## DIVISION OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY

## FTMANCIAL REPORTT <br> ON TOWNS

FISCAL YEARS ENDED 2005

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is to serve
taxpayers'
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management of
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New York State

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## Overview

There are 932 towns in New York State. The State's towns encompass all territory within the State except that within cities or Native American reservations. Towns are municipal corporations that can be traced to both English and Dutch colonial government roots in the Hudson Valley.

The Town of Hempstead, Nassau County, is New York State's largest town. In 2005, Hempstead had an estimated population of 751,276 -more than twice the size of the city of Buffalo—and taxable real property of over $\$ 87$ billion. The State's smallest town, Red House, Cattaraugus County, had an estimated population of 37 in 2005 and taxable real property of $\$ 81$ million.

Because of population outward migration from cities into suburban and rural areas over the past 50 years, New York's towns have generally enjoyed the benefits of growth (unlike some other classes of local government) with sizable increases in population and real property valuation. Traditionally, the construction and maintenance of roads has been the largest financial responsibility for towns. While this is still the case, with rapid population growth, some towns are finding themselves responsible for services not previously provided by towns, such as public safety, recreation and social services.

## Revenues

Town revenues totaled $\$ 5.7$ billion in 2005. Between 2000 and 2005, town revenues increased 31 percent, or an average annual rate of 5.6 percent, exceeding the average annual inflation rate of 2.5 percent for that time period.

## Property Taxes

Towns rely heavily on real property taxes to support their operations. In 2005 , towns raised over $\$ 2.9$ billion from property taxes, which accounted for 51 percent of all town revenues. Between 2000 and 2005, towns slightly reduced their reliance on property taxes, from 51.6 percent of their revenue mix to 50.4 percent. Part of this shift can be attributed to increases in State aid and non-property taxes, such as sales tax revenues.


While town property tax levies increased by 1.7 percent a year between 1995 and 2000, from 2000 to 2005 town levies increased 5.1 percent annually - well above the average annual inflation rate of 2.5 percent for that period. This trend is similar to the experience of all classes of local government during this period, largely due to the terrorist attacks of 2001, the national recession and increased fringe benefit costs, including health insurance. Analysis of preliminary data indicates that this trend is continuing, with town levies increasing by 4.6 percent in 2006.

## Sales Tax

Currently, 43 of 57 counties (excluding New York City) share sales tax revenues with towns within their boundaries. Sales taxes are an important revenue source for towns, accounting for over 9 percent of all town revenues in 2005. These revenues result from sharing agreements between counties and the municipalities within their borders. Consistent with overall growth in sales taxes, town sales tax revenues increased from $\$ 316.3$ million in 1995 to $\$ 526.6$ million in 2005 at an average annual growth rate of 5.2 percent.

The remaining $\$ 119.5$ million in non-property tax revenues account for 2 percent of town revenues in 2005, and represent funds from a wide variety of sources, including licenses, permits, rentals, recoveries and forfeitures.

## State Aid

Between 1995 and 2005, State aid to towns increased by 130 percent, from $\$ 279$ million to $\$ 641$ million. The share of town revenues resulting from State aid has increased from 7.6 percent in 1995 to 11.2 percent in 2005 . Most of this increase was attributable to the mortgage recording tax ${ }^{1}$ and its growth reflects the increasing demographic outflows to suburban towns and growth in the state's housing market.

The mortgage recording tax was responsible for 65.1 percent of all State aid distributed to towns in 2005.


Highway and transportation aid accounted for 13.9 percent, and unrestricted aid accounted for 6.2 percent; miscellaneous categories comprised the balance. Other than villages, towns receive the smallest share of unrestricted State aid of any class of local government.

[^0]The 2005-06 and 2006-07 enacted State Budgets included unrestricted State aid increases for towns, cities and villages. In 2006-07, towns received a 20 percent increase in unrestricted State aid. Even so, this increase is only valued at $\$ 48.3$ million, which accounts for only 5 percent of all unrestricted State aid distributed to local governments, compared to 60 percent for cities (excluding New York City, which receives 33 percent).

## Expenditures

Town expenditures totaled almost $\$ 6.3$ billion in 2005. Payments for current operations (e.g., personal services, employee benefits and contractual obligations) comprised about 76 percent of total town expenditures, with the remaining 24 percent devoted to capital investments and debt service. Of the $\$ 4.7$ billion spent on current operations, salaries and benefits were responsible for 55 percent of expenditures, and contractual expenses made up the balance.


Town expenditures increased 34.9 percent between 2000 and 2005, at an average of 6.2 percent annually, more than double the rate of inflation for the period.

Town functional expenditures, which do not include payments for debt service, increased by 37.6 percent between 2000 and 2005, at an average annual rate of 6.6 percent-more than twice the rate of inflation for the period. While transportation was the largest category of functional expenditure ( 25 percent of total

expenditures) - responsible for $\$ 1.4$ billion in spending in 2005 - the rate of spending growth in this category of expense was slower than in other areas. Culture and recreation spending ( 11 percent of total) had the largest five-year growth, increasing by 49 percent from 2000 to 2005. From 1995 to 2005 , culture and recreation expenditures increased 90 percent, at an average annual rate of 6.6 percent. Community services expenditures, a category driven by spending for refuse and garbage, was responsible for $\$ 934$ million (16 percent of total expenditures) in 2005.

## Population Growth in Towns

As a result of population declines in cities and corresponding suburban growth, towns have shown consistent increases in population since 1970. In fact, 83 percent of towns have experienced population growth since 1970, with 22 percent growing by at least 50 percent, and 5 percent effectively doubling in size during this time period. Towns in Rockland and Saratoga counties have grown the most, accounting for six of the top ten high-growth towns in the State.

By comparison, cities (other than New York City) have lost 21 percent of their total population from 1970 to 2005, and while there are some exceptions, 48 of 61 cities have lost population during this period. From 1990 to 2000, towns grew by 5 percent, while cities lost almost 5 percent of their population. More recently, the U.S. Census Bureau has estimated that from 2000 to 2005, towns in New York grew 2 percent while cities lost almost 2 percent of their population. While the disparity in population growth between towns and cities continues, it has slowed in recent years.


## Town Special Districts

Special districts are mechanisms by which some towns deliver certain services. A special district is a geographic area within a town established to address specific needs of the property owners within that district, utilizing charges and, in some cases, user fees paid by taxpayers within the district to finance these services. Special districts were statutorily authorized to assist towns in adjusting to patterns of growth that were not townwide, and have been used liberally by towns over the last several decades to address increased residential needs. The revenue raised to pay for special district services now represents a significant share of total revenue raised by local governments, which can cost a taxpayer hundreds of dollars annually.

The numbers of special districts have grown consistently since 1909, when the authority for town improvement districts was originally established in law. The end of World War II and the subsequent "baby boom" was accompanied by an expansion of suburban development in towns surrounding larger metropolitan areas. The greatest increase of special districts in towns occurred between 1950 and 1970 , when more than 2,500 special districts were established, largely for lighting, water, sewer and fire protection. As of 2004, there were 6,927 special districts which have been created throughout the State for a wide variety of residential needs. Most districts are established to attend to common needs of people in residential areas, with drainage, fire protection, lighting, park, refuse, sewer and water districts accounting for about 93 percent of all existing improvement districts.


Other less-common districts have been created for ambulance services, incinerators, sidewalks and snow removal, among other purposes. These districts are responsible for about 7 percent of all current special districts. The concept of the special district has proved so flexible that it has even been used to meet some unusual and unique needs, including public dock, beach erosion control and harbor improvement districts for seaside properties. Other special districts have been created through special acts of the State Legislature.

## Town Full Value Trends

Though problematic for cities, the shift in population from metropolitan centers into suburban and rural towns has contributed to the continuing growth in town full value over the five-year period from 2000 to 2005. During this time, full value in towns statewide has increased over 60 percent ( 10 percent annually). In contrast, full value growth during the five-year period from 1994 to 1999 was only 15 percent ( 2.8 percent annually). In effect, full values grew almost four times faster between 2000 and 2005 than they did in the preceding five-year period. Some of this growth could be the result of property revaluations within towns.



When split between upstate and downstate, the full value story in towns is quite different. The growth of towns in areas surrounding metropolitan New York City is largely responsible for driving the growth of town full values statewide. From 1995 to 2005, almost 70 percent of the towns in downstate counties (Nassau, Orange, Putnam, Rockland, Suffolk and Westchester) had full value growth of more than 100 percent. Overall, the full value of downstate towns grew by 124 percent during that 10 -year timeframe and by 82 percent from 2000 to 2005 . The same cannot be said for upstate towns, which averaged 34 percent growth in full value from 1995 to 2005 and 28 percent growth from 2000 to 2005. Only 2 percent of upstate towns doubled their full value between 1995 and 2005.


[^1]| Expenditure Trends by Function for Towns - Fiscal Years Ended in 1995 and 2000-2005 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | Percent Change |  |  |  |
| :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | Overall |  | Average Annual |  |
| Towns | 1995 | 2000 | 2001 | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 | 2000-2005 | 1995-2005 | 2000-2005 | 1995-2005 |
| GENERAL PURPOSE: | * Amounts below in millions of dollars |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| General Government | \$635.8 | \$747.5 | \$862.3 | \$876.5 | \$998.6 | \$1,038.6 | \$1,107.0 | 48.1\% | 74.1\% |  |  |
| Police | \$274.7 | \$350.7 | \$371.6 | \$397.6 | \$424.4 | \$469.7 | \$496.0 | 41.4\% | 80.6\% | 7.2\% | 6.1\% |
| Fire | \$108.9 | \$127.1 | \$133.2 | \$141.2 | \$148.6 | \$157.1 | \$164.4 | 29.3\% | 51.0\% | 5.3\% | 4.2\% |
| Public Safety | \$125.6 | \$141.2 | \$146.5 | \$162.0 | \$173.4 | \$195.8 | \$205.8 | 45.7\% | 63.9\% | 7.8\% | 5.1\% |
| Health | \$66.2 | \$85.4 | \$89.5 | \$99.2 | \$104.1 | \$113.0 | \$116.5 | 36.4\% | 76.0\% | 6.4\% | 5.8\% |
| Transportation | \$912.7 | \$1,039.6 | \$1,128.2 | \$1,121.6 | \$1,233.9 | \$1,295.5 | \$1,371.9 | 32.0\% | 50.3\% | 5.7\% | 4.2\% |
| Economic Assistance | \$42.2 | \$50.8 | \$50.4 | \$54.3 | \$56.2 | \$58.5 | \$61.8 | 21.6\% | 46.5\% | 4.0\% | 3.9\% |
| Culture-Recreation | \$339.0 | \$432.3 | \$487.3 | \$505.3 | \$553.8 | \$602.4 | \$643.8 | 48.9\% | 89.9\% | 8.3\% | 6.6\% |
| Utilities | \$434.6 | \$488.8 | \$536.7 | \$528.2 | \$590.7 | \$607.4 | \$659.1 | 34.8\% | 51.6\% | 6.2\% | 4.3\% |
| Other Community Services | \$725.4 | \$722.9 | \$760.0 | \$818.9 | \$863.4 | \$931.2 | \$934.4 | 29.3\% | 28.8\% | 5.3\% | 2.6\% |
| TOTAL GENERAL PURPOSE | \$3,665.1 | \$4,185.3 | \$4,565.6 | \$4,704.8 | \$5,147.0 | \$5,469.3 | \$5,760.6 | 37.6\% | 57.2\% | 6.6\% | 4.6\% |
| DEBT SERVICE: |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Principal | \$264.1 | \$322.0 | \$332.9 | \$337.9 | \$346.4 | \$388.4 | \$379.0 | 17.7\% | 43.5\% | 3.3\% | 3.7\% |
| Interest | \$162.1 | \$155.4 | \$157.8 | \$150.7 | \$147.1 | \$145.2 | \$150.8 | -3.0\% | -7.0\% | -0.6\% | -0.7\% |
| TOTAL DEBT SERVICE | \$426.2 | \$477.4 | \$490.7 | \$488.6 | \$493.5 | \$533.6 | \$529.8 | 11.0\% | 24.3\% | 2.1\% | 2.2\% |
| TOTAL GENERAL PURPOSE AND INTEREST | \$4,091.3 | \$4,662.7 | \$5,056.3 | \$5,193.4 | \$5,640.5 | \$6,002.9 | \$6,290.4 | 34.9\% | 53.8\% | 6.2\% | 4.4\% |

Note: Detail may not add due to rounding

| Large Towns* |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: |
| Selected Socioeconomic Indicators |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Town | Population |  |  | Unemployment Rate |  | Median Household Income |  |  | Poverty Rate |  | Median House Value |  |  |
|  | 1970 | 2000 | $\begin{gathered} \hline \text { \% Change } \\ 1970 \text { to } \\ 2000 \\ \hline \end{gathered}$ | 1990 | 2000 | 1990 | 2000 | $\begin{array}{\|c} \hline \text { \% Change } \\ 1990 \text { to } \\ 2000 \\ \hline \end{array}$ | 1990 | 2000 | 1990 | 2000 | $\begin{gathered} \hline \text { \% Change } \\ 1990 \text { to } \\ 2000 \\ \hline \end{gathered}$ |
| Amherst | 93,929 | 116,510 | 24.0\% | 4.1\% | 9.4\% | \$41,466 | \$55,427 | 33.7\% | 5.4\% | 6.4\% | \$102,100 | \$120,000 | 17.5\% |
| Babylon | 203,570 | 211,792 | 4.0\% | 5.4\% | 4.4\% | \$47,074 | \$60,064 | 27.6\% | 5.1\% | 6.7\% | \$156,000 | \$167,600 | 7.4\% |
| Brookhaven | 245,260 | 448,248 | 82.8\% | 5.0\% | 4.3\% | \$46,339 | \$62,475 | 34.8\% | 5.2\% | 5.9\% | \$146,900 | \$159,100 | 8.3\% |
| Cheektowaga | 113,844 | 94,019 | -17.4\% | 4.5\% | 4.6\% | \$29,223 | \$38,121 | 30.4\% | 4.9\% | 6.5\% | \$68,500 | \$81,800 | 19.4\% |
| Clarkstown | 61,653 | 82,082 | 33.1\% | 3.2\% | 3.1\% | \$62,685 | \$82,107 | 31.0\% | 3.3\% | 3.8\% | \$227,900 | \$255,700 | 12.2\% |
| Clay | 36,274 | 58,805 | 62.1\% | 3.2\% | 3.7\% | \$40,463 | \$50,412 | 24.6\% | 4.0\% | 5.7\% | \$84,700 | \$85,500 | 0.9\% |
| Colonie | 69,147 | 79,258 | 14.6\% | 2.8\% | 4.4\% | \$39,394 | \$51,817 | 31.5\% | 3.9\% | 4.7\% | \$111,900 | \$118,300 | 5.7\% |
| Greece | 75,136 | 94,141 | 25.3\% | 3.6\% | 3.9\% | \$40,204 | \$48,355 | 20.3\% | 3.9\% | 4.8\% | \$92,700 | \$99,500 | 7.3\% |
| Greenburgh | 85,827 | 86,764 | 1.1\% | 4.4\% | 3.2\% | \$58,947 | \$80,379 | 36.4\% | 4.1\% | 3.9\% | \$291,300 | \$331,900 | 13.9\% |
| Hamburg | 47,644 | 56,259 | 18.1\% | 4.7\% | 4.4\% | \$35,066 | \$47,888 | 36.6\% | 5.1\% | 4.5\% | \$76,300 | \$95,700 | 25.4\% |
| Hempstead | 801,592 | 755,924 | -5.7\% | 4.3\% | 3.9\% | \$52,286 | \$69,083 | 32.1\% | 4.0\% | 5.8\% | \$193,900 | \$221,500 | 14.2\% |
| Huntington | 200,172 | 195,289 | -2.4\% | 4.1\% | 3.2\% | \$60,530 | \$82,528 | 36.3\% | 3.2\% | 4.6\% | \$229,300 | \$277,900 | 21.2\% |
| Irondequoit | 63,675 | 52,354 | -17.8\% | 3.7\% | 3.8\% | \$37,003 | \$45,276 | 22.4\% | 3.8\% | 5.4\% | \$89,000 | \$88,700 | -0.3\% |
| Islip | 278,880 | 322,612 | 15.7\% | 5.0\% | 3.8\% | \$50,212 | \$65,359 | 30.2\% | 5.1\% | 6.6\% | \$151,200 | \$169,700 | 12.2\% |
| Mount Pleasant | 38,535 | 43,221 | 12.2\% | 3.8\% | 3.2\% | \$57,426 | \$81,072 | 41.2\% | 4.9\% | 4.9\% | \$288,000 | \$349,800 | 21.5\% |
| North Hempstead | 235,007 | 222,611 | -5.3\% | 3.6\% | 3.7\% | \$60,320 | \$81,039 | 34.3\% | 3.3\% | 4.8\% | \$289,000 | \$354,100 | 22.5\% |
| Orangetown | 53,533 | 47,711 | -10.9\% | 3.6\% | 3.1\% | \$51,493 | \$70,477 | 36.9\% | 4.5\% | 4.8\% | \$220,900 | \$266,900 | 20.8\% |
| Oyster Bay | 333,342 | 293,925 | -11.8\% | 3.9\% | 2.9\% | \$59,286 | \$78,839 | 33.0\% | 2.5\% | 3.3\% | \$212,800 | \$259,800 | 22.1\% |
| Perinton | 31,568 | 46,090 | 46.0\% | 2.9\% | 3.0\% | \$51,231 | \$69,341 | 35.3\% | 2.3\% | 2.9\% | \$122,800 | \$143,500 | 16.9\% |
| Poughkeepsie | 41,087 | 42,777 | 4.1\% | 2.6\% | 9.2\% | \$45,886 | \$55,327 | 20.6\% | 3.5\% | 5.7\% | \$143,200 | \$142,000 | -0.8\% |
| Ramapo | 76,702 | 108,905 | 42.0\% | 4.1\% | 4.3\% | \$48,539 | \$60,352 | 24.3\% | 9.8\% | 16.3\% | \$215,200 | \$229,600 | 6.7\% |
| Smithtown | 114,657 | 115,715 | 0.9\% | 4.0\% | 2.7\% | \$60,068 | \$80,421 | 33.9\% | 2.2\% | 3.0\% | \$196,400 | \$248,400 | 26.5\% |
| Southampton | 35,980 | 54,712 | 52.1\% | 3.6\% | 4.0\% | \$36,859 | \$53,887 | 46.2\% | 7.6\% | 8.3\% | \$194,300 | \$245,400 | 26.3\% |
| Tonawanda | 107,282 | 78,155 | -27.1\% | 4.4\% | 4.2\% | \$31,078 | \$41,453 | 33.4\% | 5.0\% | 6.9\% | \$73,500 | \$85,100 | 15.8\% |
| Union | 64,490 | 56,298 | -12.7\% | 4.5\% | 4.9\% | \$29,995 | \$34,101 | 13.7\% | 7.8\% | 11.3\% | \$80,500 | \$74,700 | -7.2\% |
| West Seneca | 48,404 | 45,920 | -5.1\% | 4.9\% | 4.1\% | \$34,383 | \$46,278 | 34.6\% | 3.2\% | 4.6\% | \$78,900 | \$95,200 | 20.7\% |
| All Large Towns (median) | 75,919 | 84,423 | 4.1\% | 4.0\% | 3.9\% | \$46,707 | \$60,208 | 33.2\% | 4.1\% | 5.2\% | \$149,050 | \$163,350 | 15.0\% |
| All Large Towns (mean) | 136,815 | 146,542 | 12.4\% | 4.0\% | 4.2\% | \$46,441 | \$61,226 | 31.4\% | 4.5\% | 5.8\% | \$159,123 | \$183,362 | 13.7\% |



[^2]

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New York State
Office of the State Comptroller
Division of
Local Government and School Accountability


[^0]:    ${ }^{1}$ The mortgage recording tax is a State tax collected at the county level and distributed to the State of New York Mortgage Agency (SONYMA) in support of the Mortgage Insurance Fund, and to the municipalities in which real property has been purchased. It is therefore categorized as State aid.

[^1]:    (1) 1990 Federal Census population figures are used for 1995; 2000 Federal Census population figures are used starting in 2000. (2) Includes the following types of notes: bond anticipation, capital, revenue anticipation, tax anticipation, budget, etc.

[^2]:    *Includes only towns with populations exceeding 40,000 . The town of Rye is excluded because data were not available at the time of publication.

