THE CHAIRMAN'S CORNER

BY

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2026 BUDGET

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At the upcoming Columbia County Board of Supervisors regular monthly meeting on Wednesday, December 10, the board will vote on making final what is currently the 2026 tentative county budget.

With a budget that totals $186 million, we would enter 2026 with a county budget that includes a tax rate decrease of 4.9 percent based on a 1.87 percent tax levy increase, which brings the fiscal plan within the New York State tax cap. The county again moves forward with no cut in services, and no county work force reduction is planned at this time. The effective tax rate is down 26.3% since my first budget as chairman in 2017.

Among what's new in the 2026 budget:

- After a $1M increase in the NYS Retirement System contribution for the 2025 budget, the county's contribution goes to $1.2M in 2026, unexpected on the heels of 2025's large increase.

- "More money is being added to building maintenance, including utilities, which are going up just like everyone else's," said county Controller Jim Breig.

- After using ARPA money to initiate a pilot program run by the county Mental Health Center, the county will fund the Multidisciplinary Team program. The intention is to do such things as help keep people out of jail and emergency rooms, and hold down ambulance calls. "It's worked out very well over the past year," said Controller Breig.

- To become ADA-compliant, the county website requires an upgrade. $90,000 has been dedicated for that.

- Other increases are included for the CEDC and the Land Bank program, Columbia County Soil & Water, libraries, and the Council on the Arts.

Additionally, sales tax revenue line has been increased by $2M, which in turn will ultimately provide more funding to the 18 towns in Columbia County.

As I've stated in the past, in keeping with the philosophy I've held in my time as chairman and budget officer, once again this budget was designed to maintain the county's strong fund balance, to ensure that the revenue flow into the county remains healthy, to continue the maintenance of infrastructure, and to provide services to residents dealing with a changing economy and, at times, personal difficulties.

The county's Moody's Investor Service rating remains at Aa3, a rating the county has maintained since 2013. This continuing stable financial position has been accomplished by adhering to balanced budgeting, the implementation of cost controls, and other measures implemented by county department heads together with the support of the Board of Supervisors.

I would like to express particular thanks to Treasurer PJ Keeler and Controller Jim Breig for their day-to-day assistance and in preparing this budget, as well as Supervisor/Deputy Chairman Rob Lagonia, Supervisor/Deputy Chairman and Finance Chairman James Guzzi, Supervisors Tistrya Houghtling, Ron Knott, Michael Chameides and Rick Scalera, and county Human Resources Director Michaele Williams-Riordon for their assistance during the budget process.