



“NEWS & VIEWS”

YOUR SUMMER NEWSLETTER FROM

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It is my pleasure to distribute the third edition of my county newsletter to you. Throughout my term in office I intend to use this newsletter to keep in touch and share my perspective on what's happening in our county. I believe that an important aspect of public service is responding to constituent concerns and providing timely and relevant information. If you have any questions, comments, or concerns, please feel free to contact me.

2009 County Budget

The economic crisis facing the country has hit home here in Albany County. The 2009 county budget contained a property tax levy of \$67.9 million, representing a 4.2% tax increase from 2008. The increase follows three years of either reducing or holding the line on **county** property taxes. For a taxpayer with a home valued at \$150,000, the 4.2% represents an increase ranging from \$13-\$26 a year.

In spite of \$12.1 million in Federal stimulus funds allocated to the County, Albany will still be left with a budget shortfall at the end of the year. In an effort to address this crisis now, the county legislature enacted a deficit reduction plan last month, cutting an additional \$6 million from this year's budget.

Significant revenue losses facing the county have occurred in the following areas:

- \$12 million (est.) in lower sales tax revenue;
- \$7.8 million cut in state aid for the County Nursing Home and Correctional Facility.
- Interest earnings are estimated to be down \$5 million.

As we continue to tackle this unprecedented budget crisis, I will continue looking for ways to trim costs while still providing county services to those who need them most.

Long Term Care In Albany County

Apart from the budget, one of the most pressing issues facing Albany County is the future of long term care for our seniors and those in need. Two years ago the State Berger Commission required the closure of Ann Lee, one of Albany's two county nursing homes. Since then, the County Executive and Legislature have made it a top priority to develop a comprehensive and expansive long term care plan that best utilizes the County's resources to serve the elderly and individuals with disabilities. To date, the county has taken the following steps:

- Increased funding for the Expanded In-Home Services for the Elderly Program ("EISEP") so that there is currently no waiting list;
- Supporting adult day health care for approximately 280 patients and;
- Increased our financial commitment to home delivered meals programs throughout the county.

Moving forward, one of the options under consideration is whether Albany County should construct and operate a new nursing home. Building a new facility would undoubtedly be the largest county financed capital project since construction of the Times Union Center. Another option is the establishment of a comprehensive home health care PACE Program as an alternative to nursing home care. This

program would be a supplement to many of the county programs already offered.

As we evaluate the cost feasibility of such a project, be assured that I will also continue to advocate for continued expansion of in-home services, so that those who wish to remain in their homes can do so. Given the fluidity of the issue I will most certainly continue to keep you posted on how the debate and policy considerations shape up.

Calorie Content Posting Local Law

I am pleased to report that legislation I introduced requiring chain food service establishments in Albany County to list the calorie content values of menu items directly on menus and menu boards has passed. Simply put, the new law requires calorie information to be clearly displayed at the point of decision, allowing consumers in Albany County to make informed choices prior to ordering at fast food restaurants. Similar laws have been enacted in NYC, Westchester, and Long Island.

Text Messaging While Driving Banned

This past April the legislature adopted a local law I introduced and sponsored, effectively banning text messaging and e-mailing while driving. According to the American Automobile Association, any activity that takes a driver's attention off the road for more than two seconds doubles the risk of an accident. Adopted in several other counties throughout the State, the bill provides law enforcement with yet another tool to deter people from using their cell phones while driving.

Local Food Purchasing Policy

Earlier this year the county legislature adopted a food purchasing policy for all county departments. The resolution requires the county to buy at least 10% of its food purchases from local markets and farms. Local food is more environmentally friendly, traveling an average of less than 40 miles from origin to your plate, compared with an average of 1,500 miles for supermarket produce. Not only will this policy promote our local agricultural economy, but it will also reduce air pollution and fuel consumption by delivery trucks.

Rail Trail & Environmental Initiatives

Albany has taken significant steps to becoming one of the greenest counties in the State. Energy efficiency improvements at the sewer district have resulted in a reduction of carbon emissions equivalent to taking nearly 1,100 cars off the road. In 2008 alone these improvements saved the county over \$1.6 million. Additionally, investment in energy efficiency upgrades has enabled the county to cut our electricity usage nearly in half. Implementation of the county recycling program has also resulted in diverting nearly 70 tons of waste away from the landfill.

Work on the county's "rail trail" is also progressing. In March, the county executed the contract for sale of the land from Canadian Pacific. A 300 day due diligence period is now underway for the county to inspect and evaluate the 8 bridges along the trail. Once completed, the rail trail will link municipalities along a safe and accessible pedestrian and bicycle route. The trail will also allow the County to preserve open space in the community, link neighborhoods and promote physical fitness.

I've also been working on a local law for Albany County to outlaw extended idling of motor vehicles. The bill is currently in committee. I am hopeful to have the bill discharged and considered for a vote sometime this fall. If adopted, Albany County would join some 35 other jurisdictions throughout the state that have restricted extended motor vehicle idling.

Funding Secured for Local Projects

Every year the legislature awards minor grants to organizations throughout the county based upon proposals submitted by various community organizations. Do to the ongoing budget crisis we are facing these grants were cut out of this year's enacted budget. I was, however, successful in securing several awards for programs here in the 6th district from the funding in the 2007 budget. As of this writing, I am pleased to report that county funding has been secured for:

- ✓ \$2,000 for the Grand Street Community Arts.
- ✓ \$2,500 for the FOCUS Churches Computers for Kids Summer Program
- ✓ \$1,500 for the Lark St. Bid to assist in First Friday events
- ✓ \$1,500 for the Emmanuel Baptist Church Roof Replacement Project on Chestnut Street