

Are your taxes going up or down next year?

Are my taxes going up or down next year? That's the question many residents have been asking me these days. They're confused.

- In October, taxpayers were told their town tax would go down by 0.47% and their total town tax bill would go down by 1.65%.
- In November, the newspapers were reporting that taxes were going up by 1.75% and down by 0.35%.

No wonder taxpayers are confused.

Question: How can taxes go up and down at the same time?

Answer: It depends on what number town officials are using. There are two very different tax numbers in the budget book — a real one and a phony one.

And guess which number some Town Board members are using?

The real number is the "town tax" —the tax that covers basic town operations and which every taxpayer pays. Unless the Town Board makes changes to the Preliminary Budget after the December 10 public hearing, this tax is now set to **increase** by 1.62%.

The phony number is the "total town" tax bill for a "typical homeowner with a house assessed at \$10,000 with water and sewer." According to some Town Board members, this number includes "most" homeowners — but these same Board members never explain how many homeowners are included in the word "most."

The "typical" total tax number is phony for two reasons:

- It assumes that every homeowner who has water also has sewer. Not true. There are at least in excess of 1,000 taxpayers who have water but no sewer. So the "typical" number doesn't apply to them. They're not part of the "most."
- The sewer tax used in the "typical" calculation is phony because it's a hypothetical number that no one actually pays; it's a calculated average that includes all 12 of the town's very different sewer districts. And —the averaging calculation doesn't include **all** the sewer taxes that homeowners in 11 of the 12 districts pay.

The numbers speak for themselves.

Because the 2014 budget shows a decrease of \$43.78 in the "average" sewer tax, the total tax bill for the "typical homeowner with water and sewer" shows a decrease 0.42%. (The decrease in the sewer tax offsets the increases in the town, water, refuse and emergency medical services taxes.)

But — if the typical homeowner only has water, and no sewer, the homeowner's total tax bill actually increases by 1.4% — instead of decreasing by 0.42%

Then there's the phoniness of the sewer tax.

The 2014 budget shows a “weighted average for all town sewer districts” of \$327.05 **But, more than 4,251 taxpayers actually pay considerably more than that.** For example:

- \$592.34 for the 3,600 taxpayers in the Yorktown Sewer district (aka Hallocks Mill sewer district), or \$265.29 MORE than the “average.”
- \$413.69 for the 159 taxpayers in the Mohegan West district, or \$86.64 MORE than the “average.”
- \$438.47 for the 423 taxpayers in the Mohegan East district, or \$111.42 MORE than the “average.”
- \$776.52 for the 69 taxpayers in the Overlook district, or \$449.47 MORE than the “average.”

[Click here](#) for the estimated sewer tax for all 12 sewer districts. Which district are you in?

Taxpayers in only two sewer districts pay less than the \$327.05 “average” tax; 2,554 taxpayer in the Osceola district who pay \$214.13 and the fewer than 100 taxpayers in the Clover district who pay \$303.80.

There’s no getting around the real numbers. The current “typical” homeowner tax number in the budget book — and the number that some Board members continue to cite when claiming that taxes are going down — is flawed. It’s a false number. It misrepresents what “most” homeowners’ taxes actually are.

The “typical” calculation needs to be changed . All references to a sewer tax should be eliminated from the calculation — just like the budget book’s tax allocation pie chart excludes sewer taxes.

If some of our elected officials insist on using a “typical” total tax number when talking about the budget, at a minimum, they should use an honest number.

As taxpayers, we shouldn’t expect — or accept — anything less.