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**BROOME COUNTY LEGISLATURE  
REGULAR SESSION  
SEPTEMBER 30, 2004**

The Legislature convened at 4:02 p.m. with a call to order by the Chair, Daniel A. Schofield. The Clerk, Louis P. Augostini, read the fire exit announcement and called the Attendance Roll, Present-18, Absent-1 (Wike).

The Chair, Mr. Schofield, led the members of the Legislature in the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

**WRITTEN OR ORAL PRESENTATIONS OF THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE:**

Presentation of the Proposed 2004 Broome County Budget and Proposed Six-Year Capital Improvement Program.

Ladies and Gentlemen of the Legislature:

Good Afternoon.

In accordance with Article VI, Section 604 of the Administrative Code, it is my privilege to present the 2005 Operating Budget and 6-Year Capital Improvement Program for Broome County.

My priority in each of the eight budgets I have submitted to you has been to control the cost of County government while maintaining the high level of service County residents have come to expect.

Today, on behalf of all the taxpayers in Broome County, I am pleased to present a County Budget for 2005 which not only reduces taxes but lays the ground work for stabilizing taxes in the foreseeable future.

My budget reduces property taxes by 8.1%. Cutting taxes will help in our effort to stimulate economic development and investment within our community. Broome County property taxes will be among the lowest in New York State, making our area more attractive to both new and existing businesses.

Six out of the eight budgets that I have proposed have reduced taxes. Taxes over the past eight years have increased by an average annual rate of just two tenths of one percent. We have accomplished this feat through controlled spending, careful budgeting and good management of County finances.

Throughout this budget you will note that I have continued the practice of eliminating unnecessary expenses and limiting expenses on discretionary items wherever possible.

The reduction in County property taxes proposed for 2005 is primarily due to an increase in the 2003 fund balance. Aggressive recovery of State and Federal aid, reinstatement by New York State of the sales tax on clothing and better than expected retail sales contributed. In addition; record breaking home sales increased mortgage tax revenues, savings in retirement, savings in personnel costs and the most aggressive and comprehensive Welfare Fraud Detection Program in New York State also contributed. None of this would be possible without the hard work and dedication of our County employees. A good example is Broome County Security's Front End Detection and Case Integrity Units.

In July 2002, I asked Carl Fenescey, Director of Broome County Security, to implement an Eligibility Verification Review (EVR) Program that would utilize every available resource when determining eligibility for individuals applying for assistance. According to a report issued by the NYS Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance, the FEDS and EVR Programs saved New York State more than \$10.7 million in avoided costs with Broome County's share of savings being over \$3.5 million.

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The Broome County EVR savings in the Assistance Program alone was a remarkable 34.1% of the total savings realized in all of New York State. This unprecedented effort was due to the work of Jim Dadamio and his staff in County Security. Please join me in recognizing Jim, his investigative team and support personnel.

It is my firm belief that the increase in fund balance should be returned to County taxpayers. This is entirely appropriate. When State mandates (primarily soaring Medicaid) forced County cost increases, these increases had to be passed along to County taxpayers. Any mandate relief in the form of increased state aid payments, other increased revenues and reduction in expenses, should likewise be passed along to County taxpayers in the form of tax reductions. This is taxpayers' money, not ours, and should be returned to them whenever possible.

Some individuals may criticize this as an election year budget given its tax decrease. I have cut taxes five of the past seven years. This is not election year gimmickry, **this continues a trend.**

This budget lays out a plan to minimize any future tax increases.

As many of you know, the State Comptroller has proposed and the State Legislature has signed off on a one year moratorium for State retirement expenses. Local municipalities which operate on a calendar year basis (including County, City and towns) will be given relief from paying the 2004 State retirement bill. A full year's relief for Broome County is approximately \$5.1 million. Any savings in 2004 expenses will be available for the 2006 Budget and beyond as a source of tax stabilization.

Let me take a moment to highlight several other specific areas of the budget:

The Health Department requested and I am recommending the creation of a Public Health Technician position to allow the Senior Engineer and Director of Environmental Health Services to devote more time to our expanding Toxics Program dealing with underground pollution.

Further, I have included funding of \$100,000 for the Health Department to support the Community Free Clinic. This Free Clinic co-sponsored by the Clinical Campus at Binghamton University and the Broome County Health Department provides comprehensive primary care, including laboratory and prescription medications on-site to the working poor of the Greater Binghamton area who lack health insurance and earn too much to qualify for Social Services and Medicaid. Since 1997, over 5,000 patients have been seen generating over 18,000 visits. Over the past seven years, 450 residents in the community have volunteered to staff the Clinic.

This is indeed a worthwhile and money-saving endeavor that should continue to receive the full support of the County.

My 2005 County Budget recommends a contribution to the Ross Park Zoo of \$366,250. This is an increase of \$200,000 over the amount given to the Zoo in 2004.

In light of the recent disclosure of an extremely serious financial situation at the Zoo, I feel that it is imperative that the amount I recommend be approved for 2005 become the base amount for future support of the Zoo. This increased County support will help the Zoo to obtain the necessary accreditation and apply for Federal and State grants to continue and possibly expand current educational programs. Our Finch Hollow Nature Center will also be exploring the possibility of doing joint programs with the Zoo. In addition, I am coordinating a private sector effort to help in the current financial needs of the Zoo. The youngest and most dynamic Zoo Director in the Country is with us today, I'd like to introduce Jarod Miller.

I have also included in my 2005 Recommended Budget a \$300,000 increase in support for local libraries. This brings our support to over \$1,000,000. When I took office in 1997, support for local libraries was \$200,000. My 2005 Recommended Budget represents a better than 5 fold increase over 1997 support and provides a 49% increase for all libraries when compared to our support in 2004.

Our self funded health insurance program continues to reap huge benefits. After a 5% increase in premiums in 2004, and a 2% increase in 2003, I am proposing an increase of 4% for 2005. Our 3 year increase of less than 12% is actually less than the average annual increase for HMO's for one year over the past 3 year period.

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My 2005 Recommended Budget reflects a 10% increase in Medicaid growth over projected 2004 expenses.

Medicaid expenses for Broome County now stand at over \$41 million. This compares with an actual fiscal year 2000 expense of \$22.8 million. In just 5 short years, Medicaid tax support has increased by \$18.5 million. And since 2000, County property taxes have increased by \$9.4 million, which means that the increase in tax support for Medicaid has been almost twice as large as the overall property tax increase.

Counties across New York State are suffering under the Medicaid burden. Most who haven't cut discretionary spending like we did will have to raise property taxes significantly. There must be state mandate relief from this onerous monster.

This budget reflects the full cost of operating both the Veterans Memorial Arena and Forum for 2005 as we explore and analyze management options.

My 2005 Recommended Capital Program includes capital projects that can be classified into the following categories: infrastructure renovations, health and safety projects and capital projects to improve service delivery

There are two pending projects that while not included in the 2005 Capital Program at this time, may require some action next year as more details become available.

A replacement for the Willow Point Nursing Home and Central Foods is awaiting the results of a New York State Health Dept. study as to how to deal with 10,000 surplus nursing home beds across the state and how that might impact future reimbursement of construction and operating costs.

An inter-modal terminal in downtown Binghamton that would serve as the hub for B.C. Transit, for two long-distance bus services, and various shuttle and taxi services at one location is an exciting project. We have received federal funds toward this project, but before we can take any further action we need to determine the scope of the project including the impact on the neighborhood, and receive accurate cost estimates.

Before I complete my comments on the 2005 Budget, I would like to take a moment to recognize those County Legislators who will be leaving us and who I consider partners in our accomplishments over the last eight years. Those Legislators are Vince Pasquale, Bill Wike and Wanda Hudak. Though we may have disagreed sometimes on process, I know that our goal was the same, to provide needed County services to all our residents in the most cost-effective manner. I thank you for your extraordinary commitment to public service.

I would also like to thank the entire Legislature for the difficult role you have played as a partner with this administration in addressing the County budget challenges. Over the past three years, speaking as a fellow elected official, I know that cutting positions and making difficult decisions have not been pleasant undertakings. You are to be commended for making the difficult decisions that have allowed the County to downscale to a sustainable level. I believe our actions over the past eight years can best be characterized as a partnership which took proactive measures to address the financial challenges we faced.

At this time, we all need to thank our County employees for the roles they have played in addressing the County's financial challenges. It is a stressful situation when an organization has to go through the process of downsizing. Our County employees have stepped forward and accepted the challenge and I think it's appropriate at this time to thank them for their efforts. It is indeed a pleasure for me to be County Executive in an organization with such dedicated and involved employees and I look forward to working with them in the years to come.

Mr. Howard made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Mr. Pasquale. **Motion to adjourn carried** Ayes-18, Nays-0, Absent-1 (Wike). The meeting was adjourned at 4:18 p.m.

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