



# Onondaga County Legislature

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## COUNTY EXECUTIVE'S 2023 BUDGET PRESENTATION TO THE ONONDAGA COUNTY LEGISLATURE SEPTEMBER 15, 2022

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** Chairman Rowley, Mr. May, Mr. Burtis, Ms. Gunnip, Ms. Cody, Ms. Abbott, Ms. Kuhn, Mr. Ryan, Dr. Chase, Mr. Olson, Mr. McBride, Mr. Knapp, Mr. Bush, Dr. Kelly, Mr. Garland, Mrs. Ervin

**MEMBERS ABSENT:** Mr. Kinne

Chairman Rowley called the meeting to order at 11:07 a.m. and asked Legislator McBride to lead the Pledge of Allegiance. Chairman Rowley introduced County Executive J. Ryan McMahan.

County Executive J. Ryan McMahan, II:

*Good Morning*

*Chairman Rowley, Leaders May & Ryan, Members of the Legislature and guests, thank you for being here.*

*2022 has been a year of notable and undeniable success and growth as we continue our recovery from the 100 year pandemic. And there is even greater promise on the horizon. The momentum in our community is palpable and for the first time in generations, we are finally becoming the GROWING community that we always knew was worthy of investment and success.*

*In just the last nine months we have:*

- *Cut the local sales tax on gas;*
- *Allocated \$15 million towards broadband to FINALLY end the digital divide;*
- *Approved a plan for our seniors, the backbone of our community, a senior stimulus check for those who have the enhanced STAR property tax exemption;*
- *Engaged in a contract with LOCAL developers for the transformation of the former ShoppingTown Mall into District East;*
- *Amazon opened up one of the largest robotics warehouses in Clay, hiring more than 1,500 of our neighbors – and as a side note I will remind you that Amazon initially committed to 1,000 jobs and on Day 1 not only have they hired over 500 more than originally proposed, but they have been a phenomenal community partner, most notably with their investment in our county-wide STEAM school;*
- *JMA Wireless opened the ONLY 5G facility in America on the South Side of Syracuse;*
- *Secured a \$10 million housing fund to help stimulate more affordable, senior and market rate housing because – and I cannot emphasize this enough – folks we are truly a GROWING community once again;*
- *We secured an additional \$3.7 million for lead remediation ON TOP of the \$8 million that was already available;*
- *White Pine Business Park is now our Country's newest Mega Site; and*

- *We worked to get Local developers site Control of Great Northern Mall the future site of millions of dollars of investment.*

*Folks these are just SOME of the many accomplishments we have achieved, together, over the last year. But I would be remiss if I did not make a point of acknowledging and thanking our workforce. They are the ones who come in everyday to make these initiatives a reality and I thank them for their service. Also important to note is that this budget fully funds our departments at levels that supports current operations and anticipated need for the quality of services our constituents expect and deserve. In fact, as of September 2<sup>nd</sup>, there are currently 2,927 filled positions and another 148 in the process of being filled. For comparison, in January of 2020 – before the pandemic – we had 3,105 filled positions. We will continue to recruit and hire to ensure services are efficiently and effectively delivered.*

*As you can see, we have had already made impressive strategic and historic investments in our people, our economy and our future. And the budget I present to you do today doubles down on those investments.*

*You have heard me say before that I view the budget as a statement of values and priorities. The 2023 budget prioritizes tax relief to our citizens, funding our base operations, public safety and revitalizing our Infrastructure and our neighborhoods. I am very excited about the focus in the 2023 Budget to support our kids with numerous historic investments.*

*But before we get into those proposals, let's discuss where we stand fiscally as a County.*

*I stand before you today presenting a fully balanced 2023 budget. And for the 5<sup>th</sup> year in a row does not use any fund balance.*

*When I became County Executive I told you that my administration would be guided by our PIE platform and that has not changed. While I am excited about the many new initiatives contained within this budget, I am equally excited to announce that I am proposing an 11% cut in the county property tax rate from the current rate of \$4.79 per thousand to \$4.26 per thousand. This equals over a \$100 savings on a house assessed for \$200,000. Onondaga County has an undeniably solid track record of strong fiscal management. That track record has allowed us to cut taxes every year since 2012 and if approved, this tax cut would be amongst the largest in the history of Onondaga County and would also mean that the County Property Tax rate will have been cut nearly 27% since I joined County Government in 2012.*

*And you don't have to take my word regarding our fiscal management. This year, S&P affirmed our AA rating with a stable outlook and Onondaga County received an UPGRADE in our bond rating from Moody's Investors Services.*

*At the end of the day, this money is not yours or mine but rather the people of Onondaga County. They expect us to manage it responsibly and make the investments and policy decisions that focus on both the short AND long term. My administration has proudly done just that – during a 100 year pandemic no less – which allows us to now propose this much deserved property tax relief.*

*It has been well reported the numerous economic headwinds and high inflation affecting our Country. This economic uncertainty means we must be even more deliberative in our budgeting. CFO Steve Morgan and his team are projecting that we end 2022 with a 2% growth in sales tax and we are forecasting a 1% growth in sales tax for 2023.*

*Nevertheless, as I said earlier, this budget continues to make strategic and important investments in our community.*

*I have spoken repeatedly about the emotional and social trauma caused by isolation on our young people during the pandemic. That is why our administration moved quickly to expand our successful school based mental health services to every school in the County using American Rescue Plan funds. I also committed to using local dollars in out years to ensure that this critically important initiative continued and this budget makes good on that promise. I am proposing to continue this investment in our school children with \$5.5 million dedicated to these vital services. As we continue our recovery from the pandemic, the continuation of mental health services in our schools is more important than ever.*

*There has been a lot of discussion in our community, especially as of late, regarding the topic of lead. The issue of lead is real and it is serious. Too many of our neighbors, especially our children, live in inadequate and dangerous housing. It is an issue I have spoken out about since my time on the Syracuse Common Council.*

*While the County may have no control over inspections and codes for the City of Syracuse or our 19 towns and 15 villages, it does not mean that we pass the buck. As a reminder, when I became County Executive, I directed the law department to find a way to hold irresponsible landlords more accountable when they knowingly expose their tenants to lead. And in May of 2019 I announced an Executive Order that allowed our team in Social Services to withhold ALL payments to a landlord in any multi-family building where a lead hazard is left untreated even if the lead issue is confined to a single unit.*

*In 2020, Onondaga County was successful yet again in our lead funding application to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. We were awarded \$5.6 million which was our largest award yet. Even better, this award came less than a year after we partnered with the City of Syracuse on their lead application where they were awarded \$4.1 million. And just a few months ago, the City allocated ANOTHER \$4.5 million towards tackling lead.*

*Now, with the recently approved \$3.7 million in additional county funding for lead, my administration continues to demonstrate our commitment towards solving the lead issue plaguing our community. My 2023 budget furthers that commitment by proposing an additional \$5 million investment towards tackling lead.*

*All of that being said, the allocation of money means absolutely nothing if there isn't the workforce to do the work. And to be blunt, we have a workforce problem when it comes to those certified to do the type of work required when remediating lead. This is something that has become especially problematic post-pandemic. So as opposed to using that as some excuse for why more isn't being done, my administration will work to actually solve the problem.*

*We will work to build local capacity of Lead-certified contractors through supporting a recruitment drive and assisting with fees to become HUD and EPA certified. We will also support training for existing contractors to learn lead-safe work practices and dedicate funding towards upgrading outdated lead inspection equipment.*

*We often talk about removing barriers. And one of those barriers is access to lead screening. To be clear, it's not that there is insufficient testing, but rather recognizing that not every parent can just take off from work to bring their child to be screened. Transportation, work schedules, child care for siblings are all potential barriers that people in our community face. That is why Onondaga County will be investing in a mobile lead testing van that will allow lead staff to drive to a child's home to perform a lead screening test.*

*Our commitment to investing in our youth does not stop there. In this budget you will see a proposal to allocate \$5 million towards a Children's Rising Center. In partnership with the City of Syracuse and the Allyn Family Foundation, the proposed Children's Rising Center will serve as a vital anchor in the transformation of the 15<sup>th</sup> Ward. This best-in-class facility will include an early learning center, a parent/child play center, a YMCA and will also house the offices of the Early Childhood Alliance.*

*Even more important, this center will serve as a constant “safe space” for children and families while offering programs and experiences that will promote positive youth development.*

*I am also proposing \$2 million in Capital funds in partnership with NFL Star Latavius Murray to build the John Diaz Community Center in Nedrow, located in the town of Onondaga. This investment will assist in the goal of creating a hub that will deliver programming and resources for our youth in this underinvested neighborhood in our County.*

*Another program that we have proudly invested in, is the Early Childhood Alliance. The ECA is responsible for administering critical programs such as Talking is Teaching, Help Me Grow, Parent Child Plus and Child Care Solutions. The work they do is as important as ever and that is why I’m proposing increasing our investment in the ECA to \$2.3 million.*

*When it comes to investing in our people that also means investing in the infrastructure that provides them the services they rely on such as our Senior Centers.*

*Our senior citizens not only serve as the backbone of our community but they provided the foundation for which we have built much of our success. While there are numerous senior centers throughout our community, many are in need of capital improvements. The programs and resources offered by these centers are absolutely vital in our strategy of helping senior’s age-in-place. That is why I am proposing a \$1 million fund to be awarded through a competitive process overseen by our team in Adult & Long Term Care lead by Commissioner JoAnne Spoto Decker and Deputy Commissioner Maria Mahar.*

*Investing in our public safety infrastructure is one of many core responsibilities of county government. Over a decade ago, Onondaga County purchased radios for many of our police, fire and EMS agencies. It goes without saying that technology has progressed significantly since that time and there is now a need for new, updated radios. I am proposing we allocate \$750,000 towards this effort which will be especially helpful for our smaller public safety agencies.*

*This budget also provides funding for more deputy sheriffs on our streets and more school resource officers working in our schools.*

*And when it comes to our most basic infrastructure, we continue our tradition of making good roads and bridges BETTER. While we do not own every road in this community, the commitment to investing in the roads and bridges we do own is reflected in this budget. This budget calls for \$10 million in cash be allocated towards our DOT Capital Improvement Plan. Not only does this represent a significant investment, but by using cash we are making our dollars go further by avoiding any costs associated with borrowing – an especially important factor given the current state of the market. In fact, it is estimated we will save \$4.5 million in interest by using cash.*

*We all know that the impending I-81 project will have ramifications throughout our County and region. As a result, I am proposing the allocation of \$500,000 towards examining the economic and land use impact of the I-81 viaduct removal on communities OUTSIDE of the City of Syracuse. Similar to the study initiated by the City of Syracuse, this funding will be dedicated to examining the impacts of the viaduct removal on the broader community and also propose recommendations and strategies to mitigate those impacts while also potentially creating new opportunities for those impacted communities.*

*One of the most effective economic development initiatives that my administration has administered is our Main Street Grants program. To date, we have invested nearly \$10 million into our Main Street Program and that investment leveraged ANOTHER \$10 million plus from the private sector. Nearly all corners of our County have seen investments in their Main Streets and the results have been nothing less than transformative. This budget calls for the continuation of that program with an additional \$5 million towards this successful initiative. We will*

*make specific investments in the South Salina Street Corridor and the Village of Manlius as well as have a competitive process for our Towns and Villages to apply for. Whether it be improving business facades, acquiring a property that is an eyesore, demolition of an unproductive building or performing streetscape improvements, the success of this program is undeniable but more important is the momentum it has created in communities across our county.*

*This budget cuts taxes, strengthens our County departments, invests in Public Safety as well as investing in Neighborhoods, our seniors and our Kids. This budget builds on the success we have seen in recent years and leaves us positioned for Economic opportunity this community has never seen before.*

*My administration looks forward to working with you in the weeks to come as you deliberate our Proposed Budget.*

*God Bless you all.*

Chairman Rowley thanked the County Executive for getting the budget process started, and he thanked all the legislators for being present. This is a good kick off to the next few weeks and Chairman Rowley hopes everyone is ready to dig in and work on this.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:26 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,



JAMIE McNAMARA, Clerk  
Onondaga County Legislature