

2021 BUDGET MESSAGE FROM DANIEL P. McCOY

When I was elected in 2012 our County faced significant financial challenges and through prudent fiscal management we were able to right the ship and build our reserves to all-time highs. We did this while also providing needed services and maintaining one of the lower effective property tax rates in New York State. Now, we are facing an even greater challenge to our economy. No corner of our globe has been left untouched by the COVID-19 pandemic and many economists are expecting the long term fiscal impact of this outbreak to be far greater than that of the Great Recession. This is a situation which no one would have been able to predict, but due to our preparation we are in a position to come through this while still providing the services our constituents rely upon. The recovery will take years but because of our foresight, we are in a far better position than many other municipalities to weather this storm.

In delivering this balanced budget, hard decisions had to be made. We instituted an innovative Early Separation Payout (ESP) program that was open to all full time County employees. From that solicitation over 100 employees applied to be considered for the program and over 70 were determined to be eligible and took the payout. This program is estimated to save over \$5 million in 2021 alone and, combined with the hiring freeze instituted by Executive Order earlier this year, allowed us to downsize the workforce in a voluntary manner without needing to institute a layoff.

I would like to thank our many Department heads as well as those elected officials who chose to work with us to reduce appropriations from their individual budgets. While it may appear daunting to some, we will emerge from this as a leaner, more efficient organization that is better suited for the 21st century and our “new normal.”

Last year, with the support of Camoin Associates, our economic development partner, we published our strategic economic development plan, a roadmap for economic development in Albany County. We are making progress implementing a key recommendation of the report: establishing and funding a dedicated economic development Local Development Corporation (LDC) for the County. The new LDC will promote and coordinate economic development in the County in order to retain existing businesses, attract new investment, and support the economic recovery following COVID-19. We look forward to continued partnership with the Legislature on this important initiative.

Before the economy began to falter, the Department of Management and Budget had been working with our new County Comptroller to maximize the returns realized by our investment team, headed by the Commissioner of Management and Budget. As the economy begins to rebound, these ideas and partnerships will help the County’s fiscal situation in a variety of ways.

For the fifth consecutive year the State Comptroller has placed Albany County in a category of “No Designation of Fiscal Stress” based on our impressive record of fiscal management and growth. We take pride in the fact that our score has improved each year the State Comptroller has evaluated this data.

Additionally, this budget continues support to the Albany County Land Bank, with a grant of \$250,000. This brings total support for the Land Bank to \$3 million in direct support and forgiven revenue due back to the County. The economic impact that our communities will be facing over the next few years will be harsh and this is another weapon in our arsenal to combat blight and decay in our community.

2021 is the third year of Statewide Implementation of the Hurrell-Harring indigent legal defense reform that I championed with our partners in the State Legislature. Statewide Implementation directly funds 10 new positions and additional expenses with an additional \$1.4 million in funding for 2021. The program is fully reimbursed by New York State and will improve indigent legal defense by increasing access to quality defense and reducing caseloads for the County’s defense attorneys.

I would like to thank legislative leadership for working with my administration in our effort to keep Albany County moving forward with our mutual goal of improving the quality of life for our residents while maintaining fiscal prudence. I look forward to reviewing the budget together over the coming weeks and steering the County toward a better economic future.