11 a.m, children 10 and under, free.
- 19-21 **The Great Russian Nutcracker (The Moscow Ballet)**, various, \$25 to \$65. For tickets call 1-877-840-0457

Source: The Hudson Valley Gateway Chamber of Commerce and other organizations.



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**Councilwoman:** Drew Claxton  
**Councilman:** Don Bennet, Jr.

**City Manager:** Dan Fitzpatrick  
**Deputy City Manager/Comptroller:** Marcus Serrano

# LIVING WITH DIVERSITY



By Eugene Tumolo  
Chief of Police

**One of the most special—and challenging—things about Peekskill is the fact that our city is truly a diverse community.** Though we talk a lot about America being a melting pot, our country really is much more of a stew. Far more than we'd like to think, chunks of people who are like each other live close to but not mixed up with people who are different.

There are blocks and neighborhoods in our city which are almost little mini-United Nations, with people from many different races and nations and cultures living side by side—and sometimes cheek by jowl. That's where the law enforcement challenges come in. To a great degree, living in Peekskill is about learning how to adjust and cooperate with people who may be different from us in many different ways.

This is definitely a two-way street. There are people in Peekskill who come from countries that do not have zoning laws and noise ordinances. Lack of knowledge is never an excuse for breaking the law—but it is one reason that the Peekskill Police Department is engaging in a new and aggressive information outreach program.

As part of that program, we're creating bilingual, informational brochures that we will be distributing in English and Spanish both to individual households and through a series of special events. If you'd like to receive this information, or have us send it to your neighbor, please give us a call. We'll be glad to send it out, or even drop the material off personally if you feel the situation merits it. You can also download the material yourself off the city web site, [www.cityofpeekskill.com](http://www.cityofpeekskill.com).

While some people might call this kind of situation a clash of cultures, it is not. If someone is breaking the law, they are breaking the law, whether or not they are familiar with the way we live in our communities. That said, a little patience can go a long way. People who live in single-family neighborhoods value their privacy, quiet and relaxation time. If you feel you are being intruded upon, before you go to battle yourself, call us. We have an entire community relations department that's dedicated to helping deal with situations like the one you're in.

Peekskill's downtown is another place where the challenge of dealing with diversity truly lives. There are a lot of people who have lived in Peekskill for years who have never been in our downtown. That's a sad thing, because Peekskill's downtown is an increasingly attractive, welcoming place. You'll find a lot of interesting restaurants and shops in our downtown. What you won't find is much crime at all. Are there sometimes young people standing around in the downtown area? They have every right to do so. They are simply part of what our city is—a complex mosaic that can offer surprising rewards if you care to explore it.

## A Wealth of Opportunities

*Continued from page 2*

Other sports including basketball, flag football tennis and baseball are on the menu.

Nor are the imaginative and educational sides neglected. Although the City of Peekskill and the Peekskill City School District; programs such as a hip hop dancing course give youths and adults a like a chance to express themselves.

A number of special revolve around Halloween, including window painting, pumpkin designing and a hayride, the intensely popular Halloween night parade, which will be broadcast live on the City cable TV channel. Other fall special events will include Letters from Santa and the City's 9th Annual Holiday Show. None of this would happen with-

out extensive and ongoing support from the Peekskill Common Council, Brunelle says. Peekskill has made a policy decision that it will offer Recreational services equal to those of many communities in Southern Westchester even though it doesn't have their budgets.

"The Mayor and Council have been very supportive of recreation programs in all the years I've been here," Brunelle says. He's seen how hard some of his peers have to battle for a minimum of services. "I know a lot of people who have dealt with mayors and councils and towns where they're clueless about recreation," he says. "We've been very lucky with good council people," he says. Physical evidence of this support is readily available. "In my time here, I've seen the Riverfront Green go up, I've seen Tompkins Park get refurbished, and I've seen construction of the gem of our system, Peekskill

## CITY OF PEEKSKILL Key Government Meetings

### OCTOBER

3	Committee of the Whole, 6:30 P.M., City Hall
10	City Hall Closed, Columbus Day
11	Common Council Meeting, 7:30 P.M., City Hall
13	Historic Preservation Advisory Commission, 7:30 P.M., Neighborhood Center, 4 Nelson Ave.
17	Committee of the Whole, 6:30 P.M., City Hall
18	Planning Commission, 7:30 P.M., City Hall
20	Zoning Board of Appeals, 7:30 P.M., City Hall
24	Common Council Meeting, 7:30 P.M., City Hall
27	Historic and Landmarks Preservation Board, 7:30 P.M., City Hall

### NOVEMBER

3	Historic Preservation Advisory Commission, 7:30 P.M., Neighborhood Center, 4 Nelson Ave.
7	Committee of the Whole, 6:30 P.M., City Hall
8	City Hall Closed, Election Day
9	Planning Commission, 7:30 P.M., City Hall
11	City Hall Closed, Veterans Day
14	Common Council Meeting, 7:30 P.M., City Hall
17	Zoning Board of Appeals, 7:30 P.M., City Hall
21	Committee of the Whole, 6:30 P.M., City Hall
24	City Hall Closed—Thanksgiving Day
25	City Hall Closed—Thanksgiving Day
28	Common Council Meeting, 7:30 P.M., City Hall

### DECEMBER

1	Historic and Landmarks Preservation Board, 7:30 P.M., City Hall
1	Historic Preservation Advisory Commission, 7:30 P.M., Neighborhood Center, 4 Nelson Ave.
5	Committee of the Whole, 6:30 P.M., City Hall
12	Common Council Meeting, 7:30 P.M., City Hall
13	Planning Commission, 7:30 P.M., City Hall
15	Zoning Board of Appeals, 7:30 P.M., City Hall
19	Committee of the Whole, 9:30 a.m., City Hall
26	City Hall Closed.
27	Common Council Meeting, 7:30 P.M., City Hall

Stadium," Brunelle says. He's immensely grateful for all the support he's gotten.

Because of this, those who are willing to take advantage of the City's services will find a full banquet of opportunities. The Fall Catalog was mailed out to all households. Those who don't have one can go to the Parks and Recreation portion of the city's web site, [www.cityofpeekskill.com](http://www.cityofpeekskill.com), or call 914-734-4220.

## CODE ENFORCEMENT:

# Making Safety and Stability a Priority

**One of the promises a city makes its residents is that it will do everything in its power to make sure they live in safe, healthy, and comfortable environments.** With predatory landlords looking to cash in on Westchester's desperate housing shortage, accomplishing this is not always easy. At times it can even be controversial. But the City of Peekskill and its leaders are willing to pay a significant price to ensure the protection and quality of life of the people who live here.

New policies, procedures, and even laws have been created to help the City deal with building code violations. One result: the number of violations issued and convictions achieved has soared. Among the crucial tools that helped make this happen are the Code Enforcement Hot Line (914-862-2065), the Code Enforcement Task Force and two recently-hired code enforcement officers. The hot line allows the average citizen to participate in the enforcement process. Anyone can call up with a violation knowing the City will respond. Tips dialed into the hot line can be left anonymously. If people want to find out the impact of their calls, they can leave contact numbers so the City can get back them. Their identities will be protected if cases move forward.

By bringing people from numerous different departments together, the Code Enforcement Task force has created a tool that is generating significant results. Information that the Task Force uses to choose its targets include Hot Line calls, Police Arrest records, requests for enforcement by neighborhood associations and other materials.

Two new tools that should dramatically improve Peekskill's Code Enforcement environment are the Property and Building Nuisance Abatement Law, colloquially known as the Lockdown Law, and the Certificate of Occupancy Law. Both laws have been thoroughly test driven in other communities. Each has been modified to meet Peekskill's specific needs. The Lockdown Law assigns points to specific kinds of violations. Drug and Building Code infractions top the list.

Properties that accumulate more than a set amount of points over a specific period time are padlocked for a given period. Buildings aren't seized, they're just shut down for a while. An extensive notification process helps make certain the law is constitutional. The goal is to hit property owner's wallets so hard that they ensure significant violations never occur in their buildings or on their land again.

Consideration of constitutional rights and similar issues are a top priority for the City of Peekskill. That's one reason the Certificate of Occupancy Law was created. As enforcement efforts have gathered momentum, people who purchased what they thought were multi-family homes have discovered that their residences were only legal for single family use. Requiring a new Certificate of Occupancy when a building is sold will help solve this problem. Now purchasers will know what is legal and not with their buildings, and those who have abused their structures will have to rectify the damage they've done instead of passing it on to someone else.

In no way are any ethnic groups being specifically targeted by the Code Enforcement department. Even the most cursory glance at the list of court cases shows names representing virtually every background found in the United States. *Continued on page 12*



## Sweet Central

51 Hudson Avenue • Peekskill, NY 10566 • 914-737-8656

Before it was even officially open, word was out about Sweet Central. Peekskill has another culinary treasure. Owner Michael Fertucci is a graduate of the Culinary Institute of America who has honed his skills at places such as New York City's magnificent Plaza Hotel. A true artist with all foods cool and sweet, Fertucci serves not ice cream, but ice custard, its richer, more flavorful cousin. Of course, the standard flavors are available, but he also goes many steps further, creating splendid new concoctions such as cappuccino hazelnut at customers' requests out of his own intuition. Sweet Central also provides malteds, shakes, a complete selection of quality chocolates, and as many as half a dozen different nut brittles.

# Congratulations & Welcome



## New York Restaurant

824 Washington Street • Peekskill, NY 10566 • 914-788-6680

Manhattan is many places, and Glen Price and his fiancé Flo Morocco have tried to bring all of them to their restaurant. There's Central Park, a lovely outdoor dining area, the East Side, a sleek, modern dining room, Broadway, which features a stage, and Times Square, a beautifully appointed bar. And, just like in New York, diners can feast on everything from a quick and simple burger to savory steaks and fine pasta dishes. Owner Price has done business in Peekskill for many years; his ice cream shop thrilled taste buds for many years on Washington Street. Price also owns Glen's Tavern in Montrose, which is well known for providing great meals at affordable prices.



## Precious Garden

990 Main Street • Peekskill, NY 10566 • 914-737-8611

This latest addition to Peekskill's restaurant row offers more than just wonderful food. Owner Josh Wu decided to directly take on the current trend which has most Chinese restaurants focusing solely on takeout food and not providing a dine-in experience. Precious Garden provides a warm and welcoming dining environment along with such spectacular dishes as Scallops and Beef Prawns Sizzling Platter, Dragon Phoenix, which includes jumbo shrimp and white chicken meat sautéed in a special brown sauce, and such classics as General Tso's Chicken, Peking Duck, and Sesame Beef or Shrimp. Despite the great setting and the wonderful food, prices are comparable to those of other Chinese restaurants in town.

# Peekskill News

## Finance Update



## Peekskill City Budget Features 0% Tax Increase for 2006

**Strict financial discipline and revenue gains driven by carefully planned development have enabled the City of Peekskill to feature a 0% tax increase in its 2006 budget.** After years of decline, the total assessed value of properties in Peekskill began rising a couple of years ago. This along with strict financial discipline has enabled Peekskill to recover from the devastating impact of unfunded state mandates and plan for a 0% tax increase in 2006. This means that, for the City portion of tax bills, rates will hold steady at \$202.56 per \$1,000 of assessed property value.

In the space of a little more than a year between mid 2002 and early 2004, New York State increased the total retirement contribution demanded from the City from \$165,000 to more than \$2 million. The City has now dealt with that blow and is now moving forward.

Though some of the projects were controversial at the time they were implemented,

they have now proven themselves as revenue generators for the city. Other efforts that will be constructed in coming years, such as the Peekskill Waterfront Development, should help keep revenues rising and taxes stable for a long time to come.

In the 2006 budget, the City of Peekskill anticipates it will receive \$13.03 million in property tax revenue. This amount amounts to about 26% of the total amount of property taxes that our residents pay. The remaining balance is accounted for by two School districts and Westchester County taxes. The current levy for the Peekskill School district is \$17.5 million; Hendrick Hudson, \$1.9 million and Westchester County, \$7.8 million. This budget is presented to the Common Council by City Manager Dan Fitzpatrick. As the tentative budget, it is more a suggestion than something set in stone, Fitzpatrick says. "I see this as a taking off point," Fitzpatrick says.

There are three distinct categories in the budget: the General Fund, the Water Fund and the Sewer Fund. The Water and Sewer Funds are self-supporting, so the General Fund, which comes to \$30.884 million, gets most of the attention.

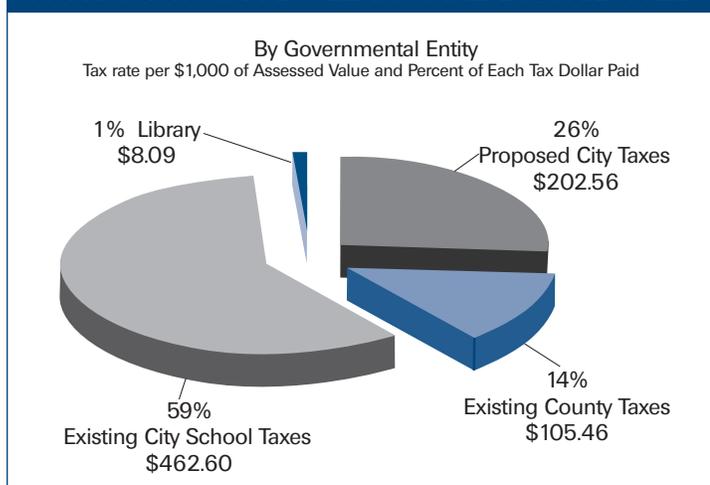
Much of Peekskill's infrastructure is more than 100 years old. Prudent management suggests we start setting money aside to maintain and rebuild the systems and build a bulwark against potential financial shocks. That's why the Water and Sewer funds were created. Each will see a small increase in 2006, with water fees rising by a total of \$16 per household and sewer fees just \$13.28 for the average household.

How much households or property owners pay in water or sewer fees depends on how much they use. In essence, the system is a user fee that rewards those who are careful in their use of water and penalizes those who aren't. Though the fees are relatively new, they're already supporting some important projects. These include the Stormwater Runoff project on Central Avenue and the City's federally mandated \$21 million water filtration plant.

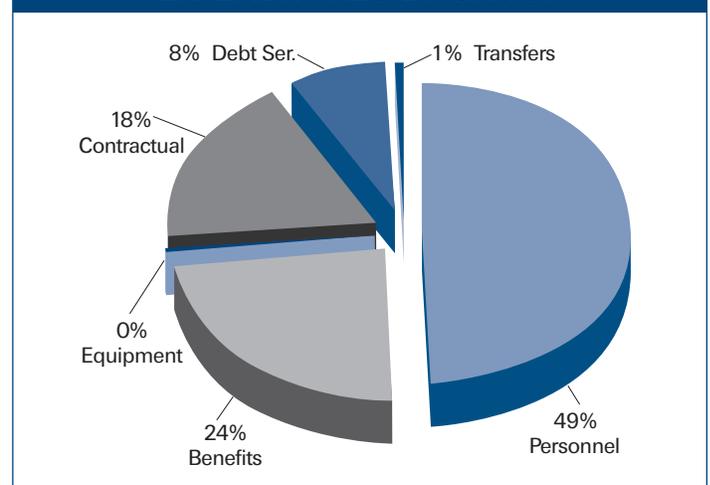
Revenues for the general fund come from a number of different sources, including non-property and other taxes, departmental income, fees and charges, use of money, property and transfers, state and county aid, and federal aid. These categories generate

*Continued on page 7*

### HOW YOUR TAX DOLLARS ARE DISTRIBUTED



### EXPENDITURES BY GROUP



## Enthusiastic Evaluation From Outside Auditor

**Outside auditors gave the City a rave review for its current financial practices, saying the City's practices, finances and results were of award winning quality that would have significant positive impact for taxpayers and the community at large.** Les Storch, a partner in the firm of O'Connor, Davies, Munns & Dobbins (ODMD), describes the results of the audit as "very positive."

"One would have to say the city is in healthy financial condition at the end of 2004," he says. Storch focused on 2004 because it was the most recent complete year for which the City had records.

An audit is basically a snapshot of a city's financial condition. In this case, ODMD was looking back at the last full year of Peekskill's expenses. "The job of the auditor is to issue an opinion on the financial statements of the city. We need to make sure that they present fairly in all material respects the financial position of the city at the end of the financial year and that the financial operations are presented fairly for that fiscal year," Storch says.

ODMD is New York State's leading accounting firm specializing in the auditing of small to mid-sized communities. Although it is paid by the city, as an auditing firm, ODMD is legally required to render an independent, unbiased view of the financial state of the city.

Storch found that Peekskill's finances are now so strong he suggested that next year the City should apply for the prestigious Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting. This award is only available to communities that go through an extensive, extremely rigorous process and which maintain very high financial standards. Only a few communities in the region have gained the award; Peekskill's two most recent audits are strong enough for the community to gain the certificate next year, he says.

This strength comes after Peekskill has taken a number of financial blows that were totally beyond its control, Storch says. Labor costs make up the largest part of the City's budget, and a portion of these expenses has increased dramatically in recent years. "About three or four years ago, retirement costs were 1% of payroll. Now

they're about 10%-19% of payroll," he says. "When you go from one percent to 19% that's a significant increase, absolutely."

Though Peekskill faced this and other potentially devastating mandates, strict financial discipline, intense cost control and extensive implementation of new managerial practices enabled the city to overcome their burden. This strong financial state did not come easily or by accident. Positive movement was apparent in virtually all of the areas that are hot buttons for professional auditors, Storch says. Among the most important is the tight match between the City's spending and its revenues. In 2004 the city projected expenditures of \$29.2 million.

save the city interest costs," he says.

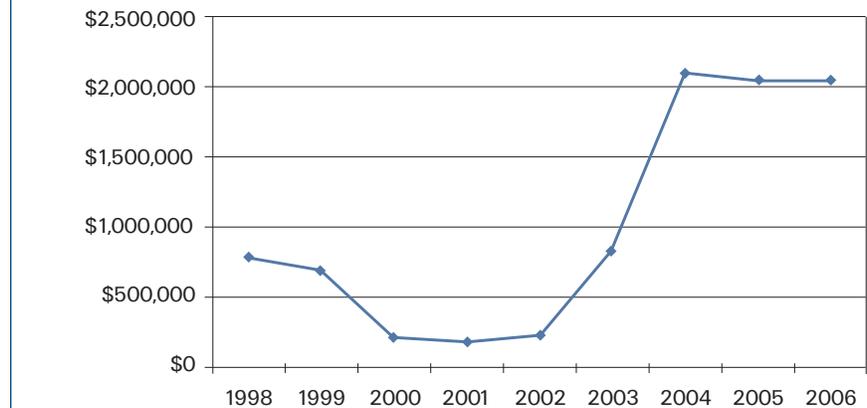
"The city has improved its financial condition from 2003 to 2004 with a fund balance increase totaling \$2.5 million," Storch says. This has definite long-term implications for the City, in that it will allow more financial flexibility, reduce the amount of borrowing that has to be done, and cut the cost of borrowing when it is done.

"The city's budget is about 30 million; so it has an unreserved and undesignated fund balance which is about 8% of the operating budget which is clearly in the range that Moody and Standard & Poor recommend, which is 5%-10%," Storch says.

While the \$2.5 million is already targeted at specific projects and funds, the City also has more cash on hand, Storch says. "The unreserved and undesignated fund balance went up by \$375,000. That's also very positive; that means the city has monies available to deal with unanticipated events and for use

### RETIREMENT CONTRIBUTIONS

1998 - 2005



It actually spent just \$28.6 million. "That shows the budget was a realistic document in meeting the needs in 2004," Storch says.

Another important area is the city's fund balance. A fund balance is money that the City has in reserve which can be used for various different purposes. As part of its long-term financial planning, the City has specified where its fund balance will go, which is another good thing, Storch says. "Most of the fund balance was put into a reserve for capital projects, which means the city will have funding available to invest in projects from operating funds rather than the use of debt, which will

in future budgets after 2005," he says.

Peekskill's use of such financial tools as Tax Anticipation Notes was completely appropriate and effective for a Westchester County Community. Tax Anticipation Notes are in essence loans against future tax revenue. They are a common feature in Westchester because communities in the County are required to not only collect but to turn over by specific deadlines tax funds for the County and for the local school districts.

"TANs are a common short term financing vehicle used particularly in the towns and

*Continued on page 8*

# KEEPING THE BOOKS: The Peekskill Finance Department

**Marcus Serrano doesn't just count beans. As Comptroller and Deputy City Manager of the City of Peekskill, NY, he dissects them, looking for every penny that can be saved or put to better use somewhere else.** That's because the money Serrano saves may well be his own. Though he's worked for a number of Westchester communities—Peekskill is the first place where he's chosen to live and work. And the choice was a real one—Serrano turned down the position of Director of Finance of Port Chester when he decided to stay at Peekskill, after the City made a counteroffer in 2003. He's been with the City since 1999.

"In all the other places I worked—Irvington, Ossining, Port Chester and here, I never lived in any of those communities," Serrano says. For Serrano, the famed slogan, "Peekskill, the friendly town" is true enough to have bet his home on. Everything simply added up when it came to leaving his longtime place in Mount Kisco and buying a home in Peekskill, Serrano

says. "I feel very much a part of this community. I feel the City is in a great position. I feel that Peekskill is a place I want to be in. I have a lot of friendships here," he says.

Personal relationships aren't the only things that provide Serrano satisfaction in his job. "I've always had a love for accounting and computer science," he says. The financial side of his job certainly exposes him to the joys of accounting. As comptroller, he's responsible for all the finances and collection and distribution of cash for the City, as well as serving of debt, which includes the issuing of bonds.

Computers are an essential tool in any modern institution today, and Serrano is the City's information technology department. He's in charge of everything that involves computers, including the web site, Internet access, maintenance of the city's PCs, e-mails, networking and telecommunications for the entire City government.

*Continued on page 8*

## Peekskill City Budget Features 0% Tax Increase for 2006 *Continued from page 5*

revenues totaling \$17.86 million. Property taxes themselves account for \$13.03 million.

Though taxes will not increase, expenditures will. The tentative budget projects a boost in \$1.321 million in revenues for 2006 over the adopted 2005 budget. An increase in non property tax revenues will account for most of this rise. Expenditures in the budget will rise by \$1.452 million, a total that is due primarily to union salary negotiations, employee health insurance increases, and increases in the cost of doing business, according to the tentative budget message. "The offset between revenues and expenditures results in an appropriated fund balance of \$266,400," the City Manager's message says.

Costs are being kept to an absolute minimum in the current budget, the City Manager says. "This tentative budget is a bare bones document," the Message says. "There is no increase in full time employees," he

says. Although departments requested 230.638 full time employees, the budget keeps staffing at just 222.376 employees.

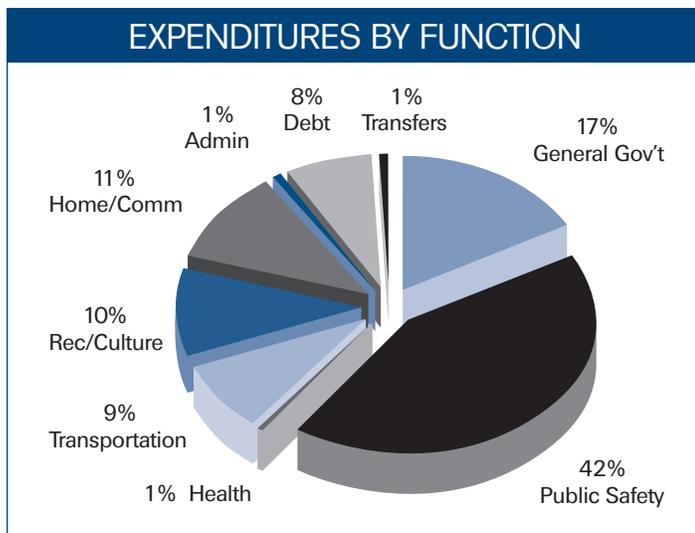
Two personnel changes are planned. A part time housing inspector will be hired to meet the demands of a new ordinance that requires houses get a new certificate of occupancy whenever they are sold. And, when the current full-time assessor retires in October, a part time clerk will become a full-time employee and the City will hire a consultant on an as-needed basis.

Reflecting the fact that the City is a service business, a full 73% of revenues go towards personnel salaries and benefits. About 8% of the budget goes towards debt services. By themselves, the police and fire departments account for 42% of the budget, with police taking up 68% of that total.

Projects in the budget are that the most sig-

nificant changes in expenditures will come from labor negotiations and increases to employee benefit costs. Changes in revenues will most likely come from the New York State-managed mortgage tax, at \$700,000, increased per capita state aid of \$138,000, and tipping fees of \$300,000 growing out of the recent agreement with Karta.

Fitzpatrick is especially proud of the budget's clarity and comprehensiveness. Items mentioned in his message are linked to specific pages in the full budget document. The budget also contains a new "Issues and Options" segment that takes a close look at how the 2006 document varies from its 2005 predecessor and provides detail on the additions and subtractions. Fitzpatrick singled out City employees Lynn Swansen and Barbara Mignano for serving as budget officers, and also specifically praised Ida Esposito, Marcus Serrano, and Sharon Heitman.



## City of Peekskill Gets Enthusiastic Evaluation

*Continued from page 6*

cities of Westchester County, because it is only in Westchester County where the cities and towns are required to guarantee the taxes of the school district and the county taxes," Storch says. "The TANs are the vehicle to provide you the cash funds necessary to satisfy the warrants until you collect the taxes at a later date, so they are not uncommon," he says. "If everybody paid their taxes when they were supposed to, you wouldn't have to rely on TANs."

Besides, this year will probably be the last one where Peekskill has to use TANs, says Peekskill City Comptroller Marcus Serrano. "With our increase in fund balance and greater control of expenses, next year will be the first year as far as anyone can remember that the City will not have to borrow using TANs," he says. "Our savings will be substantial," he says. "I can't express how happy I am as the comptroller of the city to see our fund balance growing so we don't have to borrow money to pay our obligations for the first time in a number of years."

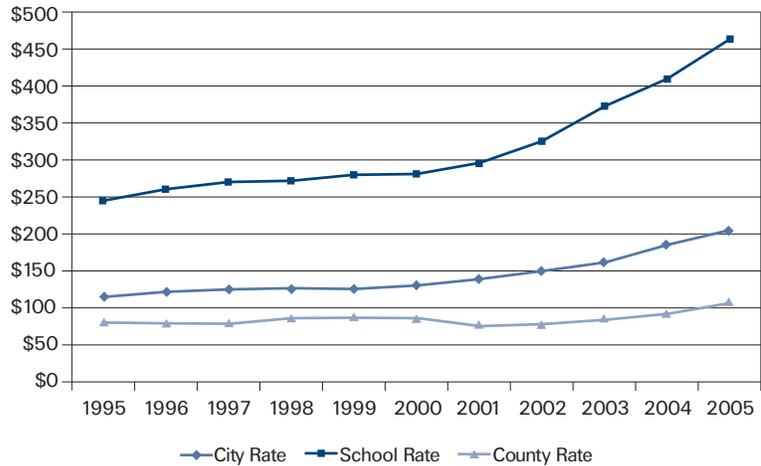
Storch was deeply impressed by Peekskill's managerial and financial staffers. "You've got a great team here," he says. "The finance group downstairs is doing a good job. Sheila Doughtie does a great job, and Marcus oversees things very well," he said. "Marcus has some difficult tasks to handle, and he has handled them well."

"From a financial point of view it would appear the budgets are realistic in their expectations of the city's needs, the computer system has been upgraded and it works efficiently, and he is realistic in estimating revenues and expenditures," Storch says. ODMD audited Peekskill's 2003 and 2004 statements. It last worked with the City about 20 years ago, in a different political era. At that time, Peekskill was in near constant financial crisis, running deficit budgets while it dramatically cut services and increased taxes.

While the financial shocks the City faced in recent years were sharp enough to have triggered emergency responses, effective leadership and management have kept the impact to a minimum. The City's recent success at bringing in high quality developers has also paid off for its citizens. "The City is experiencing some new development, which is very helpful," Storch says. Peekskill's current finances fit its needs, Storch says. "If you look at the final budget compared to expenditures, the City, out of \$30 million, underestimated its spending by about \$700,000. That's clearly a budget that's meeting the needs of the City. It's not too fat," Storch says.

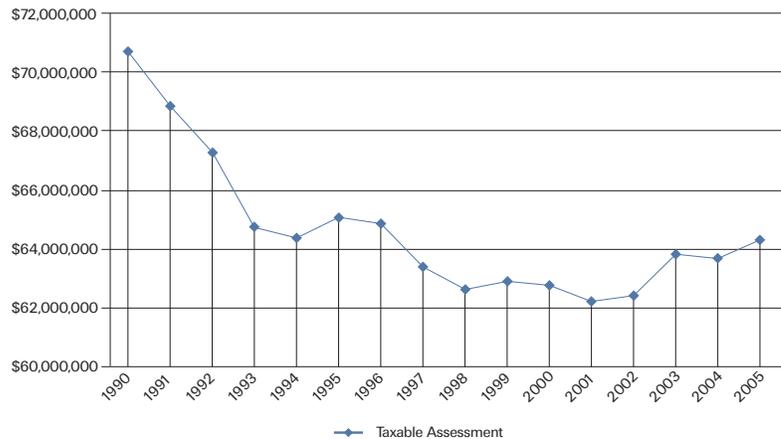
## CHANGES IN THE TAX RATES (PER THOUSAND)

From 1995 through a Projected 2005



## TAXABLE ASSESSED VALUATION

For years 1990 thru 2004



## The Peekskill Finance Department *Continued from page 7*

When Serrano started working for Peekskill, the City's computer systems were antiquated and dysfunctional. One of his proudest accomplishments has been to modernize Peekskill's information infrastructure. Yet the thing that Serrano feels best about is the atmosphere he's created in his department and with his fellow managers at City Hall. "I'm really proud of two things: advancements in information technology and the view of my department as a tool for getting things done and not as a hindrance," he says.

"We've created a team environment," he says. The camaraderie and cooperation between departments is also an accomplishment that Serrano credits to the excellent teamwork that occurs each and every day between department heads and the staff of the City.

Peekskill residents experience the fruit of Serrano's work regularly. Costs are lower, productivity is higher, documents are more available and the entire department is focused on providing quality service to its users. "We've tried to create more of a customer relations environment for our City residents," Serrano says. Behind this achievement has been the restructuring of the uniform system of accounts, streamlining of payments and receipt of taxes, and the installation of a scanning system that makes documents accessible at the click of a button instead of forcing staffers to wade through untold different file cabinets.

None of this would have happened without his excellent staff, Serrano says, especially his second in command, Deputy Comptroller, Sheila Doughtie. "She's been here since the 1978, and she's tremendously knowledgeable and experienced," Serrano says.

# As the Seasons Change, Take Basic Precautions



By Fire Chief James Howard

**Summer is only just ending. But that means that cold weather will be coming sooner than we realize. With energy prices soaring, this winter is going to be a difficult one for many people. So I'd like to make a few suggestions that will help keep you both safe and comfortable.**

You may have heard some of these before, but it never hurts to be reminded about things that could result in the death or injury of your entire family.

### **Be careful when you use space heaters.**

Portable heaters cause many, many fires. Make sure that there is nothing flammable within several feet of any space heater in operation. Teach your children to not go near a heater. If you're using a kerosene heater, make certain it is one rated for indoor use, and be extremely careful with both the heater and the fuel.

**Watch out for extension cords.** I tell people to make it a rule to never, ever use extension cords when they're running an electric space heater. Heaters use a lot of power. If you put that kind of energy through a regular extension cord, it will start to get hot. We have had a number of very bad fires because of overloaded extension cords. People also run extension cords under rugs. This is an incredibly bad thing to do. Rugs wear the insulator from the extension cords, which can quickly cause short circuits and fires.

**Understand how fast quilts and mattresses can burn.** There is fire-test video on the Internet of a quilted bed set on fire. Within a minute, most of the bed was a furnace. They had to shut down the test early after about three minutes. If you smoke, be careful. But rule number one is to never allow open flames near bed linens.

**Do not use candles.** Any open flame in a house is a dangerous thing, but candles can truly be killers. You may think your candle is in a safe place—but the first draft that moves a curtain may leave a

room engulfed in flames in seconds. People should even avoid using candles as an emergency light source. They are simply too dangerous. Stock up on batteries and flashlights instead.

**Watch out for wood stoves.** If you install a wood stove, contact our building department. The City has very strict, specific rules dealing with how wood stoves can be set up. If you have a wood stove and are uncertain about how it has been installed, contact the City. Even if your stove has been installed appropriately, make sure you do the maintenance that is absolutely essential to keep your home safe. Wood is not a clean fuel. It leaves large amounts of residue in flues and chimneys. This residue can easily burn hot enough to set your house on fire. Careful use can considerably reduce your risks.

There are a number of safe things you can do to reduce your heating costs. Using kits to install plastic storm windows over your regular windows can dramatically reduce drafts. Surprisingly, one significant source of cold air is electrical outlets. Special insulating material is available that can be installed simply by taking off your switch plate and putting it back on. Old houses have a lot of nooks and crannies. Foam is available that can be sprayed into areas where cold air is coming in, shutting out the breezes and (omit "cutting") reducing your heating bills. Make sure your fireplace flues are shut.

**A final note:** leaves fall with fall. Years ago, people could burn them in their backyards. This is no longer legal because it both pollutes the air and creates significant fire risks. Check out the [www.cityofpeekskill.com](http://www.cityofpeekskill.com) website for information about bagged and loose leaf pickups.

## A Community Serving A Community: The Peekskill Fire Department

There are a lot of special things about Peekskill. One of the most important is the city's fire department. Longevity is one of the reasons the Peekskill Fire Department is special. With one company founded in 1826, the PFD is one of the oldest fire departments in the country.

This means the Fire Department's roots run deep, long and rich. Where many communities in the region are having trouble finding enough people to keep operating, Peekskill's residents have truly stepped up to the plate. While the Department could certainly use a few more people, its basic needs are definitely being met. One reason for this is the incredible strength of the community connection in the Department. There are many third, fourth and even fifth — generation firefighters serving in Peekskill's fire companies.

Another unusual aspect about the Peekskill Fire Department is the fact that it mixes full time and volunteer employees. There are 24 full-timers in the department and 180 volunteer firefighters. The full-timers drive the trucks and help maintain them; the volunteers do most of the actual firefighting.

Becoming a volunteer firefighter is a more challenging task than it used to be. Today's volunteers need to take numerous different classes in firefighting and fire safety. Even after they've made it into the department, they've got to keep on taking courses so they're aware of the latest developments in technology and strategy.

Peekskill's fire department is divided into six different companies, each



**FIVE GENERATIONS OF SERVICE.** Bill Clark, Sr. stands next to his son Bill Clark Jr. Clark Jr. is the fifth generation of his family to have served in the Peekskill Fire Department's Columbian Engine Company.

of which specializes in a different area of firefighting. The name of each company tells a lot about what it does.

An "engine" company's vehicles usually specialize in pumping water. Engine and hose companies get the hoses into a burning structure and are usually the first to put water on the fire. A "hook and ladder" company usually focuses on getting people out of burning homes or buildings, while a fire patrol watches for fires and provides rapid response emergency services.

Although the City owns the fire engine and the equipment the fire department uses, each company is itself an operation that is technically separate from the City. That means the companies have to take care of their own fundraising and finances. Two of the City's firehouses are actually owned by the fire companies that occupy them: Cortlandt Hook and Ladder and Columbian Hose in the Beach Shopping Center.

Peekskill is diverse in both its buildings and its  
*Continued on page 12*

**Peekskill's six companies are:** Columbian Engine Company • Cortlandt Hook and Ladder • Washington Engine Company (Just celebrated its 165th anniversary) • Columbian Hose Company • Centennial Hose Company • The Peekskill Fire Patrol

LINDA JEAN FISHER:

# A Hard Working Artist

***Rebuilding a downtown devastated by decades of neglect takes more than slick words and fancy plans. It takes more than new buildings and clean sidewalks. What makes a downtown come alive again is people—individuals who live in a place and are totally dedicated to making it a better, more exciting, more attractive place.*** Some have called Peekskill's Artlofts corporate welfare for elite artists. But the reality is that most artists don't make much money. And that goes double for those who purchased the newly constructed Artlofts on Central Avenue and South Street. Anyone buying one of those Artlofts couldn't have an income above a certain level—and had to prove that a significant percentage of that income came from their work as an artist.

Experts in bringing back downtown districts have relied on Artists for years for a number of reasons. Because they are creative by nature, artists are often willing to take risks and move into urban space that others might avoid. Since they frequently don't have much money, artists are willing to act as urban pioneers, turning once empty and fallow space into homes and studios. Due to the fact that they march to their own beat but realize they have to deal with the world at large, Artists often are entrepreneurial at the same time they understand the importance of organizing to help achieve their goals.

Although Peekskill's artist district was gathering momentum before the Central Avenue and South Street art lofts were built, the opening and occupying of those buildings appears to have put the movement into overdrive. Publications from The New York Times to Westchester and Hudson Valley Magazines have all done extensive features focusing on the both artists who live in the Lofts and the work they are creating there.

Few exemplify the type of person the Artloft program was trying to attract and the program's success in achieving its goals than Linda Jean Fisher. She was born in the City in 1965 in the old Peekskill Hospital. Fisher and her parents moved to Montrose when she was a child—but she always wanted to come back. Her family had lived in Peekskill for three or four generations. "I wanted to come back to where I was from and wanted to make my life here," she says. "I believe in the City of Peekskill and I put my life savings into this place."

"There is this great positive energy that I get from Peekskill. I know it's not perfect, but there's been a huge improvement from years ago," Fisher says. She is proud to be part of that improvement—and intensely grateful to the City for the opportunity she's been given.

She expresses that gratitude by doing volunteer work as president of the Peekskill Artists Council. Though her spare time is minimal, Fisher believes it's vital to get the word out about the great opportunities Peekskill offers and to help make sure the Artists community keeps building momentum.

***Few exemplify the type of person the Artloft program was trying to attract and the program's success in achieving its goals than Linda Jean Fisher.***

It's a myth that artists thrive in isolation. Many of the great artistic movements in history have come through artists working together, supporting each other in everything from trying out new ideas to figuring out ways to make a living. Artists like Fisher also need a space that offers rich light and abundant room.

None of this would have been available to Fisher without the Peekskill Artloft project. Though she has gotten some strong reviews, her reputation as an artist is only just emerging, and the amount of money she makes from selling her work is limited. To earn a living, she frames pictures at the Art Barn



**FOCUSING ON CREATIVITY.** Working with light, shape, color and figures is an essential part of Linda Jean Fisher's life. With its tall ceilings and stunning northern light, her Artloft has inspired Fisher to do work that's won acclaim in such publications as The New York Times.

in Ossining, a place where she's worked for the last 17 years. "I started there on October 3, 1988," Fisher says, who is truly a woman obsessed when it comes to her work and her art. "I document everything. Documentation is a large part of my work. I document how much time I spend on it. I document how I did it," she says. To have more time available for her art, she packs 40 hours of work into three days a week.

Getting the money together for the down payment was a long and difficult process for Fisher. She lived in her mother's house for several years to help accumulate money for the deposit. From the moment the concept of building the Artlofts was announced, she was committed to getting one.

She got on the first waiting list in 1999, and was one of the first to officially apply in January 2002. There were some minor snags, but she wound up with a space that was perfect for her purposes. It had huge, north-facing windows and was filled with the glorious natural illumination that has made the Hudson River Valley legendary and helped inspire an entire school of painting.

It's certainly helped inspire Fisher. "I officially moved in here on June 1 of 2002. My first painting was executed on June 17 of 2002," she says. "I choose this unit because of the privacy aspect and because I can see the light over the Hudson, which is miraculous," she says. Having an Artloft is both convenient and inspiring. "In 2002, I spent a total of 2,199 hours and 17 minutes developing my work and artistic career—that was my first year here. In 2004 my total was 2,281 hours," she says. "I never was able to put this many hours in my work until I put it all under one roof."

"I've started a project where I'm going to be doing 6 million fingerprints, one for each Jewish victim of the Holocaust, on 50,000

*Continued on page 11*

## Peekskill Moves Forward

*Continued from page 1*

that presents shopping and entertainment opportunities, and by using history as a tourism-boosting tool.

- **Maintaining** strict financial discipline to keep the City's finances healthy, preserve our bond rating, and keep tax increases to a minimum.
- **Aggressively** pursue code violation and quality of life issues to ensure the safest, most rewarding environment for City residents.

Some key portions of the revitalization program still remain to be completed. The most important of them is the Peekskill Waterfront Redevelopment Plan. Successful accomplishment of the Waterfront project will send a clear signal to the nation's developers that our City is ready to play in the big leagues. With government funding for urban redevelopment at a minimum, quality developers are the best resource available for large-scale urban renewal projects.

Going with a single developer will create a focused, well-defined project that will adhere to specific standards, have money not only for construction but for marketing and maintenance, and most important, fill one of the City's most crippling demographic gaps. Peekskill has a strong and committed middle class. It home to more poor people per capita than almost any community in Westchester. What has been missing for many years is a significant number of people at the upper end of the spec-

## A Hard Working Artist

*Continued from page 10*

sheets of 11 by eight and a half inch paper," she says. "I want to execute it over a 27 month period, which is same amount of time that it took to create the atomic bomb. That's because most of the people who worked on the atomic bomb initially worked on it because they wanted to defeat the Nazis," she says.

Fisher plans to continue working, living and volunteering in Peekskill. "The beautiful thing about Peekskill is that it's a melting pot where there are people of every race, religion and income—everybody to me is represented here. Where I was raised is a whole different thing," she says.



trum. Providing services to those in need has been an important issue in Peekskill for decades. But the gap at the top end of the spectrum means the city does not possess the depth of resources that other communities—especially those in Westchester—have.

Census statistics tell the story. In 2000, Peekskill had 8,695 households, of which just 391 had an income of \$150,000 or better. That's just 4.5%. In Ossining, a village to which Peekskill is frequently compared, the percentage is fully 8.7%, almost double that of Peekskill. A better Westchester measure might be Scarsdale, where fully 58.7% of all households make \$150,000.

Statistical analysis shows that people who tend to buy Ginsburg condominiums and townhouses have relatively few children and tend to utilize a minimum of city services. In addition, those with extra disposable income can support the specialty shops, restaurants and other businesses that will thus be available for everyone else. Filling the demographic gap is thus a commonsense move that will improve the quality of life of everyone in Peekskill.

Strict financial discipline, professional management and the strength and commitment of its middle class have enabled City of Peekskill to offer Scarsdale-quality services on a Peekskill budget. Peekskill Stadium, the Youth Bureau and the Department of Parks and Recreation are good examples of this.

An upscale developer with a strong reputation, Ginsburg Development Corp. will draw in the people Peekskill needs to grow in a healthy way and increase services to residents without boosting tax rates. The projects that Ginsburg has already completed are one reason the city will see a 0% tax increase in 2006.

Though the City of Peekskill has no control

## Foundation for Success *Continued from page 1*

redevelopment project that will take land that has been vacant for decades and fill it with buildings that match the historic style of our downtown. The project will add 20 new live/work condominiums and seven new retail businesses. An exciting part of this project is on N. Division Street where a Guinness Irish Pub will be opening. This will be the first Guinness Pub in Westchester. The pub will be built in Ireland and reconstructed in the space in downtown Peekskill.

Government is playing an important part in Peekskill's recovery. But the big dollars are coming from some of the most respected and admired developers in America. They are planning to put hundreds of millions of dollars into our community—something that will happen only if we welcome them. That's one reason the Waterfront project is so vital to Peekskill's future. Successful implementation of the Waterfront Project will show the world that Peekskill is a place where huge successes can occur, and build our momentum even further.

There are people who still reject the plans we have put in place to add to the City's tax base and revitalize the downtown. We have utilized the Arts District concept to bring new businesses and culture to the City and we have put Peekskill on the map as one of the 'Top 10 Places to Live' according to the Westchester and Hudson Valley Magazines. Many of those same people are now attacking the Riverfront Project. Let's not allow their lack of vision to get in the way of a wonderful new future for our City.

over rising real estate prices, it is taking significant steps to provide workforce-priced affordable housing. Fully 10 of the 14 townhouse units on the new Gateway project will be workforce-affordable housing. Located on the 600 block of Main Street, the Gateway project will spruce up the entrance to our city at the same time it fills a key need.

Strong pressure from the City has also made sure there will be a significant amount of workforce-affordable housing in the Waterfront Development project. Ginsburg has agreed to make 10% of its units workforce-affordable.

Another development that's underway will help further energize that essential element of Peekskill's downtown revitalization campaign, the artists' community. Construction has begun on the latest phase of the Artloft project, with nationally respected Community Preservation Corp. subsidiary CPC Resources Inc. building or rehabilitating more than 20 different housing units.

While the Main Street properties will be designed for artists and sold only to those who pass a strict screening process, CPC is also building market-rate units on Diven Street. And in a classic example of the excitement a well-connected private developer can bring to a downtown two of the buildings CPC is restoring will be converted into a genuine Guinness pub at a cost that may top \$1.5 million. The pub will actually be built in Ireland by Guinness, taken apart, and reassembled in Peekskill.

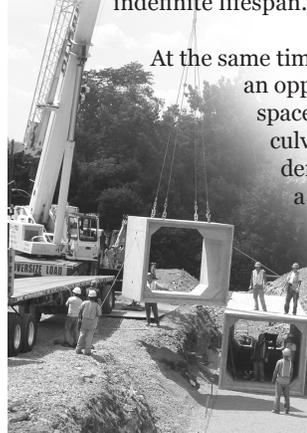
Investors Barry Gilsenan and Leslie McGettigan have a strong record of working successfully with rising Hudson River Towns. They own Vertigo and the Olde Village Inne in Nyack and Fagan's Ale House in Yonkers, and they've decided Peekskill is the latest coming place in the Hudson Valley. They're not alone, which is good news for everyone in the City.

# NEWS UPDATE:

## Central Ave Repairs Make City Safer

**An aggressive stormwater abatement project on the upper end of Central Avenue is making Peekskill a safer place at the same time it significantly increases the number of parking spaces available in the downtown area.** Best of all, City taxpayers are only paying for a small portion of the project, with the Federal Emergency Management Agency covering 75% of the \$3 million expense. That's because the reason for the repairs is damage to a culvert by the series of super-storms that's occurred in recent years.

That culvert carries McGregory's Brook, which ripped apart the lower end of Central Avenue a few years ago. To prevent the Brook from doing further damage, the City is replacing the old galvanized steel culvert with new high-pressure concrete piping that has a near-indefinite lifespan.



At the same time, the Department of Public Works is also using the project as an opportunity to address downtown's critical shortage of parking spaces. Dozens of new parking spots should be available once the culvert replacement is completed. In addition, the Peekskill Garden Club is getting a transformed home that will include a brook, a bridge and other sophisticated landscaping. More than 280 feet of brook that now run underground will now be on beautiful display, concluding in a dramatic and lovely waterfall. The improvements will make the City safer and more attractive.

City officials understand the inconvenience caused by road closures, traffic rerouting and blinking traffic lights, and appreciate the patience residents and local businesses have shown.

## Making Safety and Stability a Priority *Continued from page 4*

Code enforcement officers have found that many tenants do not fully understand their rights nor the regulations regarding living spaces in Peekskill itself. That's why the City is working on creating brochures in English and Spanish that will soon be released.

There is one rule of thumb that anyone in Peekskill can use: boarding houses are absolutely illegal in the City. Anyone renting a room to someone rather than a full apartment is breaking the law. So is the person paying for that room.

Cramming far too many people into houses than they were designed to maintained puts the lives and health of the occupants at risk. A number of Peekskill's worst fires in recent years grew directly out of over crowding-related abuses. So far, no one has been killed, but the risks are real. Anyone in a big, old house that catches on fire has just two or three minutes to escape.

Strong code enforcement is thus a great way of keeping people and neighborhoods alike healthy and sound.

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Peekskill, NY 10566

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To Postal Patron

## A Community Serving A Community *Continued from page 9*

citizens, and that complexity is evident in everything from the makeup of the fire department to the type of fires it battles. "We welcome with open arms anyone who would like to come and work with us," says Peekskill Fire Chief Jim Howard. There are 10 women volunteers in the PFD, as well as a significant number of minorities.

More than 3,000 calls come into the fire department every year. Most of these are motor vehicle accidents. About 800 of them are fires. Of these, about 40 do significant property damage. Response times are very quick, usually within a few minutes. In the old days, a siren went off to summon volunteers. Today, they are called by beepers. Volunteers use blue flashing lights in their vehicles to let people know they're on their way to an emergency.

Each company is a small democracy, and the department itself elects its officers. Ranks include first lieutenant, second lieutenant, captain and chief. New firefighters have to go through a six-month probationary period. Firefighters must have at least three years experience before they can become lieutenants, and five years before they can become captains.

For those who want to support the fire department but who aren't comfortable fighting fires, each company has an associate membership. Associate members help with everything from fundraising to education, and once again, everyone is welcome to join.



### WELCOME TO THE City of Peekskill

NEW YORK STATE'S FASTEST GROWING CITY

#### Budget Statistics for City of Peekskill Fiscal Year 2006

**Total tax increase by City of Peekskill: 0%**

**Distribution of Dollars Collected by City of Peekskill:**  
**By Percent:** Peekskill City School and Henry Hudson Districts: 59%; City of Peekskill, 26%, Westchester County, 14%, Field Library, 1%.

**In dollars:** Peekskill City School District is \$175 million; Hendrick Hudson, \$1.9 million; City of Peekskill \$13.3 million and Westchester County, \$78 million.

**Per \$1,000 of assessed Value:** Peekskill City School and Henry Hudson Districts: \$462.60; City of Peekskill, \$202.56, Westchester County, \$105.46, Field Library, \$8.09

**Increase in New York State retirement contributions 2002-2004 in total dollars:**  
2002-\$165,000; 2004-\$2 million plus

**Number of full time employees:**  
requested by departments: 230.638  
approved in budget: 222.376

**Percent of revenues that:**  
go towards personnel salaries and benefits: 73%

**Percent police and fire department take up of total budget: 42%**

**Percent police take up of that total: 68%**

**Total money coming from New York State-managed mortgage tax: \$700,000**