

## **Clean Audits, No Debt, And Teamwork Results In County Tax Rate Freeze**

What the Hunterdon County Freeholders have achieved in freezing the County tax rate in four of the last five years has been realized by putting the County financial house in order, eliminating debt, and teamwork between the Freeholders and County employees, according to Freeholder Matt Holt, who has served on the Freeholder Board since 2007.

As the Budget Committee Chairman or member over the years, Freeholder Holt has been involved in the development of many County budgets. During that time, he says he has seen ‘the good, the bad and ugly’ when it comes to County finances.

Holt said recently, while meeting with local officials, “The Freeholder Board over the last few years have been serious about reducing costs. The County budget today is nearly \$12 million less than it was a dozen years ago. In fact, the 2019 budget is still lower than the budget from six years ago. All achieved during an era of rising costs.”

Holt said the success came from strategic planning. “First off, the Freeholders established a no debt policy that eliminated costly interest payments. The last debt payment was made in 2014.

The Board also recognized the need for improved financial controls, so as elected officials we know in detail where the dollars in the budget are going. A few years ago, a new CFO was promoted, and new controls have been put in place.”

“The result is a clean audit from the independent auditors four years in a row. We’re all pretty proud of that achievement,” Holt added.

Holt said that credit is due to the teamwork of, “not only to the current Freeholder Board that includes Board Director Suzanne Lagay, Deputy Director John Lanza, and Freeholders Shaun Van Doren and Sue Soloway, but also to our two most recent former members, John King and Rob Walton.”

The Freeholder pointed out, “I cannot stress enough that these successful financial achievements, resulting in freezing the County tax rate in four of the last five

years, have come from not only the efforts of the Freeholders, but also the commitment of the County employees to embrace cost consciousness and the new budget record keeping system.”