**Town of Penfield Supervisor’s Column**  
**October 28, 2019**

It’s that time of year again to prepare for the transition from fall to winter. This means sustainable and cost effective leaf management, optimizing drainage in yards and neighborhoods, and preparation for snow.

Autumn is also a time when some residents ask why the Town of Penfield does not provide curbside leaf pickup. The Town has studied the topic and run the numbers many times over the past several years and administrations. And over the years, the reasons for not getting in the business of municipal leaf pick-up bear out: avoiding a tax increase for all property owners, customer service, and sustainability.

First, the cost of town-wide collection would raise taxes and be more expensive for every single taxpayer compared to individually supporting local businesses by private pickup by those who wish to have their leaves removed from their property. While leaf pickup has become the norm in some towns, it comes with a price tag in the form of tax dollars. Towns that provide leaf pick-up have significantly higher town tax rates compared to Penfield.

To get in the business of leaf collection, previous studies show the Town of Penfield would need to invest hundreds of thousands of dollars outfitting trucks for the service, labor (including overtime and seasonal), and tipping/composting fees for an eight week period with no opportunity for intermunicipal sharing, given that leaf pickup must be done within a short time frame. A past financial study looked like this: $1 million startup followed by an estimated $500,000 in subsequent years. That is $83 per household to start up and $40 a year thereafter. The cost would be passed on to every household, including those who are opposed to funding a leaf service, or who have no leaves that need to be removed.

From a customer service point of view—given the logistics of town-wide collection for more than 14,000 properties—crews could make only one pass through town within a finite number of days between last leaves falling, residents’ ability to rake, and an unpredictable first snowfall when trucks must be equipped and dedicated to plowing snow. Given these constraints, it’s unlikely the Town would make it to your house exactly when your leaves are ready at the curb, leaving you frustrated with wet piles of leaves killing grass or dry leaves blowing around. Further, leaves spilling into roadways narrow driving lanes, block storm drains causing potential neighborhood flooding, and pose safety hazards for runners, walkers, children waiting at bus stops, and cyclists.

In contrast, a local landscape service will collect leaves curbside—at your convenience—for a negotiated price that would be below your cost of an increase in town taxes. Landscapers and leaf removal companies who live and do business in Penfield would certainly welcome new customers and you would be supporting businesses who employ residents. If you would like to hire a leaf pickup service, use your favorite search engine or business directory to find one you like. The Town has always advocated for residents who want leaf collection to team together in their neighborhood to get better pricing and scheduling from private contractors. The Town Hall is resource for names and addresses of residents in neighborhoods. If you have questions please call my office at 340-8630.

From an environmentally conscious and sustainability point of view, mulching and composting is recommended by agencies such as the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation. The DEC just published its Solid Waste and Recycling newsletter. The lead article is “Leaf Me Alone: Why You Should Keep Your Leaves in Your Yard.” The article points out that “many of us will use our time or money to rid our lawns of leaves. Keeping our leaves nearby is a simpler, more environmentally-friendly solution,
as leaves contain nutrients that are good for the soil.” Here is the link if you would like to read the full article for tips and suggestions for sustainable leaf management: https://content.govdelivery.com/accounts/NYSDEC/bulletins/26637b7.

With leaves down and mulched, composted, or taken away, we prepare for the arrival of snow. This means keeping swales and storm drains clear so that rain, sleet, and snow melt can move freely and prevent localized flooding. The Town appreciates your help in checking storm drains near your property to keep them clear and free of leaves and debris, enabling our highway crews to focus on fall drainage projects and winter readiness.

Until next week, enjoy the mild weather. It looks like we will have a wet Halloween, so please keep your walkways clear and well-lit for our youngest residents to enjoy safe trick-or-treating.

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