



State of New York County of Broome Government Offices

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

2022 Budget Address

Good evening. Thank you to the Broome County Legislature for hosting us here tonight. Thank you to Chairman Daniel J. Reynolds, Majority Leader Cindy O'Brien, Minority Leader Bob Weslar and all the members of our Broome County Legislature. I'd also like to thank our Department Heads and members of the public for joining us tonight.

COVID-19 has once again prevented us from being together this evening and this is now my third address to the Legislature and Public being delivered by Zoom. The pandemic has presented unprecedented challenges for the people of Broome County and for the 40-plus departments that make up the government that serves them. We asked our employees to quickly transition into new roles and to create innovative ways to provide services with virtually no notice or planning. Some employees took voluntary furloughs to help ease the burden on our County finances. Countless others went without vacations and other time off. And our Emergency Operations Center was active for longer than any other period in the history of the County. All of this was no small feat, and I would like to extend a tremendous "thank you" to everyone who did their part to help us get through the most difficult time in Broome County's history.

Over the past 18 months, we have developed battle-tested practices that we now have at our disposal to implement once again at the drop of a hat. Rapid testing, mass vaccination, contact tracing - all these are the result of the groundwork we've laid over my past four years in office. COVID isn't going away anytime soon, and other situations may arise that present an equally difficult challenge, but we have the knowledge and best practices at the ready to take on whatever may come next. And this proposed budget provides the needed support for our continued COVID response.

COVID dealt a huge blow to County finances, but by prioritizing responsible spending and building up our fund balance, we were able to weather the storm the pandemic presented. Because of our responsible budgeting practices, we were able to quickly adapt and survive the economic downturn without laying off a single person in the County's workforce. I am extremely proud of the work every single person in County Government has done to help guide our community through this public health crisis.

It has been my goal every year to present structurally sound, balanced budgets. Working with our Budget Director, Department Heads, and the County Legislature, we've accomplished this for the past five years and 2022 will be no different.

Before I became County Executive, the budget often relied on short-term borrowing to fund the programs and services we offer. In fact, at one point Broome County was borrowing 20 million

dollars a year just to pay its bills. These tax anticipation notes increased our debt burden and cost taxpayers thousands of dollars each year in interest payments.

I would like to note that before I took office the County Legislature had already begun the difficult work of reducing that number each year. Last year we were able to work together to lower that number to 7 million.

And for the 2022 budget, I'm happy to announce to you this evening that due to the hard work we have done with the County Legislature, we have completely eliminated short-term borrowing while still providing - and in fact adding to - the services County residents have come to know and expect.

And I am excited and proud to share with you tonight that the 2022 Broome County Budget proposes the fourth-consecutive tax cut for County residents. Given the impact COVID had on County finances, it would have been very easy to pass the buck on to taxpayers. But we recognize that the pandemic has been extremely difficult on household budgets; the last thing we want families to have to worry about is paying even more in property taxes.

So just think-in the last four years, we have cut taxes every year, increased our fund balance by millions of dollars, and completely eliminated short term borrowing.

Again, none of this would have been possible without the cooperation of the County Legislature, and I'd like to thank Chairman Reynolds and all of the County legislators for the good working relationship that has allowed us to meet these financial goals.

My administration has worked hard to make Broome County a place that both residents and visitors can be proud of and in 2022 we will continue to prioritize quality of life issues here.

We have more than 300 miles of roads, 108 bridges, more than 50 watersheds, and a number of buildings that we maintain. Road by road, and bridge by bridge, we are rebuilding Broome County - and in 2021 we completed more miles of roadways in one year than ever before. My budget funds a new Deputy Commissioner of Public Works, a position that has not been funded in years, that will allow our DPW to fix even more of our infrastructure than ever before.

This work also requires a strong partnership with our Planning Department. This budget includes funding for a new position in Planning that will help us modernize our infrastructure. By attracting and implementing untapped grant funds, this position will help develop community projects fit for the 21st Century. The more state and federal grants we can leverage means the more we can invest in our community without raising taxes.

Clean streets are important to the people who call Broome County home. We are renewing our commitment to creating a clean and beautiful community by making enhancements to our Department of Solid Waste Management. I'm proposing an increase to tipping fees to help

offset rising costs at our Landfill including plans to increase capacity and required increases in salaries and retirement. Even with this proposed increase, Broome County will STILL have one of the LOWEST tipping fees in New York State.

AND we will also be adding a number of initiatives to help make Broome County the most beautiful community in New York State. Additional municipal cleanup days and electronic recycling collection events will allow residents to get rid of trash, old TVs and computers, and other items piling up in their houses FOR FREE. A new graffiti removal truck will allow us to make buildings and properties throughout the community like new again. We plan to purchase tools and supplies that can be transported around Broome County for residents to use, free of charge, to clean up their neighborhoods. And we will create a new program that will hire young people during their summer break to clean and improve our parks, streets, and other public places.

We also will once again invest DIRECTLY in our neighborhoods by funding another round of Small Community Grants, a program that has put more than half a million dollars into projects in our towns, villages, and small non-profits. These grants have helped small communities throughout Broome County improve parks and libraries, and support emergency responders, youth, and our seniors.

Investments in public safety are also important to a vibrant community. Our new communications network will come online soon, increasing radio coverage and allowing our first responders to respond faster than ever, making every single person in Broome County safer by increasing radio coverage and response time.

With school back in session, our mission to keep students safe continues. In its short time in existence, the School Bus Stop Arm Camera program has been extremely successful, and we are looking to expand it into other counties, making Broome County a leader in traffic safety in New York State. As this program grows, I am proposing to combine it with another public safety initiative, the STOP DWI program. Both directly impact the safety of our streets by targeting unsafe drivers and the two programs naturally go hand-in-hand. Combining these programs will make them more efficient and effective.

For the men and women who have served to protect our Country and way of life, we will continue doing all we can to give back to them in their lives as civilians. After COVID-related setbacks, our Veterans facility is moving forward and we will be soon announcing the new location for this tremendous resource center which will also include a housing component for homeless vets. In 2022, our Veterans Fund will once again support a number of great programs and initiatives. In the past, we've used funding to send former service members to Washington DC on the Twin Tiers Honor Flight and connected disabled veterans with service dogs by providing needed funding to the Stand With Me organization. I am also proposing to fund a new full-time position in our Veterans Services office to help better serve the men and women

who served on our behalf. Maintaining a quality of life that also honors and respects their service is of the utmost importance and we renew that commitment in the upcoming year.

The past year and a half has been difficult for everyone and has highlighted the need for more mental health services for people of all ages. I am proposing a \$100,000 pilot program that will bring mental health education to some of our youngest students, teaching it in a way that is fun and impactful. Through this program, our Mental Health Department will purchase books that promote mental wellness, as well as teach children how to effectively reach out for help from a trusted adult. It's never too early to start talking about mental health and this program will help reach children at an age where it can set the tone for the rest of their lives.

We continue to modernize operations at BC Transit, creating more efficient service. This year, we secured a grant to purchase six all-electric buses from BAE Systems, right here in Endicott. This investment in our fleet will support the great manufacturing work being done in our community, promote the development of clean energy, and save money on the cost of fuel.

Encouraging new businesses to invest in Broome County and bring jobs to our community is an ongoing commitment. 2021 brought announcements of companies like Amazon and FedEx expanding their operations here. Additionally, local businesses have reinvested and committed to growing in Broome County, like National Pipe and Plastics with its new corporate headquarters in Western Broome. We have also made critical investments to reinvent the Oakdale Mall and ensure that this property will once again be an anchor of economic activity in the heart of the County. In 2022, we will build on these investments to further revitalize our economy and work closely with Broome-Tioga Workforce to ensure that workers have the training they need and employers have qualified candidates to choose from.

Housing plays a critical role in the stabilization of our economy and entire community. Residents are moving into the Endicott Square affordable housing project in the newly renovated Henry B. Endicott school, we have invested in another affordable housing project through SEPP on Washington Avenue, and renovations at the Victory Building in Johnson City are underway as part of a new housing development there.

Additionally, our Land Bank continues to remove blight and create new opportunities for homeownership and economic development. Thank you to Jess at the Land Bank who has helped guide this important work. And to further help address housing issues, we are expanding our Housing Casework program within the Department of Social Services that began in 2021 which has been successful in assisting many individuals and families find and sustain stable housing.

To attract and retain young professionals and families, we need to continue enhancing activities here so people know this community is a destination with plenty of things to do. We have some of the most beautiful parks in New York State and we plan to make needed improvements to them: a fully accessible playground is coming to Dorchester Park; upgrades are being made at BAGSAI to attract more softball tournaments that will help fill our restaurants and hotels; and

with the tremendous support of the public who voted every day, we just recently won a grant for a brand-new dog park at Otsiningo North. I am also announcing tonight a multi-million dollar commitment for renovations at Grippen Park, which has been long awaited by the Western Broome community. We will work directly with the people that use this park and that live in this neighborhood to make improvements that the entire community can use and be proud of.

When our previous AHL hockey team decided to leave Binghamton without any notice, we worked quickly to secure a new team here, the Binghamton Black Bears, that will begin playing next month. We will do all we can to support them and invite the community to check them out as well.

We will continue to work with Visit Binghamton, which has done a phenomenal job of marketing this area, to showcase Broome County. We will renew our commitment to tourist attractions like LUMA, which just wrapped up another hugely successful event, as well as Cornell Cooperative Extension, the Ross Park Zoo, Discovery Center, the Broome County Arts Council, and GiGi's Playhouse.

As we make the investments outlined tonight, we do so as we continue to practice responsible spending. We have created the Broome County Purchasing Alliance that combines the buying power of many local governments and school districts to help save money on health insurance costs for retirees. We have also implemented best-value procurement to achieve additional cost-savings and purchase from local companies when we buy equipment, materials, and services for the County. These efforts set the tone for our budget and create a ripple effect for the surrounding economy.

My budget continues our mission of strengthening our finances and cutting taxes while making investments directly in our neighborhoods. New infrastructure projects, clean streets, public safety, housing, economic development, and recreation will all be prioritized to create a better Broome County for residents and visitors.

I would like to thank all my colleagues on the County Legislature for working with me on behalf of our constituents. I look forward to listening to your concerns and answering questions throughout the budget process; I know we will put together a final budget that provides for and protects all our taxpayers.

We have no idea what tomorrow holds, but if the last 18 months has taught us anything, it's that we're all in it together. What we do in government has a more direct impact on the 200,000 people of Broome County than ever before. Let's move forward on their behalf, together.

Thank you and God Bless.