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Opinion

Reader's View: Mayor explains his priorities

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When I became your Mayor, I knew there'd be times when issues are distorted by others, unfortunately for political gain and not public service. So it is with my positions on a Public Safety building, waterfront park, indoor recreation center and proposed Capital Program for 2009-2014.

The waterfront park and recreation center are not choices of recreation over public safety.

I'd like to set the record straight, end the distortion and have you, the public, realize that I remain determined to simply do what is best for all of us. Fiscal restraint is still paramount but we must continue to improve our quality of life. Affordability, a comprehensive solution and timing must go hand-in-hand for every project we undertake.

Many taxpayers feel overburdened and need convincing on future increases. Therefore, I already proposed that the Finance Commissioner reduce my share of 2009 operational costs by over \$100,000 from that budgeted for 2008.

Fiscal conservatism dictated the 2009 recommendations of the Capital Program Committee, consisting of ten members set by City Charter and not political appointment. The Committee pared 32 requests, totaling \$22,381,000, down to 22 items, totaling \$5,141,000. This is the lowest since 2003, with only \$3,841,000 to be bonded in 2009. Notably, the Public Safety Building for \$9,700,000 was deleted.

Most important, the exclusion of the Public Safety building shouldn't be viewed as a determination that we don't need to improve current conditions. Rather, a majority of the committee felt that the present proposal lacks City Council approval, ignores the enormous value of the proposed site and is a piecemeal approach to the project.

The waterfront park isn't a choice of recreation over public safety. This property was purchased 2-1/2 years ago for \$2,000,000, with Open Space Bond money. It remains

closed to the public to date. We've been paying taxes on the property without any meaningful use accomplished.

The waterfront park shows it's unfair to promise and bond a project and then fail to deliver. Same with the recreation center, bonded since 2006 and yet to see a shovel in the ground. The city must now fulfill these promises, improve our quality of life and give us something to show for our money.

Naysayers coin the waterfront park as "expensive beach" and beyond affordability. However, 2009 construction costs, based on an average \$300,000 to \$400,000 home assessment, would increase taxes only \$3.30 to \$4.40 per year, per household.

Unaffordable?

In conclusion, I haven't overlooked my responsibilities to our hardworking taxpayers. For months now, I've been working on a Request For Proposal (RFP) for a more comprehensive, affordable solution for our city's public safety and parking needs, while also generating tax revenue to reduce future costs.

Sometimes it takes a bit longer to reach a better solution that serves the long-term needs of our city. Impatience doesn't serve the public.

Scott Johnson is mayor of Saratoga Springs.