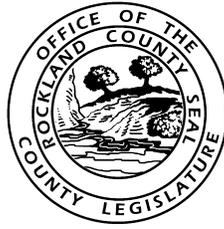


Press



Release

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For Immediate Release

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LEGISLATURE'S BUDGET CUTS PROPERTY TAXES

FIRST PROPERTY TAX CUT IN 11 YEARS

New City, NY (Dec. 6, 2016) – The Rockland County Legislature voted 11-6 Tuesday to adopt an amended 2017 County Budget that cuts property taxes for the first time since 2007, restores funding for public benefit organizations and sets aside \$4 million for deficit reduction, among other actions.

The \$705 million spending plan cuts property taxes by 0.43 percent next year, a modest decrease that marks an important milestone in the county's return to good fiscal health.

The amended budget also restores about \$1.3 million for 31 nonprofit Public Benefit Organizations, everything from Child Care Resources, Keep Rockland Beautiful and the Legal Aid Society to Cornell Cooperative Extension, the NAACP and the Historical Society of Rockland County.

In addition, the plan commits to selling the Sain building, with an estimated revenue of at least \$4.5 million, and designates that the proceeds be used for deficit reduction. The County Executive's 2016 budget proposal called for the proceeds to be used in a one-shot effort for operational expenses, which ultimately proved to be unnecessary.

By designating the \$4 million for deficit reduction, the Legislature also responded to the state Comptroller's Office, which recommended addressing the lack of any such funding in the County Executive's 2017 budget proposal. County law also requires that \$4 million be set aside.

"This budget is extraordinary and allows us to do so much for taxpayers, both by cutting property taxes and by restoring vital services," Legislature Chairman Alden H. Wolfe said. "It is the result of hard work, not only this year, but since the financial crisis of nearly a decade ago.

"This budget is an acknowledgement that difficult choices were made – very tough choices," Wolfe said. "But we committed to getting through it and now we can see we have moved forward. Challenges remain, and will always remain, but we have made changes that have well-prepared us to meet them."

A detailed review of the proposed budget, with more than a dozen individual sessions, was overseen by Legislator Michael Grant, chairman of the Budget & Finance Committee.

“The budget serves as the blueprint for how county operations will proceed throughout the year,” Grant said. “It requires a detailed, fine-tooth comb review to ensure that all revenues and expenses are balanced and that the services our residents have come to rely on are available.

“In many ways, the budget is an intricate balancing act, where we must weigh costs and services with the needs of both taxpayers and residents,” Grant said. “I believe we have conducted a thorough job and produced a budget that meets the concerns of all.”

While the county Charter requires the County Executive to submit a proposed budget each year, the tasks of appropriating funding and setting policy are the responsibility of the Legislature.

The amended budget also restores funding for two nurse’s aide jobs at the county’s HIV/AIDS Clinic and for four posts in the Health Department’s Petroleum Bulk Storage Program. The County Executive’s proposal sought to turn over the work to the state.

Legislators also earmarked \$750,000 to meet contractual obligations resulting from new contracts with the County Sheriff’s Deputies’ union – a deal cut by the County Executive, who did not include funding for the salary increases it includes.

The County Executive, who is up for re-election in 2017, also included a \$1,000 per week increase in his postage allocation for mailings coming out of his office. Legislators reduced the allocation to \$3,400, the same amount in the 2016 budget.

Legislators also conservatively increased the amount of sales tax revenue for 2017 by \$1.5 million, to a total of \$195.5 million, \$1 million less than the amount that the Commissioner of Finance and outside auditors estimated for 2016.

The amended budget also cut a combination of 26 new and vacant positions and restored 13 jobs, including 9 layoffs, to cut expenses by about \$920,000.

SEE NEXT PAGE FOR BUDGET SUMMARY AND WHAT’S NEXT

Here is a summary of the adopted budget:

- Reduces property taxes by 0.43 percent
- Does NOT bust the tax cap
- Restores funding to nonprofit Public Benefit Agencies (about \$1.3 million)
- Restores two nurses' aide jobs at the HIV/AIDS Clinic and four jobs in the Health Department's Petroleum Bulk Storage Inspector Unit.
- Sets aside funding to cover contractual obligations not included in County Executive's proposal (about \$724,000), as recommended by the state Comptroller
- Sets aside funding for deficit reduction not included in County Executive's proposal (\$4 million, in accordance with County law and as recommended by the Comptroller)
- Commits to sale of Sain building not included in County Executive's proposal (estimated revenue is \$4.5 million)
- Commits proceeds from Sain sale to deficit reduction, NOT operations as was budgeted by the County Executive in 2016
- Conservatively increases estimated sales tax revenues by \$1.5 million to \$195.5 million, \$1 million less than the amount the Commissioner of Finance and outside auditors estimated for 2016
- Eliminates \$1,000 per week increase in funding for postage as called for by the County Executive (cuts \$50,000; leaves \$3,400, same as in 2016)
- Eliminates a combination of 26 new and vacant positions and restores 13 jobs, including 9 layoffs (\$920,188)
- Total budget is about \$705 million

What's next?

- The adopted budget is submitted to the County Executive
- He has five business days to review and issue any line-item vetoes
- Legislature needs 12 votes to override each line-item veto
- Final budget must be completed by Dec. 20
- Legislature meets at 7 p.m. Dec. 19 to consider any overrides

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