

Dec 8, 2010



Westchester Democrats add money for jobs, clinics to budget

Democrats on the Westchester County Board of Legislators added millions back into the **budget**, providing money for county jobs, day care, mental- health clinics, Section 8 housing and other nonprofits targeted for cuts. And they're still promising a tax-levy decrease.

"None of these are surprises," said board Chairman Ken Jenkins, D-Yonkers. "We've added back stuff that we've supported in the past. "The bottom line is we're going to have a negative 1 (percent) tax impact."

After weeks of budget meetings, public hearings and active lobbying, lawmakers this week added roughly \$43 million in expenses and \$35 million in revenues to County Executive Rob Astorino's \$1.78 billion proposal. While Astorino called for 226 layoffs, the lawmakers' plan had 75 after they restored positions and programs.

Republicans chided Democrats' additions as "reckless" and a "total disregard for the taxpayers." "We absolutely must keep our pledge to reduce the size and cost of county government in the face of an overbearing tax burden on residents and businesses," said Legislator Gordon A. Burrows, R- Yonkers. Because the five Republicans on the board generally agree with the county executive's goal of shrinking the size of government, they had no additions whatsoever. But they did take issue with Democrats' using about \$10 million from savings, in what they called an "irresponsible raid of the fund balance" for what they dubbed a spending spree. In announcing a series of programs to remain on a day referred to as "adds day," Democrats gave their first indication of what would be in the final product, which is likely to be approved by next week.

Much of it was jobs — many in Planning, Labs and Research, and Public Works — as well as money for nonprofits, including Invest-in-Kids, Cornell Cooperative Extension and Legal Services of Westchester County, that were sliced in Astorino's proposal. Though legislators cannot add any more, they still can subtract from the budget; deletions are due by Friday. The board, meanwhile, is holding another public hearing at 7 p.m. Thursday at the Westchester County Center. The location was changed to accommodate an expected high turnout.

Astorino is hosting a live telephone town hall meeting from 7 to 8 p.m. today. It also will be streamed online at www.westchestergov.com.

Republican Budget Committee members who voted NO to the additions to save jobs were James Maisano, Sheila Marcotte, and Bernice Spreckman

The Democratic additions include:

- Restoration of the county's Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher Program for low-income people and the 40 jobs in the Planning Department that administer that.
- More than \$3 million for neighborhood health centers and \$5.2 million for four mental health clinics in Peekskill, Mount Kisco, Yonkers and Mount Vernon that were targeted to be eliminated. Legislators also increased revenues in these areas.
- \$1.55 million for Labs and Research, including roughly 23 positions, and increasing expected revenue by \$1.8 million.
- Raised sales-tax revenue projections by \$2.3 million. Majority Leader Peter Harckham, D-Katonah, said these moves restore important services yet still provide relief.

Budget meetings

What: The Board of Legislators is holding a public hearing on County Executive Rob Astorino's \$1.78 billion budget proposal. **When:** 7 p.m. Thursday **Where:** Westchester County Center, White Plains

What: County Executive Rob Astorino is hosting a live telephone town hall meeting. **When:** 7-8 p.m. today **Details:** It also will be streamed at www.westchestergov.com. To ask a question or listen in, call toll-free, 888-886-6603, and enter event ID: 16011, beginning at 7 p.m.