



Onondaga County Legislature

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COUNTY EXECUTIVE'S 2022 BUDGET PRESENTATION TO THE ONONDAGA COUNTY LEGISLATURE OCTOBER 5, 2021

MEMBERS PRESENT: Chairman Knapp, Mr. May, Mr. Rowley, Mr. Burtis, Mrs. Tassone, Ms. Cody, Mrs. Abbott-Kenan, Ms. Kuhn, Mr. Ryan, Dr. Chase, Mr. Holmquist, Mr. McBride, Mr. Bush, Dr. Kelly, Mr. Kinne, Mr. Williams, Mrs. Ervin

Chairman Knapp called the meeting to order at 11:10 a.m. Chairman Knapp introduced former Legislator Danny Liedka to lead the Pledge of Allegiance. Chairman Knapp stated that he is looking forward to a great presentation, and then the work begins for the Legislature.

County Executive J. Ryan McMahon, II:

Good Morning

Chairman Knapp, Leaders May and Ervin, Members of the Legislature and guests. Thank you for being here.

2021 has been a year that continues to test us in our response and recovery of COVID-19.

Our community, however, has continued to show its resilience and we have started to recapture the momentum and progress we were experiencing before the hundred year pandemic.

Earlier this year we outlined our vision and priorities. We talked about continuing our fight against COVID-19, we spoke about our commitment to keep our kids in school, learning in person. We talked about the opportunity we have to lead our region's economic recovery. We spoke about investing in our people, breaking down barriers to employment, modernizing our infrastructure, and making strategic investments today that will drive future revenue growth tomorrow.

With your partnership, in 2020 and 2021 we made difficult, but necessary decisions. These decisions, in addition to American Rescue Funds, will allow us to fund our vision and put our County on a path to inclusive growth.

I am able to proudly stand before you today to present a balanced budget for 2022.

Not only is our 2022 budget balanced, it makes historic investments, cuts property taxes, and invests in our base operations shoring up departments.

So let's get into the numbers - this budget, all funds, is one point four billion dollars.

When looking at how this current 2021 fiscal year will end, our team in Management and Budget is projecting nine percent growth in sales tax and a surplus of nearly sixty million dollars. The budget presented to you today responsibly projects 2% growth in sales tax for 2022.

Despite these unprecedented times, I am happy to share with you that both S&P and Moody's have affirmed our credit rating.

I am also pleased to report New York State Comptroller DiNapoli has determined that Onondaga County is not in fiscal stress based on his independent fiscal stress monitoring program.

We also continue to maintain a healthy fund balance. When I started in County government, our fund balance was ninety million dollars. Currently, it is one hundred and two point one million dollars and well within compliance of the ten percent goal set forth by the Legislature. And for the fourth straight year, we will not use any of our general fund reserves to balance the budget.

This incredibly strong financial position also allows us to once again cut taxes. This budget proposes a new tax rate of \$4.93 per thousand, a decline of six cents per thousand. For context, when I started in County government, the tax rate was \$5.82 per thousand. If the proposed tax cut is approved by this Legislature, it will represent an over 15% decline in the property tax rate since 2011.

This budget also proposes keeping the sewer unit charge flat at \$452 and our team at WEP is continuing to work diligently towards our ultimate goal of sewer consolidation.

I am excited to share with you that contained within this budget are several new and exciting investments that will not just aid in our recovery, but I believe truly transform Onondaga County and Central New York.

Also reflected in this budget is our continued investments to assisting the most vulnerable. A core piece of our PIE agenda has been addressing poverty. Now some of these things are new programs we launched while others are expanded versions of programs we have been successfully implementing for years.

Earlier this fall, I was joined by Legislators Tassone and Cody, representatives of the local hotel and restaurant industry, as well as experts in the sports industry, to announce a brand new multi-sports athletic facility to support the growing sports tourism market. This twenty-five million dollar investment will consist of approximately 10 full-sized multisport, synthetic turf fields including one championship field and one year-round bubble structure – all with lights. We commissioned an independent, professional market analysis and the results are exciting.

By year four, our community is projected to have over half a million visitors, occupying nearly 31,000 hotel room nights and generating thirty-four million dollars in economic impact. The demand for this type of facility is real and it is strong.

Now I understand the concerns from some regarding the loss of softball and baseball fields at Hopkins Road, but from day one I have been clear that we are equally committed to ensuring that you have even better facilities at a new location. I am proposing four million dollars over two years to properly build out fields at Carrier Park in DeWitt. We are currently working with the Town of DeWitt in this effort, but if necessary, we will identify another location to get this done for our softball and baseball community.

Also proposed in this budget is fifteen million dollars for the implementation of broadband infrastructure and services to meet the needs of the unserved and underserved in Onondaga County. Working with the Central New York Regional Planning Board, we have identified approximately 218 service gap miles. If approved by the Legislature, our team will issue an RFP to solicit proposals from qualified companies to design, engineer and construct the network. Our community will no longer talk about this problem, we will solve it.

The success of our Main Street Program has been undeniable. Our villages, hamlets and various main streets throughout our County are like small cities. Investing in these business districts allows these communities to make transformational changes to their local storefronts and streetscapes. And it's important to note that a requirement of the program is for a match from the local business owners. For example, in our first round of this program, the County awarded 1.5 million dollars in funding. This leveraged another 600,000 dollars for a total impact of 2.1 million dollars.

Earlier this year, we authorized another five million dollars towards this program. To date, we have received twenty-nine applications from twenty different municipalities seeking 9.7 million dollars in projects with a commitment of nearly eleven million dollars in matching funds from the businesses. The word is out and business owners and our local municipal partners understand the value of this program and we have created an environment where people WANT to invest and grow.

With such strong demand, this budget seeks another five million dollars for our Main Street program. And we are making two important and specific commitments. If approved by the Legislature, we will dedicate one point two five million to the Mattydale business district in the Town of Salina and another one point two five million to the West Onondaga Street / South Ave Business District in the City of Syracuse. I hope we can count on Legislators Deb Cody and Vernon Williams for their support!

I am especially proud to share that this budget makes a specific commitment to our Veteran's. Modeled after the "Shape-Up" program administered by our Community Development department, we have proposed spending one million dollars to assist qualifying veteran's with home repairs. This is just a small way to show our appreciation for their service and commitment to our community and country.

Last, but certainly not least, you may have heard about a project that I think can only be described as iconic and transformational. In this budget, we are seeking thirty-five million dollars to construct an aquarium at the Inner Harbor of Syracuse. I will come back to this body for an additional \$50 million of 2021 surplus funds in 2022. As usual, we did our homework to make sure this project was viable. We solicited a professional, independent market analysis and the results were nothing short of astounding.

By year three, this eighty thousand square feet, 600,000 gallon facility is estimated to draw 490,000 visitors to our community and generate nearly fifty two million dollars in economic impact. Not to mention the revitalization and investment it will spur at our Inner Harbor neighborhood. This investment will complement the Onondaga Lake clean up, the Loop the Lake and Empire State Trail systems and the Amphitheater. Our Lakefront region is quickly becoming the epicenter of recreational and leisure activity for all of central New York.

An aquarium has been talked about in this community for at least a generation. Today, I am proposing we finally act.

As I mentioned previously, our administration has been focused on addressing poverty in our community. Our teams in DSS and Children & Family Services have been doing amazing work to execute on many of our programs. And I want to thank them for the work they do every day helping the most vulnerable in our community.

And we are going to continue our investments in this space.

Back in March, we announced a much needed \$5.5 million expansion of our children's mental health work in schools. Few can argue that isolation and social/emotional trauma has been particularly acute among our schoolchildren during the pandemic.

As schools have opened more fully, we are addressing the needs of our children through partnership and investment in every school district in Onondaga County. Mental health challenges know no zip code, no race or socio-economic boundaries.

This level of investment by a county in its local school districts is unprecedented as we now have over 200 professionals dedicated to the social and emotional health of our children working right in school buildings alongside teachers and other school personnel.

We funded this investment through the American Rescue Plan, but the need will not go away once the initial funding is exhausted. I am committed to using local funds to keep this critical program available to our school children.

Again this year we are making a significant investment in the youngest members of our community. The Early Childhood Alliance continues to be laser focused on ensuring that every child is ready for kindergarten. Study after study demonstrates that kindergarten readiness and reading on grade level by third grade is the measuring stick for success later in life. Every segment of our community is better served by ensuring that our children are prepared and ready to succeed in school.

While we continue to invest in the "Talking is Teaching" campaign, Imagination Library and universal assessments through "Help Me Grow", we are also making a significant investment in quality childcare in the 2022 budget.

Childcare, as a sector, is struggling as a result of the pandemic. For many workers, the availability of high quality childcare can be the difference when deciding to accept a position or not. It is in our best interest as a community to ensure the availability of high quality childcare, not only for the betterment of the child, but also as a driver of the economy.

The 2022 budget maintains our continued investment in early childhood.

As part of our PIE strategy, we have discussed the necessity of breaking the cycle of poverty among successive generations. Through the work of DSS: Economic Security and our community partners, we began piloting a comprehensive program in 2020. It was put on hold due to the pandemic, but we are ready to reinvigorate it for 2022.

The “2Gen” approach will invest \$750,000 to build family well-being by intentionally and simultaneously working with children and the adults in their lives. The expected results are:

- *healthy parents with family-supporting jobs;*
- *healthy children meeting developmental milestones; and*
- *better connected individuals able to participate in civic and family life.*

Our unique approach addresses the needs of mothers, their children, and the non-custodial fathers, through five domains:

- 1. Education Success and Early Childhood Development;*
- 2. Postsecondary & Employment Pathways;*
- 3. Building Economic Assets;*
- 4. Building Social Capital; and*
- 5. Health and Well-being*

Breaking this cycle of poverty is crucial to the well-being of our families and we must be intentional about it. Restoring dignity and the sense of self-worth goes hand-in-hand with economic independence and child well-being.

But it should come as no surprise to hear that these things require resources. They require people and they require money. And at a time when people are turning to County government more than ever, we must make the right decisions and investments to ensure we can continue to pay for these important programs.

We are also a data driven government. We do not make decisions based on politics or press releases. We rely on facts. Over the course of the last year we have seen an increase in demand for some of our services. And looking forward, we anticipate demand to grow in other areas. These facts have made a compelling case that we need more people. So in this budget, I have authorized the addition of positions in departments where the data merits.

It is also worth noting, that Onondaga County has not escaped the struggle of many employers when it comes to finding employees. As of literally this morning, we currently have approximately 120 positions that we need filled. They range from positions in our Human Services Departments to Public Safety and Public Works.

So while we acknowledge that the data merits the addition of personnel in some areas, it still requires qualified people to apply and be willing to work. So while I have the mic – let me be clear that Onondaga County is hiring so if you're looking for a job please visit ongov.net/employment and apply today!

Now you have all heard me say countless times that we run County government on sales tax. And we rely on strong sales tax revenue to properly fund the aforementioned programs and more.

But what does that really mean? It means that as elected leaders, we must make investments in industries that will actually GENERATE that sales tax.

Mental Health clinics in our schools is the right thing to do. And we have invested heavily in this vital service. But mental health clinics do not generate the sales tax we need to ensure they are properly funded. So how do we pay for it?

We pay for it by investing in the sports and tourism industry which does generate sales tax.

Lifting people out of poverty is a moral responsibility of County government. But that, too, does not generate sales tax to ensure that the proper resources are available to our not-for-profit partners. So how do we pay for it?

We pay for it by investing in an iconic, transformational aquarium that will drive economic development and sales tax.

We need employees to make sure roads get plowed in the winter, our seniors have access to community services or that we can properly respond to a hundred year pandemic. So how do we pay for it?

By investing in things like our burgeoning film industry which generates that important sales tax

The issue of kindergarten readiness requires continuous investment in our youngest residents, but it requires resources. So how do we pay for it?

We pay for it by investing in our Main Streets and business corridors which produces sales tax and paychecks!

We cannot look at these things individually, they are absolutely linked. None of what we do is “stand alone” – we can't do the things we need to do unless we can generate the revenue to pay for them.

And I'd like to take just a minute to remind folks here and watching at home, what can happen when our community sheds the negativity and cynicism and actually dreams big. We can make things like this – the Amphitheater – a reality. And the numbers speak for themselves. From 2016 to 2019, nearly 650,000 people attended a concert with over 400,000 from outside of Onondaga County. Even more telling, the economic impact during that same time period is just shy of sixty million dollars.

This was not an easy vote as many of you will recall. There was certainly a healthy amount of discussion and debate.

But just look what we would have missed out on! Who would have ever imagined that the Foo Fighters would be attempting to move heaven and Earth so they could play on the Shore of Onondaga Lake? From day one, our facility has received rave reviews from the artists, but just as important, the community loves it too!

We have an obligation as leaders in this community to protect the interests of the taxpayers today, but also make the long-term investments that will ensure future generations will want to call Onondaga County home.

I respectfully submit this budget does just that.

So if we as a community can accomplish building a world-class amphitheater on the shore of Onondaga Lake, then who is to say we can't make this, or this, a reality except the naysayers and the cynics who have dominated the conversation for too long? I know our community is better than that and more importantly, they DESERVE better than that.

We in our community are sometimes too tough on ourselves. We live in a great Community. We have great schools, great neighborhoods, great natural resources and great people. We have a growing downtown. We have seen multi-million dollar investments by the private sector, creating economic opportunity for our residents. We have seen population growth for the first time in decades. We have a unique opportunity and a unique moment to continue to position our community for growth.

This Budget is an important step in our County's comeback. This budget is balanced, and makes historic investments that will drive jobs and economic opportunity for our residents in every neighborhood in our County. Let's seize this moment and work together to deliver historic results for our people.

I look forward to working with you all over the next few weeks.

Thank you for listening and now it's time to get to work!

God bless you

Chairman Knapp thanked the County Executive for his presentation. The next three weeks will be very busy, and he looks forward to everyone's hard work, attendance, and cooperation from the various departments.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:36 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,



JAMIE McNAMARA, Clerk
Onondaga County Legislature