



ULSTER COUNTY LEGISLATIVE NEWS

ULSTER COUNTY NEWS INFORMATION
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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ULSTER COUNTY LEGISLATORS RECEIVE BUDGET ANALYSIS AND REVIEW

Kingston, NY - Ulster County Legislators attended a virtual informational meeting Thursday evening in which Capital Markets Advisors, LLC (CMA) presented a financial analysis and report of the County Executive's proposed 2021 Budget. CMA was commissioned in September to work with the Legislature's financial analysts and key county departments to prepare the report.

Legislative Chairman David Donaldson (D-City of Kingston) acknowledged many budget challenges facing the county were largely related to COVID but was pleased with the overall budget process. He praised Legislators, legislative staff, department heads and County Executive Pat Ryan for working together to address these challenges.

"I commend our legislative financial analysts who worked tirelessly to monitor county finances year-round, Legislator Archer and our Ways and Means Committee, and the County Executive's budget office. By looking out for taxpayers and working toward a common goal this year, I believe we now have a solid budgetary foundation before us," Donaldson said.

County Executive Pat Ryan responded "After one of the most difficult years in decades, I was proud to deliver a county budget that once again held the line on taxes, while also proposing no layoffs and maintaining - and in many cases improving - delivery of vital services across the board I would like to thank the Legislature for undertaking this review and I look forward to reviewing the findings. I remain committed to working together to continue to serve the people of Ulster County especially during this period of great challenge."

Legislator Lynn Archer (D – Rochester/Wawarsing) Chairwoman of the Ways and Means Committee agreed that the CMA Budget Analysis and Review would will be a valuable tool as the committee continues their due diligence.

"There are several notable findings the Ways and Means Committee will discuss as we review this budget and evaluate proposed amendments," said Archer. "CMA has been great to work with and we look forward to continuing the partnership as they help inform our decisions."

The CMA report offered specific suggestions such as providing detailed demographic and socioeconomic information with hyperlinks but found the budget documents to be "generally concise and consistent."

The report noted that most county departments identified appropriate levels of staffing during their interviews, which CMA “deemed to be uncharacteristic” and recommended continuing the hiring freeze during 2021, only filling positions or functions deemed to be “essential” by both the Legislature and the Executive. The report pointed to several collective bargaining contracts that remain expired and warned that this could result in retroactive payments requiring the use of the fund balance.

CMA suggested the County explore additional shared services and might find cost savings by creating a clerical pool with generic titles that could be transferred between departments and exploring technology opportunities to automate some manual operations.

Comparing Ulster County to other counties in the state, CMA recommended lawmakers consider increasing the County’s Hotel Motel Tax to match the “market rate” of 4 to 5% roughly double that revenue source; adopting both a local Mortgage Recording Tax and a Local Real Estate Transfer Tax like other counties which could have increased 2019 revenues between \$3.4 and \$6.5 million; changing the Investment Policy restrictions to allow the County to maximize interest and earnings that could result in an additional \$100,000+. CMA also suggested an in-depth benchmark study of user/service fees charged by neighboring jurisdictions that could potentially increase revenue an estimated \$1 million or more annually.

“This report has given us a lot of options to consider but as always, we will have to see what is best for Ulster County taxpayers,” said Minority Leader Ken Ronk (R-Shawangunk).

Chairman Donaldson suggested that Legislators, working with the legislature’s own financial staff and the County Executive’s team during this pandemic had many positive effects. “As we all faced new and unforeseen challenges, we were able to work together. I am optimistic that we can continue to work together to solve problems as they arise, both social and financial,” Donaldson said. “and Ulster County will come out stronger on the other side.”

Public Hearings on the County Executive’s proposed budget are scheduled for November 9, 10, and 12 via Zoom meetings and the deadline for Legislative amendments and department appeals is November 13.

- November 9, 2020 - Public Hearing: Proposed 2021 Ulster County Budget 6:00pm in the Powered by Zoom Meetings. Dial (646) 558-8656, Meeting ID: 993 6322 1082
- November 10, 2020 - Public Hearing: Proposed 2021 Ulster County Budget 6:00pm in the Powered by Zoom Meetings. Dial (646) 558-8656, Meeting ID: 964 4188 4788
- November 12, 2020 - Public Hearing: Proposed 2021 Ulster County Budget 6:00pm in the Powered by Zoom Meetings. Dial (646) 558-8656, Meeting ID: 986 6581 1600
- November 18-20 – Ways and Means Committee Budget Review (details available at <https://legislature.ulstercountyny.gov>)
- The Legislature will vote on the 2021 Budget at a Special Session on December 8, 2020

CMA Budget Analysis and Review is available at <https://legislature.ulstercountyny.gov/legislature/forms-reports>