

Don Lowe First Selectman Column 02/16/2026

Huge congrats to the Sherman Knights boys' basketball team for going an entire season with only one loss. Hats off to their coach, Jared Bonner, for pulling off a great season without a home gym (due to the school renovation) to play and practice in. Very impressive! In addition, the Sherman Girls and Boys basketball, in a coed tournament at Maplebrook School, won the championship!

Last week, I offered a general look at our budgets over the last eight years, quoting a cumulative 8% (8.31% to be exact) decrease in taxes through those years. Here I want to offer a year-by-year account. Why is this important? For one thing, it offers perspective: If Sherman taxes rise in this 2026/27 budget, it's a little easier to digest than if taxes were rising year-after-year, which, actually, is the case in most municipalities. It's also important because a fellow was in my office a few weeks ago screaming at me, "My taxes are going through the roof!" And no calm efforts on my part seemed to convince him otherwise.

Sherman property taxes year-by-year:

2018/19: Flat (no increase or decrease); mill rate: 20.33
2019/20: 2.5% decrease; mill rate: 19.81
2020/21: 3.2% decrease; mill rate: 19.18 (Covid Year)
2021/22: 2% decrease; mill rate: 18.64
2022/23: 2.5% decrease; mill rate: 18.18
2023/24: 2.0 % decrease; mill rate 17.82
2024/25: 2% increase; mill rate 16.36 (Property Re-assessment year)
2025/26: 1.89% increase; mill rate 16.67

Your taxes have decreased by 8.31% over the last eight years. If you moved to town after 2018, then use the above numbers to figure out what your cumulative tax decrease or increase is. Also, the mill rate has dropped about 18%, but we had a property re-assessment (the State mandates we do that every 5 years) and reassessments usually end up higher so the mill rate is usually adjusted downward. Explaining that in detail would take an entire column, so I'll leave it at that. But don't give us too much credit for such a mill rate drop; some of it is due to the reassessment.

A note on our general fund surplus: The general fund surplus is often referred to as the "Rainy-Day Fund". It is not to be mistaken for our capital non-recurring fund, which we fund every year for capital needs. A municipal budget surplus is the amount of unexpended funds remaining at the end of a fiscal year when a municipality's actual revenue exceeds its total expenditures. In our case, through increased revenue and careful in-year budgeting we have added to our surplus every year. When I first came into office 8 years ago, we had a healthy \$2.8 million. Now after 8 budgets, despite the tax decreases, we have an even healthier general fund surplus of \$5,655, 943.

Most Connecticut municipality's' budgets increase year-to-year, usually 2-3% and sometimes much higher. So, our 8% decline over the last 8 years looks even better against a commonplace 16-24% increase for most municipalities over the same time period. You can do your own math to determine what that means to you as a Sherman taxpayer. Also, these figures assume that you haven't had a property assessment increase due to improvements or new construction on your home or property. Those actions raise your value and, subsequently, will raise taxes due to a higher assessment.

I'm proud of what our team accomplishes for Sherman and would stack these numbers against any Town in the state. This didn't happen by brilliance; it happened due to fortunate revenue circumstances that our team didn't waste. It happened through common sense and respect for Sherman taxpayers by a team of stalwarts – Selectmen Bob Ostrosky and Joel Bruzinski, Business manager Liz LaVia, treasurer Andrea Maloney. In addition, our previous treasurer Eric Holub, although no longer with the Town, was a key component to our success. And another team member was Selectman Kevin Keenan who also did an outstanding job for Sherman during his four years. Now, on to budget season!