



State of New York County of Broome Government Offices

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

Broome County Executive Jason Garnar's 2018 Budget Address September 14, 2017

Good afternoon, Chairman Reynolds, Majority Leader Flagg, Minority Leader Whalen, Legislators, elected officials, Broome County employees, and members of the public and media. Thank you for being here today as I deliver my first budget address as County Executive.

When I took my oath of office as County Executive nine months ago, I did not know if we could survive financially.

It wasn't a pretty picture and it still isn't. People often ask what keeps you up at night? For me, it's Broome County's finances and it has been since day one.

It's not just obvious to us in Broome County, but to the state, that Broome County was in a financial mess. Significant fiscal stress. That's what New York State Comptroller Thomas DiNapoli has listed Broome County as having for two straight years, 2014 and 2015. Preliminary numbers for 2016 have us in that same boat. Significant fiscal stress. Three years in a row of being labeled with significant fiscal stress. At the end of 2015, Broome County had a fund balance of 5 and a half million dollars. At the end of 2016, that money was gone. It had been depleted to a mere 250-thousand dollars on a 370 million dollar budget. You wouldn't manage your family's household budget this way. Burning through your savings, underfunding and unrealistic expectations. You definitely cannot manage a county budget that way.

When I first took office and saw this mess, I knew it couldn't wait until budget time to take action. Broome County could not continue to operate this way.

I instituted an immediate hiring freeze. I'm proud to announce that our hiring freeze has saved 350-thousand dollars in salary and benefits.

Our employees have been stepping up all year to fill in the gaps. They continue to do more with less. At this time, I'd like to take a moment to recognize all of our county employees for their hard work this year. Thank you so much.

Earlier this year I also teamed up with Chairman Reynolds and called for the State Comptroller to do a full audit of county finances. This audit was an independent study of our financial situation and we are waiting on the results to learn how we can move forward to develop future budgets that can help restore the financial health of Broome County.

For 2018, I am presenting a realistic, solid budget with no gimmicks. What you see is what you get. This is back to basics budgeting. It's practical and invests in the priorities of Broome County.

Our Office of Management and Budget Director Jerry Knebel took over at the beginning of the year and immediately got to work to get to where we are today.

He and Deputy Director of Budget Sarah Kane asked the tough questions and held the line on spending everywhere possible. They haven't made this easy on department heads and that is how we got to presenting this budget here today, which is a strong budget and one that is practical.

We've included realistic expectations about our revenues. I'm not giving you a budget that includes 850-thousand dollars for medical marijuana and then getting 2-thousand dollars.

I won't underfund budget lines and overestimate revenues because we don't have a fund balance to pay for bad budget decisions.

I'll say it again, this budget contains no gimmicks. I have developed a conservative budget and did not go over the property tax cap.

You may have heard about Raise the Age. It was signed into law this year by the state. 16 and 17 year-olds will be prevented from being placed into the county jail. This has had a major effect on the budget and will only increase in the future. It impacts the Sheriff's Office, District Attorney's Office, Probation, Law Department and Department of Social Services. New York state has repeatedly said that counties will be reimbursed for Raise the Age as long as we stay under the property tax cap. And we are staying under that tax cap this year with our budget.

In addition, we are budgeting sales tax growth at the same rate as 2016. Now is not the time to continue playing games with our finances and we are being realistic.

Over last six years, the county took an additional 23 million dollars in sales tax revenue from towns and municipalities through the sales tax cap. That's almost 4 million taken every year for 6 years. Over 5 million dollars was taken from the City of Binghamton. And in the Town of Vestal and the Town of Union, 3.2 million dollars was taken from each municipality.

If this practice continued and we had an extra 4 million, today, I would be announcing a 3 and a half percent tax cut. But to do that our towns and villages would either have to raise taxes or cut vital services like police and fire or pave fewer roads. For 2018, this stops. We're not robbing municipalities for our own gain. For the first time in six years, a county executive will be presenting a budget that proposes zero sales tax dollars be taken away from towns and municipalities.

As a result, in developing this budget, I've had to find ways to be more efficient to save money.

Deputy County Executive Kevin McManus works directly with the department heads and has been innovative in working to reorganize our departments to help this county run more efficiently and effectively. We have reorganized several departments including Public Works and the Office of Management and Budget. We have restructured personnel within these departments because it will save money. In 2018, there will be 49 total unfunded county positions which will amount to significant savings.

I challenged department heads to bring new ideas to the table to help us save money and one of them is a game-changer.

I am talking big savings in 2018 to the county thanks to our Risk and Insurance director, Tom Dellapenna. We will be entering into a new Pharmacy Coalition in 2018 which will dramatically reduce the cost of prescriptions. This decision alone will save Broome County millions of dollars annually.

It was through these efforts which allowed me to hold the line increasing taxes only slightly. The 2018 budget proposes an increase in taxes of 1.84 percent. This is far below the property tax cap.

One of my top priorities is fighting the public health crisis we are facing in Broome County, the heroin epidemic. This epidemic is evil. It does not discriminate. It has affected everyone in this room.

If you have been touched by the heroin epidemic, I want you to raise your hand. Everyone look around. This shows how big of a problem we are facing in Broome County. This touches everybody. 76 lives lost last year. 400 plus overdoses so far this year. Our first responders and Department of Social Services are inundated.

We are taking an all hands-on deck approach and that starts with our Health Department. Currently, Broome County has no position dedicated to fighting this epidemic. That changes with my budget.

For the first time ever, I will be designating a Public Health Coordinator to work directly on addressing this epidemic in Broome County and other substance use disorders. This person will monitor overdose data, partner with community organizations and spearhead drug prevention in schools.

But, the work doesn't stop there. I am proposing 25-thousand dollar grant fund to provide funding to local agencies with boots on the ground. I want to help community organizations, providers, municipalities and school districts that are working every day to fight this epidemic.

I've been saying this for two years... One of my top priorities was to bring a long-term treatment center to Broome County. That is going to happen.

The state is providing us an annual grant of \$3 million dollars for a treatment facility at the Broome Developmental Center. No local taxpayer dollars will be spent on this life-saving treatment center.

This project repurposes a huge, unused building and it will create more than 70 good paying jobs right here in Broome County.

This would not be possible without the help of our state partners. It is a true, bipartisan team effort thanks to the support of Governor Cuomo and OASAS, Senator Fred Akshar, Assemblywoman Donna Lupardo and Assemblyman Clifford Crouch.

And I cannot thank Senator Fred Akshar enough. From day 1, he has been leading the fight against the heroin epidemic in our county. He's worked hard each and every day to secure critical resources, pass informed laws and most importantly, take action that is needed to fight back against this epidemic and protect our community.

The state recognizes the need we have in Broome County, that something has to be done and it has be done quickly to save lives.

Public Safety is a big part of the budget I am presenting to you for 2018. This includes the District Attorney's Office, Sheriff's Office, Public Defender's Office, Probation and Office of Emergency Services.

Just two years ago Broome County had the highest crime index rate in New York State.

When District Attorney Steve Cornwell took office - he meant business. Last year, the crime index rate went down 16 percent.

Any investment in the District Attorney's Office is a wise one and makes Broome County safer. With the addition of more Assistant District Attorneys in 2018, the DA's office will be able to settle more cases right at

arraignment. It will also save the DA's office, the public defender's office, assigned counsel and all of our town and village courts valuable time and resources.

Does anyone know how many calls the 911 dispatch center in Broome County receives each year?

When I heard the number from Director of Emergency Services, Mike Ponticiello, I was shocked. HALF a million calls.

So far this year, I have declared three State of Emergencies and the worst one was Winter Storm Stella in March. Stella came out in full force, burying Broome County. At the Emergency Operations Center, my team was in the thick of it and I saw first-hand how critical it is to invest in public safety... standing alongside people who work day in and day out to protect the people of Broome County. Thank you to Broome County Sheriff David Harder, Mike Ponticiello and the first responders who answered the call and do so every day. We need to support their efforts. The Office of Emergency Services needs more resources in the 9-1-1 dispatch center so I am adding a new senior dispatcher.

I am also committed to improving public safety through the Broome County Sheriff's Office. More corrections officers are needed in this budget due to Raise the Age and the jail expansion so I am providing additional staffing for them.

JOBS. We need more of them. People are leaving Broome County for better opportunities. We need job training to keep people here and we also have to attract businesses. So for the first time ever, Broome County will be partnering with The Agency to create a 300-thousand dollar small business loan fund. I talk to small business owners every week and they need help. This fund will help them expand and grow their business.

But that's not all.... There has always been lot of attention paid to the urban core of Broome County. It's time our rural communities got some attention as well.

I'm a small-town boy who was raised in a town of 300 people. I understand the challenges rural communities face. For the first time ever, I am dedicating 150-thousand dollars fund for our rural communities in Broome County. This funding shows my commitment to assist all of Broome County. The best part of it? These two new projects aren't going to impact your wallet. They aren't raising your taxes.

I am funding these programs through economic development funds that have been unused for years. This money can only be used for economic development and we can't wait any longer to start creating new jobs.

I'm a proud graduate of SUNY Broome and so are many others in our community, including county legislators and many business leaders. Investment in our community college is paying off. SUNY Broome saw a 2 percent increase in enrollment this year. For 2018, I am increasing funding for SUNY Broome so our students can get the education and training they need to get jobs in Broome County and stay here.

I'm a father of three boys. My brother has two children. His youngest was actually just born on Monday. As parents, we all know the importance of reading, and reading starts at infancy.

Literacy development begins long before kids enter school and learn to read. It begins in the first days of life and it begins at home. I want to make sure that happens for all children in Broome County. In my 2018 budget, I am developing a Books for Babies program.

Every child born in Broome County will receive a Welcome Baby book and their first library card. This sends the message that it is never too early to start reading to your children and introduces our kids to the many wonderful libraries in Broome County. Broome County will always step up to the plate when it comes to investing in our kids.

In 2018, I am committed to investing in upgrades in our infrastructure. Maintaining our roads is key to driving economic development in Broome County. Our Highway Department plans to pave 40 miles across the county in 2018. Thank you to Senator Akshar for securing an extra million dollars this year in infrastructure funding. It's because of these bipartisan efforts that we are able to maintain and provide improvements to the roads we drive daily.

We all know that public transportation is a vital part of our local economy.

We have an aging fleet with almost no spare buses. The county is partnering with our federal and state officials to buy eight buses over the next two years so we can maintain and increase service. We have a new mobile app launching this fall to help BC Transit riders track buses and plan routes. Also over the next two years, Broome County will receive more than 300-thousand dollars in state funding to buy and install up to 30 bus shelters for our public transportation riders. These will be 100 percent funded by state dollars with no cost to county taxpayers.

I'm committed to maintaining service for BC Transit and it's clear we are investing in our buses and making improvements for our riders. I'm not cutting service. In fact, I'd like to add more routes and service in the future. But to make this happen some tough decisions have to be made. I am adding a small increase to fares for BC Lift. I made the decision because people have told me they'd rather pay a little more than have their service cut. Our investments for 2018 show that we are committed to improving public transportation in Broome County.

Let's talk about the airport. I walked in as County Executive to decisions that were announced last year regarding decreased service at the Greater Binghamton Airport.

I'm not focusing on that. It's time to put the past behind us and move forward.

For the first time ever, we are partnering with the Greater Binghamton Chamber of Commerce to help support and grow our airport. Working with CEO Jen Conway, over 40 businesses have pledged to use the Binghamton Airport whenever possible

I am committed to maintaining and increasing service at the airport but there are also other economic opportunities we're looking to tap into in 2018. This year, we completed an \$11 million dollar project repaving the main runway. In addition - we received a half-million dollar grant from the Federal Aviation Administration. This will allow us to reduce regulations at the airport to make it easier for businesses to come in. The future of the airport is in developing the 300 acres of land that is there for business opportunities and my budget supports this.

This is something you've heard me talk a lot about... the county website. For people looking to come to Broome County or get a job in Broome County- our website is the first thing they see. What we have now is not a good first impression. In 2018, mark my words, we will have a new county website we can all be proud of. I am working with Legislator Jason Shaw and others to make this happen. I have developed a team to focus on our new website. It will be a transparent, mobile-friendly, user-friendly, business-friendly website that provides all the information users need and showcase the best of Broome County to the rest of the world.

I cannot emphasize enough our need to partner with all levels of government. This summer, Governor Andrew Cuomo was in Johnson City to make a major announcement committing 20 million dollars investing in our urban centers- Binghamton, Johnson City and Endicott. You can leverage a lot with 20 million dollars and as co-chair, I'm going to make sure that is put to good use.

This summer I made announcements about two huge projects in Broome County. 59 Lester Avenue in Johnson City. This is the biggest eyesore in Broome County. You can't miss it if you're driving on Route 17. It is massive. This summer I requested proposals because people are knocking down our door interested in redeveloping that property. In 2018, you can expect a big announcement about its future.

The same thing is going on at 6 Emma Street in Binghamton. Paulus Development announced a 20 million dollar project for that county-owned building. I will continue to partner with state leaders to eliminate blight in Broome County.

And finally, our Veterans department continues to work hard each and every day to support our local veterans. The 2018 budget continues my commitment to veterans and provides a 100 thousand dollar fund for special veteran programs. Our veterans put their lives on the line to protect our freedoms and we owe them support to help them when they return home.

Today, I've given you many highlights of my budget for 2018 that I am proud to be presenting to the Legislature. I knew coming into this, it would be an uphill battle to get our fiscal house in order and something that I couldn't change immediately.

But this budget I'm putting forward for 2018 puts us on the right track. This budget presents opportunity. Opportunity to get Broome County back to where it needs to be financially. It is about moving forward and I'm not stopping until we get to where we need to be.

Over the coming weeks I look forward to working with the Legislature to develop a final budget that we can all be proud of.

Thank you, Goodnight and God Bless Broome County.