

Quantico fails to notify residents of tax hike

Town leaders didn't adhere to state's public notice law

» BY NOLAN STOUT
nstout@insidenova.com

Some Quantico homeowners could see their town real estate tax bills increase this year, but it appears the town didn't meet state requirements for notifying residents.

Quantico Town Council approved the town's \$488,000 budget for fiscal 2023, which starts July 1, at its meeting on June 21, according to Mayor Kevin Brown.

A draft budget provided to InsideNoVa on June 9 indicates \$488,459 in planned expenses against \$511,295 in expected revenue.

Brown said the council did not make any changes to local tax rates, leaving the real estate levy at 20 cents per \$100 of assessed value. That means the town's tax is \$600 per year on a home valued at \$300,000.

The tax is charged on top of Prince William County's levy. Although the Board of Supervisors recently approved a reduction in the county's real estate tax rate from \$1.115 to \$1.03 per \$100 of assessed value, the average residential tax bill from the county is expected to increase \$172 on a home valued at \$469,842.

That's because residential real estate increased in value by an average of 11.5% in 2021, the fastest pace since 2005.

Because the town's real estate tax rate



Quantico town leaders this year did not adhere to state law in notifying residents of a looming tax increase. NOLAN STOUT | INSIDENOVA

isn't being reduced to offset the increase in assessed value, many homeowners will see an increase in their bills, an effective tax increase. It does not appear the town followed state law for proper public notice of such an increase.

When asked for detail on what rate would have avoided the effective tax increase, Brown said, "You would have to do your [own] math on that depending on what [specific] set of data or assumptions you are using. The town has kept the same tax rate for many years."

To determine the change in property values, InsideNoVa reviewed online real estate records for five randomly selected properties in town: three duplexes, one townhouse and one detached home.

The 2021 assessed tax values for the properties ranged from \$175,200 to \$404,900. Each increased in tax value for 2022 by 10% or more, with an average increase of 11.2%.

Therefore, because the town's real estate tax rate remains unchanged, many homeowners will see an increase in their tax bills.

On the five properties examined, bills would increase an average of \$31.19, or \$62.38 for the year. The increase ranged from \$20.30 per bill to \$46.30 per bill, which are paid twice a year.

Virginia law requires localities to publish a public notice and hold a hearing about an effective tax rate increase. The law provides specific guidelines for the

format of such notice as well. The notices are required to be posted 30 days before the hearing, with some exceptions allowing it 14 days beforehand.

The Virginia Press Association compiles public notices throughout the state, and its online site has a copy of a notice published by the town in the Fredericksburg Free Lance-Star on June 14. That notice does not follow the guidelines for a notice on an effective tax increase, nor does it indicate that such an increase will occur.

No notice was posted on the town's Facebook page, and Quantico's website remains down.

Brown did not return a request for comment about a hearing or the public notice by press time.

The budget documents indicate the town would receive \$95,000 in real estate tax revenue in fiscal 2023, which begins July 1. That is more than the \$83,000 approved for fiscal 2022, but less than the \$98,929 actually projected to be collected during this past year.

The town is projected to collect \$320,000 in total local tax revenue, with \$147,000 coming from its meals tax. The remaining revenue comes from fees, permits and fines.

The spending plan includes a 3% raise for town employees and various small increases to line items, including \$7,000 for general maintenance of water and sewer lines and \$300 for supplies for town clean-up.

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