



State of New York County of Broome Government Offices

Office of the Broome County Executive
Jason T. Garnar, Executive

2023 Broome County Budget Address

Good evening. After delivering virtual addresses for the past two years, it's great to join all of you in person once again to share my 2023 County Budget Address and the exciting initiatives we have planned for the coming year.

Thank you to Chairman of the Broome County Legislature Dan Reynolds, Majority Leader Cindy O'Brien, Minority Leader Bob Weslar, and all legislators for being here tonight.

To our Department Heads: thank you for joining us and for your work day in and day out leading your teams.

And to the 2,000 County employees who make up those teams: thank you for your ongoing hard work serving the 200 thousand residents of Broome County.

I'd like to thank our hosts for the evening: Matt Paulus and his team at Paulus Development, as well as the team at LeChase. Both of these companies are doing an amazing job of transforming this building and we appreciate your continued commitment to Broome County.

This building, like countless others in our community, tells a story.

And like any great story, this one is full of ups and downs, triumphs and tragedies, twists and turns.

This story begins more than 100 years ago, in the wake of the Allied victory over the Central Powers in World War I.

From 1919 to 1920, Endicott Johnson Shoe Company constructed this very building where thousands of workers would manufacture millions of shoes for people across the country.

George F. Johnson once again offered a piece of his Square Deal for Broome County residents, a shot at the American Dream.

Johnson built a new middle class by making major investments in EJ: investments in infrastructure like this brand-new factory at 59 Lester Ave.

Investments in the equipment, tools, and machines that would at its height manufacture 52 million pairs of shoes each year.

Investments in our community like parks, pools, and recreation centers.

And most importantly, investments in the people who built the success of his company.

These investments helped families buy houses, send their children to school, receive the health care they needed, and enjoy much needed rest and relaxation when they punched out each day...

Unfortunately, the story doesn't end there. Decades of prosperity at the factory were followed by years of decline after EJ closed its doors and this symbol of what Endicott Johnson stood for slowly became one of Broome County's biggest and saddest eyesores.

For many years, it appeared that this story would have a tragic end and this building would slowly deteriorate and become just a memory of a time residents would long for once again.

But that has all changed and a new chapter has been written with the partnership between Broome County, Paulus, and LeChase.

In this final chapter, this building has come back to life and is now a symbol of progress and revitalization in our community.

After 40 years of sitting empty, this building will open its doors once again in less than 4 months as a modern, state of the art housing project, which will offer 156 units of much needed market rate housing.

Matt Paulus and his team stepped up once again in our community and took yet another run-down building and built something truly historic and meaningful to our community. Thank you, Matt.

I can't tell you how many people talk to me about how proud and amazed they are of the weekly progress happening here as they drive by on the highway. When I think of all of the progress being made in our county right now, I think this building, which stands right in the middle of our community, is a great example of all the good things that have been happening here in the last few years.

And so, with that in mind, it's fitting that we gather in this building tonight to outline the 2023 Broome County Budget.

In 2023, Broome County will continue to make big investments just like George F. Johnson made here 100 years ago.

Investments in our infrastructure, investments in our community, and most importantly investments in our people; the people that make Broome County Government run each and every day.

Getting to a place where we can make historic investments like you'll hear about this evening hasn't been easy - far from it.

Like the thousands of families that call Broome County home, we've felt the very real effects of the economic climate of the past several years.

A global pandemic brought with it the loss of jobs; then, inflation started skyrocketing; and gas prices hit all-time highs, over \$5/gallon this summer.

But with thoughtful, responsible budgeting under the guidance of our Budget Director Jerome Knebel, Broome County has continually made living and doing business in our community more affordable.

When I took office in 2017, the County Fund Balance was just \$240 thousand. Today, just five years later, we were able to grow the fund balance to \$35 million-which will stabilize our finances, protect us during economic downturns, and allow us to keep taxes low.

In the spring, as prices at the gas pump continued to climb to record levels, we took action and introduced a proposal to cap the County gasoline tax, and the Legislature passed it so we could pass savings along to you.

Combined with similar steps taken at the State level, drivers have saved more than 20 cents on each gallon of gas every time they've filled up their tanks. The price of gasoline has dropped every day since June and Broome County did our part in making sure that happened.

And to keep even more money in residents' pockets, I'm proud to say that for the fifth year in a row we are cutting taxes once again!

None of this would be possible without the support of the Broome County Legislature, and I want to thank Chairman Dan Reynolds and Finance Committee Chair Steve Flagg, and all of our other legislators for working with us over the last half decade to craft responsible budgets for our taxpayers.

Everyone in Broome County Government knows how important affordable living is, and I'm proud to say that while inflation has gone up 18% over the last five years nationwide, the last five budgets we have passed in Broome County have actually reduced the cost of county government for our taxpayers.

From the people in my administration, to our County Legislators, to our Department Heads and the 2,000 men and women who make up the County workforce.

All of us, working together, have made the cost of living just a little bit more affordable and I'd once again like to thank you all for your efforts.

As we cut the costs of living and doing business, we're seeing the fruits of this labor with businesses choosing to move and open here and bringing thousands of jobs with them in the process.

In the past year we've seen major companies like Amazon open its distribution warehouse in Conklin; in a few weeks FedEx is finishing its massive, brand-new building in Kirkwood.

And less than two weeks ago, we learned that Binghamton University's New Energy New York project was awarded more than \$113 million to make our region a hub for the development of energy storage technology; an effort that will combine two of our strongest sectors - research and manufacturing - that has the potential to create thousands of jobs for our residents.

And these major projects are just the tip of the iceberg; we're making huge investments that are generating more economic activity in Broome County than ever before.

Thanks to the American Rescue Plan, Broome County was allocated \$37 million in federal funds to restart our economy in the wake of the pandemic.

To date, we've strategically invested \$21 million into ARPA projects which has generated 225 million dollars in economic activity in our community.

Projects like the Oakdale Commons which is breathing new life into the former Oakdale Mall. This summer we opened the Lourdes Health & Fitness Center at the Commons and just last month learned that the largest Dick's Sporting Goods House of Sport store in the nation will occupy the former Macy's location.

Thank you to Lourdes, Dick's Sporting Goods, and especially the Spark JC team of Marc Newman and Doug Matthews who have continued their commitment to Broome County. We know there is much more to come with this development and we can't wait to hear what's next.

In the 2023 budget we are making big investments to help answer a question residents of Broome County have been asking for years: when will we have new flights out of the Greater Binghamton Airport?

Well, with the non-stop hard work from our Commissioner of Aviation Mark Heefner and his team, we recently announced that four brand new flights will be taking off from BGM in November with direct service to Orlando and Fort Myers-the first time we have added air service in 20 years.

"Hello, Avelo!" and thank you for believing in BGM and Broome County!

And in a one-two punch of good news at the Airport, Governor Hochul joined us just today to announce \$32 million to completely redesign and renovate BGM's terminal. This major state award will breathe new life into the airport and give passengers a modern flying experience.

Thank you, Governor Hochul, for your ongoing support of Broome County!

As we continue to see success in attracting new people to our community, we need to also continue our work to make sure that they have housing that fits their needs.

The building you sit in this evening is one of our largest housing developments which will include 156 units.

We're also expecting work to begin soon to transform one of the County's saddest eyesores into even more housing for our residents: the former IBM Country Club will be transformed into 75 new affordable housing units.

We're proud to be working with Southern Door Community Land Trust to turn a foreclosed property into six new affordable units.

And homeownership for low- to moderate-income residents is becoming a reality thanks to the great work being done by Jessica Haas and the Broome County Landbank which is taking blighted properties and completely refurbishing them. The 2023 County Budget once again supports this great agency so they can transform even more properties in the future.

That's more than 230 new units of housing throughout Broome County that has been made possible by utilizing millions of dollars in ARPA funds, leveraging millions more.

With this budget, you will see even more new housing developments in 2023 that will support all of our residents!

We're also increasing our investments in the things that matter most to our residents.

For the past two years, we have repaired more miles of roads in Broome County than ever before: 63 miles in 2021 and 72 miles in 2022, both records for Broome County and we are recommitting our efforts to fixing Broome County's aging infrastructure once again in 2023.

Thank you to DPW Commissioner Leslie Boulton and Highway Director Chet Kupiec for making sure better roads and smoother rides are a priority.

Digital infrastructure is also a priority for Broome County. Working with our Department of Planning and Director Beth Lucas, we are working on a County-wide map of high-speed internet service. Broadband is not a luxury, it is a necessity, and we are working to bring it to every corner of Broome County, an effort which will continue in the New Year.

We are also strategically planning for the future by making major investments to our Capital Improvement Program to add new roofs, windows, energy systems, lighting, and much more in County-owned buildings and properties. Thank you to our Director of Buildings & Grounds Pete Neferis for all his work to address these needs.

Whether you already live in Broome County or are thinking about moving here, we know you want things to do.

We've had more people than ever visiting our parks over the last three years, and now we are planning the biggest parks improvement project in the County's history to make sure that there's always something fun and exciting for residents and visitors to do.

From small enhancements like new picnic tables, grills, and water fountains to new shelters, pathways, and bathrooms, virtually every amenity our parks offer will be updated or replaced.

And we'll also be adding exciting, never-before seen features throughout the Parks system.

A totally remodeled building at Grippen Park will provide a space to be used for everything from soccer and basketball to craft fairs and concerts, returning this building to the community so it can be used by everyone.

Alongside the renovated building, something for residents who have longed for the return of ice at Grippen Park, as we plan to install an outdoor rink where residents can skate outdoors, surrounded by nature.

And in place of the former baseball and softball field, something that has never been seen before in Broome County: a state-of-the-art wiffle ball stadium!

This is the original backyard sport, which has gained a serious following in recent years among players of all ages. Our stadium will look like where the pros play and will be available for pickup games as well as new leagues

We will attract more tournaments and teams than ever before when we renovate the BAGSAI softball complex. Turf fields, lights, and amenities for fans will make Broome County a regional softball destination, filling our hotels and restaurants in the process.

And dogs will have a playground of their own as we begin construction on a new dog park at Otsiningo North.

Along with these improvements, residents and visitors can expect the return of great events like Spiedie Fest, a new and improved Festival of Lights, and Broome County Beach Bash which was a HUGE success in its first year this summer.

We're making these never-before-seen investments because we know that when people visit our parks, they keep coming back. Thank you to Parks Director Liz Woitd and her whole team for all their work in making Broome County Parks a destination!

We are one of the only counties in New York State that has a dedicated veterans fund that helps us give back to the men and women who served on our behalf.

Working with our Director of Veterans Services Brian Vojtisek, we have been proud to invest money from this fund into programs like the Twin Tiers Honor Flight, a veterans' canteen, and this past year we partnered with two of our local professional sports teams - the Black Bears & Rumble Ponies - to provide FREE tickets to veterans in our community.

Thank you to Black Bears' owner Andreas Johannson and Rumble Ponies' owner David Sobotka for helping us say "thank you" to our service members.

Next year, we will once again use our veterans fund to honor these men and women and we will also break ground on our long-awaited new Veterans Center that will provide the assistance and services needed by our veterans.

There really is so much to do in Broome County and we are proud to have so many partners in the community that help make this a great place to live and visit.

We will once again commit County funds to our wonderful contract agencies; places like the Ross Park Zoo, Discovery Center, the Broome County Arts Council, Cornell Cooperative Extension, GiGi's Playhouse, the Broome County Historical Society, Books for Babies, and the Soil & Water Conservation District that provide unique programming for people of all ages. And of course Visit Binghamton where Judi Hess and her team make sure that people from all over the world know what Broome County has to offer.

Broome County has a strong network of nonprofits and service agencies and recognizes the importance of local, grassroots organizations.

They provide so many amazing programs and services, but many have few resources to assist in their missions.

That's why, working directly with Chairman Dan Reynolds and our partners on the County Legislature, we created the Small Community Fund which - to date - has awarded more than \$1.5 million to help dozens of local governments and organizations in every corner of Broome County.

From the new Deposit Community Park in Eastern Broome, to a new highway truck for the Town of Windsor, beautiful new basketball courts in Port Dickinson, snowmobile trails in Northern Broome, park improvements for the Union-Endicott Little League and so many others...these projects would not be possible without the support of the Small Community Fund.

And in this budget we are making our largest investment in this program, \$1 million that will allow us to make more direct investments in community programs than ever before.

Whether it be at home, at work, at school, or out in the community, everyone in Broome County should have peace of mind knowing that they are safe.

Last year, we launched our School Bus Stop Arm Camera program that records each vehicle that illegally passes a stopped school bus; more than three thousand violations were recorded during the first year of the program, resulting in automatic tickets issued to each vehicle.

Revenue generated through fines from these tickets will be reinvested into the program in 2023, allowing us to reach and educate more drivers on the dangers of passing school buses so that all our students are safe...thank you to our Director of Emergency Services Patrick Dewing, Program Coordinator Corinne Cornelius, and the entire Emergency Services team for your efforts.

Our Security Division, led by Director Brian Norris, is on duty at all County Buildings and County-sponsored events ensuring the safety of our employees and visitors. This budget makes new investments in these men and women that protect our County.

Our Law Department, under the leadership of County Attorney Bob Behnke, led the way in taking on big pharmaceutical companies that contributed to the opioid epidemic.

Now those companies are paying out millions to communities throughout the State, and Broome County will use settlement funds to offer more substance abuse and mental health programming to help those living with substance use disorders take control of their lives again, as well as prevent addiction in the next generation.

We are also preparing so that every single County resident has the fastest response possible during an emergency as our new emergency communications network goes online.

Installing this new network was a huge undertaking and replaces components that were more than 50 years old.

This modern system will connect everyone, from callers, to dispatchers, to first responders instantly and make emergency response faster than ever in Broome County.

A huge thank you to Assemblywoman Donna Lupardo and Senator Fred Akshar who passed critical legislation in Albany that allowed us to create this important network.

In the event of an emergency, every second matters, and the time saved through the implementation of this new network will help us save lives.

Ensuring the safety of our community continues to be a priority in Broome County, and tonight I'd like to offer a special thank you to someone who has made it a priority every single day for more than 50 years.

Over the past six years we have worked with Sheriff David Harder to add road patrol officers, implement centralized arraignment, upgrade key positions, and make sure our deputies and correction officers have the resources they need to keep our community safe.

During this time the crime rate in Broome County decreased by 17%. While we still have a lot of work to do that is a good start and I want to thank the entire Sheriff's Office for the work they do every day to protect our county.

Sheriff Dave Harder will retire at the end of this year and on behalf of the 200 thousand residents of Broome County, I'd like to offer a sincere and heartfelt thank you; your dedication to this community has been second to none and we wish you nothing but the best in your retirement.

This budget is one that will put Broome County on a path into the future. Major economic development projects, new recreational opportunities, improving services, housing and public safety.

But these things don't just happen by themselves; these initiatives, along with the programs and services we offer every day, require the hard work and dedication of hundreds and hundreds of people that make up our workforce.

We recognize how hard each and every one of these individuals works each day and now we're reinvesting in our workforce like never before.

People like our health care workers at Willow Point who care for some of our most vulnerable residents and showed up each and every day during the worst public health crisis in a generation.

People like our Emergency Dispatchers who provide critical communication that sets in motion each emergency response that takes place in Broome County.

And people like the ones at our Department of Social Services who work daily with members of our community that are most in need.

We recognized that these positions couldn't wait another year; that's why we introduced legislation this summer to upgrade these positions. Thank you to our Personnel Officer Christine Segrue for working with us on these needed upgrades.

But there's plenty more. Before I took office, many employees throughout Broome County Government saw their paychecks cut.

Take, for example, the Director of Public Health, a position that has been on the front lines of the COVID pandemic. Mary McFadden has been working around the clock over the past two years and we appreciate her tireless efforts to keep our community safe and healthy.

Another position working under a 5% cut: Manager of Risk & Insurance. Tom Dellapenna helped create the Broome County Purchasing Alliance, along with Purchasing Director Robin Laabs, that has saved taxpayers millions of dollars in health care costs for public sector retirees. Again, a position currently funded below the minimum.

Or how about our attorneys who know they could make more money in the private sector but have chosen a career in public service instead?

We've been working to restore these cuts and have created or upgraded more than 500 positions in Broome County since 2017.

And we've also recognized the dedication of our unionized employees and have renegotiated their contracts with increases far higher than the previous administration.

This year we're recommitting to our efforts to compensate our employees more fairly.

In the 2023 budget, I'm proposing more than 130 long overdue upgrades that represents an investment of an additional \$688 thousand to continue the work we've been doing to make our positions competitive and attract the best and brightest candidates out there.

As I said before, the work we do in Broome County is not possible without the men and women that make up our workforce. While it's impossible to put a true price tag on it, we know your worth. This is just the beginning, we know there are many more positions we need to address, and we will continue to build on these efforts in the years to come.

George F. Johnson once said: "You owe to everybody, and to the workers most, to give yourself to it and to arrange as far as possible that the future shall hold the same sort of constructive relationship."

The man who had this building constructed knew as well as anyone the importance of investing in the workforce, and in doing so investing in the community to create a better future for all residents.

As we sit here tonight in this building, we are recommitting to Johnson's Square Deal on behalf of our employees and our residents.

There will always be more work to do, but together we will create a Victory for all of Broome County.

Thank you and God Bless!