



Onondaga County Legislature

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COUNTY EXECUTIVE'S 2024 BUDGET PRESENTATION TO THE ONONDAGA COUNTY LEGISLATURE SEPTEMBER 15, 2023

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

Chairman Rowley called the meeting to order at 11:04 a.m. and asked Legislator Burtis to lead the Pledge of Allegiance. Chairman Rowley introduced County Executive J. Ryan McMahon.

County Executive J. Ryan McMahon, II:
(PowerPoint Presentation on file with the Clerk)

Good Morning

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

Over the last nine months, our community has continued to build on the momentum, progress and success we experienced in 2022. My administration remains laser focused on delivering on our PIE Agenda – focusing in on poverty, infrastructure and economic development.

And for the first time in likely a generation, your County government has been consistently making comprehensive and holistic investments to address systemic issues. The days of choosing whether to dedicate funds to one area at the expense of another are long in the rearview mirror. We can and will continue to take an “All of the Above” strategy. A strategy that makes strategic investments to grow revenue, invest in our people, our infrastructure, plan for our future, manage our expenses and make our community more affordable. This budget I present to you today does all of this.

But first let's recap just some of the success we have had as a community this past year:

- *With the approval of the legislature earlier this year, our seniors and first responders will soon be eligible for even greater relief on their property taxes;*
- *Previously, County government really did not play much of a role when it came to housing. But the need for quality housing has never been greater and that need will only continue to grow. That is why my administration created the Onondaga County Housing Initiative Program or OCHIP. Earlier this year we announced the first round of recipients and I look forward to announcing the recipients of the next round in the coming weeks;*
- *We also continued to deliver on our popular and transformative investments in our Main Street Program;*
- *Our local senior centers across the County were all awarded Capital Improvement grants so they can continue to be a safe and reliable space for our seniors;*
- *This year we paved another 150 miles of County roads and rehabbed 4 bridges, continuing our track record of making the infrastructure we own even better;*
- *In addition to the historic funding levels we've dedicated to tackling lead, I had the honor of being joined by Health Commissioner Dr. Anderson, the lead team and several community leaders to unveil the new Mobile Lead Testing Van. Transportation, work and even finding childcare for other siblings were real barriers that prevented folks in our community from being able to access testing. With the Mobile Lead Van now available, we have removed another barrier;*

- *We made good on our promise to purchase updated radios for many of our police, fire and EMS agencies;*
- *Hundreds of people turned out as we opened up the largest Pickleball Court Complex in Upstate New York, making good on our commitment to keeping our parks updated, modern and full of the amenities that our community is asking for;*
- *And finally, earlier this year we unveiled the first update to our Countywide Comprehensive Plan in over 25 years. This Plan now serves as the roadmap as we prepare for the unprecedented growth and opportunity that is coming to Onondaga County. It highlights our blueways and greenways, encourages strengthening our Centers, our City, villages and hamlets, acknowledges the importance of our agriculture community, recognizes the need for affordable and diverse housing and also emphasizes the need to enhance and embrace the different ways people travel in our community;*

Folks this just a small sample of the results driven administration that we promised the taxpayers of Onondaga County. Of course none of it would be possible without the team we have in County government and I want to thank all of our employees who work to execute on these goals and make Onondaga County better each and every day. Thank you.

As I mentioned previously, the days of choosing “either or” in our budgets are gone. You have heard me say before that I view the budget as a statement of values and priorities. My 2024 budget prioritizes tax relief to our citizens, revitalizing our infrastructure and our neighborhoods, continuing our aggressive fight against lead, supporting our Veterans and investing in daycare to name just a few. I am excited to share with you today just some of the new proposals contained within my Executive Budget.

But let's first talk numbers.

I stand before you today presenting a fully balanced 2024 budget. And for the 6th year in a row, it does not use any fund balance.

The strong and prudent fiscal track record of Onondaga County is simply undeniable. And this track record is what has allowed us to ultimately make substantial cuts in the property tax rate. Last year we proposed, and with most legislators supporting, a cut in the tax rate from \$4.79 per thousand to \$4.26 per thousand. It equaled an 11% tax cut on the county property tax rate.

This year, I am proposing that we further cut the county property tax rate. We have successfully seen economic growth and working families greatest assets – their homes – are now worth thousands of dollars more today than they were in 2019. Economic growth provides governments flexibility to set your tax rate and tax levy. Even if we kept the tax rate flat at \$4.26 per thousand, we would still pick up 17 million dollars in assessment growth to our tax levy.

We don't lead from behind in Onondaga County. And we know our residents need relief which is why my 2024 Executive Budget calls for reducing the property tax rate from \$4.26 per thousand to \$3.62 per thousand. A 15% cut to the property tax rate. This gives back all assessment growth and cuts our property tax levy by 9 million dollars. We are giving back 26 million dollars to the taxpayers of this County. For a house assessed at \$200,000, this would mean a \$128 savings on their county property taxes.

To put this into further context, we would have the lowest County rate among major upstate counties at \$3.62 per thousand. Compare that to Erie County at \$3.74 or Monroe County at \$8.53 per thousand.

If approved, we will have cut the property tax rate nearly 35% since I joined county government. While the County is not able to control every aspect of what drives your tax bill, one thing is undeniable: My administration has worked diligently every year to make county government more lean, efficient and affordable while still providing the services the people of this community expect.

It has been well reported the numerous economic headwinds and high inflation affecting our Country. This economic uncertainty means we must be even more conservative in our budgeting. CFO Steve Morgan and his team are projecting that we will end 2023 with a 2% growth in sales tax and we are forecasting a 1% growth in sales tax for 2024. Nevertheless, this budget continues to make strategic and important investments in our community.

Lead is a consistent and pervasive problem in our community. I have spoken out about this going back to my time on the Syracuse Common Council. As County Executive, we have dedicated historic levels of financial resources towards tacking lead. 8.7 million dollars over just the last year. We must continue to build on the tireless work being done by our Health Department team. To that end, I am proposing allocating another 2.5 million dollars to ensure our multifaceted approach to this issue continues.

We must continue our Lead It Go Pilot Project which provides enrichment services for children with an elevated blood lead level who do not immediately qualify for other services. This program uses a preventive approach, by identifying and providing services to children impacted by lead before a developmental delay is detected.

These funds will also be dedicated to further addressing lead hazards in the community. The window and door replacement program started this year by our teams in the Health Department and Community Development focusses in on families and property owners who have been inspected by our Health Department and found to have lead hazards, but don't qualify for other funding opportunities.

This proposed funding will also be used to support families who need temporary housing while lead hazard reduction work is occurring in their home. It will also assist families who are required by health or housing inspectors to permanently move due to uncorrected lead hazards in the home, by assisting with first month's rent and security deposit costs.

While County government does not run a codes office or do inspections, when our partners in government inform us of properties with lead hazards, we will be ready to act right away with providing the necessary assistance to make these homes safe. We have to continue our multifaceted plan to aggressively attack this issue and protect our children.

The emotional and social trauma that our kids have experienced, and frankly still continue to grapple with, due to the COVID-19 pandemic is well documented. The pandemic exposed and heightened the mental health problem facing many of our children. In 2022 my administration got to work quickly and dedicated millions of dollars of American Rescue Plan funds to expand our successful school based mental health services into every school district in Onondaga County. We also promised that we would use local dollars in following years to ensure these critically important services would continue. Last year we made good on that promise with the support of the Legislature. And I'm happy to share that you will see in my 2024 budget a continuation of that promise with another \$5.5 million dedicated to our school based mental health initiative. When you look at the totality of our investments into the social and emotional wellness of our school children, it equals over 20 million dollars ANNUALLY. Along with our community partners, we will continue to evaluate and monitor these programs for ongoing targeted investment. Our kids need support and we will make sure that they continue to get it.

Besides our continued commitment to the well-being of our school children, the after effects of the pandemic are historic among our adult population, as well. Challenges involving mental health and substance use disorder are constant reminders that we have much to do. In this budget proposal, over 70 million dollars is dedicated to these issues. We must focus on continued coordination and getting the right services to the right person at the right time. To that end, we are developing a Single Point of Access for those ready to start their recovery from addiction which will allow us to systemically coordinate services. We will also be creating Peer Specialist positions in the Health Department to be on the ground meeting people where they are.

My administration has always believed that investing in our children and their success must start from the moment they are born and my 2024 budget provides for continued investment in the youngest members of our community.

Our focus on ensuring that our children are kindergarten ready has not wavered. Working with the community, pediatricians and our not-for-profit partners through the Early Childhood Alliance, it is in ALL of our best interests that our children start early in having the tools they need to succeed. Over the course of the last four years, we have invested over 10 million dollars in this initiative. This includes programs such as Dolly Parton's Imagination Library, Help Me Grow, Talking is Teaching and the Quality Stars Daycare initiative. Continued coordination of these programs through the ECA is a key component in the success of our children.

With our historic economic success we need to expand and grow the capacity of quality and affordable daycare. And we have already made important progress in that effort.

Funded by Onondaga County, PEACE, Inc. and Childcare solutions formed a partnership and launched The Early Childhood Career Pathways Program. This program gives people in our community the opportunity to receive education,

employment and funds to open their own Family Daycare business within the field of Early Childhood. To date, there have been 34 home family daycares opened with another 18 in process, creating a minimum of 280 daycare slots, but potentially as many as 560. I want to congratulate the teams at PEACE and Childcare Solutions for this incredible success.

Today I am excited to share with you that my 2024 budget continues to build on our efforts in the daycare space by investing 750,000 dollars into our daycare centers. Using a competitive process, we will award grants of up to 50,000 dollars to help daycare centers make the often expensive, but required capital improvements needed to stay compliant with rapidly changing rules and regulations.

The words “thank you” are never enough when discussing our Veteran community. They have served and sacrificed to allow all us to enjoy the rights and freedoms we have today. My administration has worked to acknowledge and honor their sacrifice. From eliminating the burial fee to the newly expanded and renovated chapel or the stunning new monument recognizing each branch of the military at the Veterans Cemetery, we will always stand proudly with our Veterans. And it's no secret that Veterans Director Annie Mancilla, her Deputy Cindy Meili and their entire team are the fiercest advocates for our Veteran's that you could ask for. They are amongst the busiest as well. Year over year, they have processed 30% more claims and they are about to get even busier.

The passage of The PACT Act, (otherwise known as the Burn Pit legislation), in August 2022 has led to a significant increase in veterans reaching out for help and assistance with their claims. This law expanded healthcare and benefit eligibility for veterans from all eras. We need to do all we can to support our veterans once they return home and my administration is committed to doing just that. That is why in my 2024 budget you will see a request for additional staff to support our expanded services. No Veteran should have to wait or struggle to receive the help and support they need. If my proposed budget is approved by this Legislature, we will ensure that never happens in Onondaga County.

This budget also prioritizes public safety and puts more deputies on the streets. It maintains strategic probation community details and solidifies our operations at 911.

We believe that the best pathway out of poverty is a job and a career. Providing support on the human side to our neighbors is important, but that is only one piece of the puzzle. We must also invest in workforce development and readiness. Everyone deserves a safe home and reliable daycare, but they also deserve a job. The economic success we've recently enjoyed has been well documented. Amazon, JMA and Lotte to name a few. But there is much more coming to Onondaga County including the largest investment in the history of our country with Micron, as well as the tens of thousands of spin-off jobs. And we must be ready. That is why my 2024 budget calls for 1.5 million to be dedicated towards workforce development and training.

It cannot be overstated the value in providing opportunities for Minority and Women-Owned Businesses, Disadvantaged Businesses and Small Businesses. Increasing their capacity and access to opportunities for these businesses, along with workforce development training, could satisfy the labor demands associated with the aforementioned. We can decrease unemployment and improve the sustainability of families in Onondaga County one family at a time. We cannot afford to miss this opportunity that is before us. That is why I am proposing the creation of a “One Stop Shop” within our Office of Diversity and Inclusion. The One Stop Shop will provide important services such as pre-qualification and assessment, construction management training, as well as general business, organization and professional skills development to name just a few. I have said it before and I'll say it again, we must make sure that every person in our county has the ability to take advantage of the unprecedented growth and opportunity that is taking place and I believe the creation of a One Stop Shop is an important part of making that a reality.

Earlier I mentioned the success of our OCHIP program when it comes to incentivizing new housing. But that is just one part of the solution when it comes to addressing the housing needs in our community. We must also acknowledge the need to provide tools and resources to invest in our existing housing stock. I recognized the need to invest in this space early on as Chairman of the Legislature. Working with Home Headquarters, we launched our Neighborhood Initiative program which provides financial assistance in the form of a low interest 1% loan and grant to eligible homeowners. These funds can be used for things such as electrical and plumbing upgrades, a new roof or even new windows and siding. Ensuring that this program is able to continue its success is more important than ever, which is why I am proposing allocating an additional 2 million dollars in my budget for this initiative. My administration remains steadfast in our commitment to investing in both our current housing stock, as well as the creation of new, diverse and affordable housing options throughout Onondaga County.

As a growing community, deliberate and thoughtful planning is an absolute must. And I'm both grateful and proud of the bottoms up approach that our Planning Team undertook in putting together our updated comprehensive plan. They spoke with mayors, supervisors, community groups and more in order to make sure it best reflected what we want the future of Onondaga County to look like. But Onondaga County can't be the only one with a plan. Our towns and villages need them as well. That is why I am proposing allocating an additional one million dollars to assist our partners in local government in updating their comprehensive plans.

Successful growing communities are not scared to invest in themselves. They recognize their assets and are unafraid to make them even better. Last year, I had proposed a bold plan to turn Hopkins Road Park into a state of the art multi-sports complex. Not only would this have helped attract thousands of visitors to our community – spending money in our restaurants, hotels and shops – but it was also part of a comprehensive strategy to address the very real concerns about the impact of the 81 project in our northern suburbs. After receiving additional feedback from this body, it was clear that the appetite was not there for that type of investment. Nevertheless, I firmly believe that Hopkins Road Park is an underutilized asset that is worthy of investment. As it stands currently, it consists of 5 softball fields and one baseball field. Today, I am proposing an all-in investment of 6 million dollars to upgrade the existing softball and baseball fields. This would also include creating a brand new multi-purpose super field that can accommodate all levels of Baseball, Softball, two all-purpose fields as well as many new field amenities.

Sports tourism nationally is thriving. Hopkins Road Park offers our community the perfect opportunity to enhance one of popular county parks and capture outside spending at the same time. Let's not let this opportunity pass us by.

Finally, it is no secret that Onondaga Lake Park is the crown jewel of our park system. Earlier this week I had the pleasure of joining our friends at National Grid and our Parks team as they uncovered the old Jesuit steps that led to a beach on the eastern shore. The steps had been hidden from the community for decades. But they serve as a perfect reminder that Onondaga Lake is now a true community asset and worthy of celebration and investment.

Earlier this year at my State of the County, I proposed enhancing and expanding the Marina at Onondaga Lake Park. This transformative project includes adding power, fixing the retaining wall and dredging the lake to return the marina to its original depths to name just a few components. While the economic boost this will provide to the Village of Liverpool is clear, it also fulfills the real demand we have seen from the public for more access to the lake.

This budget cuts the tax rate 15% to an historic low, strengthens our County departments and invests in our kids their Mental Health. It invests in Neighborhoods, our seniors, our veterans and housing. This Budget continues to be aspirational for the future and reflects our unwavering belief in the potential of our community. This budget builds on the success we have seen and positions us to realize growth and promise like our community has never seen before.

We look forward to working with you in the weeks to come.

God Bless you all.

Chairman Rowley thanked County Executive McMahon, and stated that the Ways and Means Committee formally starts the review process next Tuesday, September 19th at 9:00 a.m.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:33 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,



JAMIE McNAMARA, Clerk
Onondaga County Legislature