



State of New York County of Broome Government Offices

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

2024 Broome County Budget Address

Good evening.

Thank you to Chairman Dan Reynolds, Majority Leader Matt Pasquale, and Minority Leader Bob Weslar, and the entire County Legislature for working with us on this budget.

Thank you to Department Heads for your hard work leading your teams day in and day out, and for your efforts that have helped us put this budget together.

And to the two thousand men and women who make up the Broome County workforce: thank you for all you do every single day on behalf of the people of our community – your dedication does not go unnoticed.

This year's budget address is being delivered with a heavy heart.

In April, we unexpectedly lost our Budget Director, longtime County employee, and amazing friend Jerome Knebel.

While he would never admit it or take credit, Jerry was the driving force behind our past six budgets which kept spending in check, grew our fund balance, and cut taxes.

Jerry will be forever missed but will never be forgotten.

This fall his memory will be permanently honored when we install a memorial bench near his favorite spot to take a break throughout the day on the second-floor plaza of the County Office Building.

And while he may no longer be with us physically, he is with us in spirit, continuing to guide us with the knowledge he left behind, through the lessons he taught us, and by the example he set during his 40 years with Broome County.

I also want to recognize our hosts for the evening: Doug Matthews & Marc Newman.

Six years ago, this property - once the epicenter of commerce for Broome County - was on life support.

Store after store closed and the former owners told us they were prepared to walk away from the Mall.

But these two great community partners stepped up.

And while former shopping malls across the country put locks on the doors and boards over the windows – Doug & Marc put shovels in the ground and cranes in the air!

Their vision didn't just save this place, they transformed it into something that is becoming a destination for our own community and for the thousands of travelers that drive along Route-17 every single day.

And look what's already happening here.

You can come to the Factory by Beer Tree and have one of the best beers in Upstate NY.

You can use the newest equipment and get one-on-one personal training at the Lourdes Health & Fitness Center.

You can visit our Workforce Training Center to get connected with employment opportunities throughout the region.

And just a few weeks ago, the Dick's House of Sport opened to the public and has already welcomed thousands of customers into the Oakdale Commons.

This is a store unlike any other in the world – literally; this is the largest Dick's Sporting Goods store ever.

And we're not done yet. Lourdes is continuing to expand, new restaurants are about to open, and BJ's and Dave & Busters will both open in 2024!

The transformation of this site is an example of how investments in our community return dividends for the people of Broome County.

With the support of the County Legislature, we allocated one-time American Rescue Plan funds to this project because we recognized it as an opportunity to create long-lasting impacts to our economy.

Every person that walks through these doors and makes a purchase is helping generate important sales tax revenue the County relies on.

With these new destinations right here in the heart of Broome County we can expect a boost for years and years to come, building on an already strong sales tax base.

Over the past six years, our sales tax has grown, up 48% since 2017.

At the same time, we've grown our tax base with property values going up 30%.

And because of this growth and year after year of responsible budgeting, we are once again cutting taxes for the people of Broome County for the sixth-straight year!

Under this proposed budget, the average taxpayer will see a 4% reduction in their own County property tax rate.

Since the day I took office, it has been the commitment of this administration to be responsible stewards of taxpayer money.

Working with the County Legislature, we have done just that. Together, we've taken a fund balance of less than one million dollars and grown it to more than \$50 million.

We have kept spending in check. While inflation has grown nearly 25% since I took office, your County property tax rate has gone down 22%.

While our residents have paid more for gasoline and groceries, Broome County's responsible budgeting has made sure they're paying less on their County property taxes!

But this year's budget process has been far from easy; in fact, this is one of the most challenging budgets the County has had in years.

This spring, Broome County along with every other county across New York was dealt a huge financial hit.

For years, the State passed federal Medicaid dollars directly to Counties.

And while we are still required to deliver Medicaid payments to our residents, the New York State Budget that was passed in May withholds these critical federal funds.

The decision by the State to withhold this funding represents a \$625 million shift to County governments across New York and a \$5 million hit to Broome County.

Other items included in the State Budget, like changes to foreclosure procedures, and a new salary scale for public attorneys will add several millions more in mandated costs to our County Budget this year and in the years to come.

And while our State representatives went to bat for Broome County and advocated on our behalf, these new, unfunded mandates were included in the final state budget.

These new costs alone could have represented a huge increase in taxes or major cuts in services for our residents.

But because of our responsible budgeting over the past six years and the tireless work of Deputy County Executive Michael Ponticiello and Terra Adams from our Department of Risk & Insurance, who have worked on this budget since April, we were able to weather this storm.

And in 2024, we'll build on this work while continuing to make the smart investments that will pay off for Broome County residents for years and years to come.

Along with the amazing new Oakdale Commons, in 2024 we will see the progress and completion of some of the most exciting projects in the history of Broome County.

The new Greenlight Networks Grand Slam Softball Park will host its first tournament this weekend!

This \$4 million facility, complete with all-turf fields and stadium lighting, is the only one of its kind in New York State.

This spring, Grand Slam Park will be home to the SUNY Broome, Seton Catholic, and Susquehanna Valley softball teams, as well as Section IV championships where teams from throughout Broome County will play.

And for years to come it will attract tournaments, bringing thousands of players, coaches, and fans to our community – filling our hotels, restaurants and stores and bringing important tourism dollars that support our local economy.

Later this fall, the Broome County Dog Park will open its gates where residents and visitors traveling the nearby interstate will be able to bring their dogs to run off their leashes.

And in Western Broome County, work is underway at the reimagined Grippen Park.

Next year, the building there – which had deteriorated after two floods and has not been available for use by the entire community for years – will reopen for everyone to enjoy, with everything from basketball, to pickleball, to ice skating!

The Park will also feature the County's first wiffle ball stadium as well as enhanced walking trails that will connect to Round Top Picnic Area, and will host new concerts, events, and festivals.

New amenities, like picnic tables, grills, camping upgrades, and more will be added throughout our entire parks system as we continue to welcome record crowds to our ten Broome County parks.

Thank you to Parks Director Brenda Gowe for her work to enhance the experience for all Parks visitors.

In our Department of Public Works, Acting Commissioner Roger Brown and his team will continue their great work to make sure our County infrastructure continues getting the attention it needs.

Our Highway Division has fixed more miles of road in each of the past three years than ever before in County history.

Working with Deputy Commissioner for Highways, Chet Kupiec, we plan to make 2024 another record breaking year!

And our Engineering Division will build on its efforts to ensure that our bridges, buildings, properties, and roadways are designed and maintained efficiently and safely.

But we can't talk about safety without thanking the men and women who go to work every day to make sure we are safe.

Under the leadership of Director Brian Norris, Broome Security keeps residents and visitors and employees safe at all our County buildings, parks, and properties.

A new position will be added to Security next year to enhance the Division's presence at the County Intermodal where hundreds of commuters pass through each day.

At the Office of Emergency Services, Director Patrick Dewing and his team coordinate every County-wide emergency and help lead the majority of our EMS and fire departments.

The 2024 Budget includes a new position at OES to make sure all equipment is operational when the next emergency occurs, and our brand-new emergency communications network will finish going online in 2024, making response times faster than ever before when residents dial 911.

And my administration has worked closely with our new Sheriff, Fred Akshar, since he took office in January so that every corner of Broome County that relies on the men and women of the Sheriff's Office is safe.

And in 2024, the budget will fund a new Strategic Response Group within the Sheriff's Office that will be dedicated to assisting in targeted areas that require more attention.

This team will not only be able to focus on persistent quality of life issues, but will allow traditional patrol deputies to focus on criminal complaints and 911 calls, decreasing response time in the process.

Every resident of Broome County - whether they live in the Town of Union, Maine, City of Binghamton, or Village of Deposit - deserves to go to bed at night knowing that their neighborhood is safe for them and their families...this new Strategic Response Group will help give residents that peace of mind.

Thank you to each and every member of these three public safety agencies for their constant work to protect Broome County!

While our first responders are on the frontlines of protecting Broome County, our budget supports other long-term investments that will help create a safer community.

Enhancing services for people living with substance use disorders has been a top priority of this administration since Day One.

We made significant progress to cut down on the number of overdoses in our community from 2017 through 2020, but when the COVID pandemic hit, overdoses began to rise once again.

Broome County was one of the first municipalities in the nation to sue the big pharmaceutical companies that contributed to the overdose epidemic.

And together with the New York State Attorney General's Office, we were able to hold them accountable. Earlier this year, Broome County began receiving more than \$8 million dollars it was awarded through this lawsuit.

We created a grant program that is passing these funds directly to local community agencies.

And these awards will focus on education, prevention, intervention, treatment, and recovery and every single penny will go directly to helping individuals in our community.

Thank you to our County Attorney Bob Behnke and his team for their work on this lawsuit and to Director of Public Health Mary McFadden and her team for their work on the grant program that will pass this funding directly to local community agencies.

Increasing our housing capacity is also critical to creating a safe community.

We know how difficult it can be for some to find a place to live, which is why we're partnering with the City of Binghamton and Mayor Jared Kraham, we are adding a new position at our Department of Social Services that will be dedicated to assisting those searching for housing.

And we'll build on our efforts to grow the number of available housing units. Hundreds have been created over the last few years through projects we have funded.

And in 2024, this important work continues as projects we have supported through the American Rescue Plan will be under construction.

Additional units will be added on Avenue B in the Johnson City neighborhood where the new Victory Lofts are filling up with professionals who are working nearby.

We've rehabbed homes through the amazing work of our Broome County Landbank and Director Jessica Haas, and working together we will create even more new and affordable home ownership opportunities.

75 new affordable units will break ground in the Town of Union at the former IBM Country Club site.

Additional affordable housing with an associated day care facility will be built in JC.

And new, much-needed units for seniors in a partnership with SEPP will be added on Washington Avenue in Endicott.

As retirees & empty-nesters downsize, they need quality places to live...this is part of our commitment as an age-friendly community, enhancing the lives of our seniors.

As part of this effort, we added a brand-new senior center in Chenango Bridge this past spring after residents there asked for a space of their own.

This center has been a HUGE success and our 2024 budget includes funding so it can be open an additional day each week.

Thank you to Office for Aging and Director Mary Turbush for leading this effort in Broome County - we appreciate all their hard work!

Our investments are helping to make Broome County a great place to live.

And at the same time, we are continuing to build on our efforts to make Broome County a great place to work.

Over the past year, we've consistently had the lowest unemployment rate in recorded history.

But with a smaller talent pool, we must continue doing everything we can to help fill open jobs throughout the community.

And that work begins right here at home.

We have some of the best employees and it's important that we recognize how hard they work day in and day out on behalf of our community.

People like Sarah Seese & Alexis Bronson from Public Defender Mike Baker's Office who created the Period Pantry to serve women in need of hygiene products.

Or Josias Bartram and his team at the Library who have found new and innovative ways to serve everyone in the community.

And Kelly Conlon and the staff at the Broome County Dog Shelter whose tireless work to protect and care for animals until they find their forever homes often goes unnoticed.

There's hundreds and hundreds of employees like these who go to work each day not for themselves, but for the people they serve.

Over the past seven years we've upgraded more than 500 positions in Broome County and in 2024 we are investing \$3.5 million dollars more in our employees.

This includes a raise for members of our largest union, CSEA, in next year's budget.

This is the latest step in our efforts to fix the salary grid that has been outdated for decades.

Thank you to CSEA's leadership for working with us on this important increase for the workers they represent.

Doing it as part of a taxpayer-funded budget is challenging, but we will continue making needed changes year after year until every position is addressed.

We will also continue our efforts to update and upgrade our facilities throughout the County.

Our Greater Binghamton Airport is undergoing a massive renovation with the support of a \$32 million grant from New York State.

Our new flights to Florida and New York City have greatly increased traffic through the airport.

More than 22 thousand passengers have flown out of our airport this year...that's an increase of 177% since this time last year!

Many parts of the facility and associated amenities have not been touched in decades, and now travelers will have a modern flying experience.

And over at SUNY Broome, we are including funding in our budget to help transform the health sciences building.

Health care is a major employer in our region and SUNY Broome is helping to train the providers of the future.

We're excited to work with new President of SUNY Broome, Dr. Tony Hawkins, to continue moving our community college forward.

And one of our most exciting capital projects in years will finally break ground in 2024.

After setbacks during the pandemic, we have closed on a new property and secured the necessary bonding for our brand-new Veterans Resource Center.

This facility will be home to our Veterans Services Agency, along with community agencies who assist the men and women who have served on our behalf.

This one-stop resource will be near other services our veterans rely on and will help them navigate civilian life.

We will also renew our commitment to veterans in 2024 by increasing our dedicated veterans fund so we can reach more of our former armed-service men & women than ever before.

With programs like veterans' luncheons, free tickets to local sporting events, trips to Washington, D.C., and more, this fund allows us to give back to veterans in unique ways.

And we will also renew our efforts to provide help to local governments and nonprofits with another round of Small Community Fund grants.

This program was created in partnership with Chairman Dan Reynolds and the County Legislature to support projects that may not otherwise have the funding.

To date this fund has assisted nearly 80 projects around Broome County, like improving quality of life for seniors with a window replacement project in Whitney Point;

Helping rebuild Wolfe Park in the Town of Chenango after flooding destroyed it;

Improvements to the Little League field in Endicott;

Enhancing the experience at the Broome County Fair;

And even the helping with the relocation of GiGi's Playhouse to these very Oakdale Commons.

This new space will have an additional two thousand square feet so GiGi's can expand services and help more families than ever before.

We're proud that GiGi's Playhouse is one of our County contract agencies and they, along with our other contract agencies – Cornell Cooperative Extension, Visit Binghamton, Ross Park Zoo, the Discovery Center, Broome County Arts Council, Broome Soil & Water, the Four County Library System, and Books for Babies – will be fully funded once again in 2024.

These organizations do incredible work in making Broome County a great place to live and visit and we appreciate their efforts!

The investments I shared with you tonight will be made in 2024, but this budget is not just about 2024.

It's about 2034, and 2044, and 2054 and so on. It's about SMART spending now that will create returns on our investments for generations to come.

Parks where our kids, grandkids, and great grandkids will play.

Buildings where tomorrow's businesses will operate, where their employees will work, and where those workers will raise their families.

Programs and services that will make our neighborhoods safer and that will provide the help some of our neighbors need to put them on a path to success.

All it takes is all of us, working together, believing in the same goals, and a little investment.

When you walk into this House of Sport, there's an area just inside the entrance that tells the story of Dick's Sporting Goods.

In that area you'll see a cookie jar that belonged to our friend Tim Myers. Dick's gives these jars to employees after 20 years with the company along with \$300.

It was with \$300 from his grandmother's cookie jar that Dick Stack started this company...a young man with a dream, a strong work ethic, and a small investment.

75 years later, look at what that \$300 has turned into.

75 years from tonight, I hope that the investments we're making in our community now will have a similar lasting impact on Broome County.

With all of us committed to working together, I know they can.

Thank you!