



Westchester County Legislator
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Supporting Our Residents and Our Communities

In District 2, we have always made it a priority to support our neighbors. I am proud to report that Westchester County shares this value.

INCREASING FUNDING FOR CHILDCARE: Westchester's **WESTCHESTER WORKS CHILD CARE SCHOLARSHIP**, created in 2022, will now be available to more families, and the County has lowered the parent contribution to 1% for subsidized childcare.

TACKLING FOOD INSECURITY: In 2023, Westchester County awarded **\$929K IN FUNDING TO 63 LOCAL FOOD PANTRIES**, including The Mount Kisco Interfaith Food Pantry, the Community Center of Northern Westchester, and St. Luke's in Somers, in addition to funding Feeding Westchester for support countywide. Westchester County's **HILLTOP HANOVER FARM GREW OVER 15,000 LBS. OF ORGANIC PRODUCE** for our food pantries and Westchester supported **SENIOR NUTRITION PROGRAMS**, including in Mount Kisco. For 2024, we bud-



Produce growing at Hilltop Hanover Farms

geted \$1.3M to continue this fight.

HOUSING: For 2024, Westchester has budgeted: \$100M for housing, including funding to support new property acquisition, over \$40M for investments in local projects, plus a grant program to improve existing housing stock. In District 2, County funding provided critical assistance to the newly opened Lewisboro Commons, creating 42 affordable apartments. Westchester is also investing in eviction prevention, because keeping peo-

ple housed whenever possible is financially beneficial as well as humane.

EMBRACING NEIGHBORS OF ALL ABILITIES: Westchester's newly created **DIVERSE ABILITIES JOB FAIRS**, developed this year, are connecting job seekers with disabilities with potential employers and our **SUNFLOWER LANYARDS PROGRAM** is helping those with hidden disabilities travel independently. Training continues at Westchester County Airport, where nearly every employee from the food court to the TSA has been trained to best support travelers of all abilities. The Town of Bedford is working to make its community more accessible to neurodiverse residents as well, and I am thrilled to be on that task force. We've connected Bedford with the resources used at Westchester's airport, and hope to build on this model to bring a similar program countywide next year. Plus, we increased funding for special needs programming by almost \$1M for 2024. ■

Westchester County Board of Legislators NEWS

Voice of the People of Westchester County for over 300 years

Winter 2023/24 Newsletter



Legislator Erika Pierce

District 2 ~Bedford, Lewisboro, Mount Kisco, North Salem, Pound Ridge, Somers
Chair, Public Works & Transportation



Dear Friends and Neighbors,

We have had many accomplishments this term. On the legislation side, we passed new environmental bills, including **UPON REQUEST**—my single-use waste reduction legislation. We created a new program to provide free legal representation for those facing eviction. We passed legislation that made it easier for first responders to qualify for tax exemptions and legislation to promote election transparency.

In the district, we made record investments in our parks' infrastructure, including restoring historic homes in multiple parks, purchasing the components to rebuild the fire tower in Ward Pound Ridge, breaking ground on new bathrooms at Muscote Farm and developing programs to replace dying trees. County residents came to our parks in droves to celebrate, to learn, and to hike and run. And we didn't stop there. We held our inaugural District Volunteer Awards, trained residents from almost every town on the use of Narcan, saw the expansion of free arts and Juneteenth events provided by County funding to ArtsWestchester, held a Tree Summit in Bedford and came together as a community in times of international crisis. In addition, our office was instrumental in starting two new programs: providing support for those aging out of school-based special education programs through Community Based Services and youth mental health services through the Boys and Girls Club of Northern Westchester.

District 2 enters 2024 (and the new term) bigger than it was before as a result of redistricting. The district now includes a larger portion of Somers, in addition to Bedford, Lewisboro, Mount Kisco, North Salem and Pound Ridge. These six towns are diverse communities with differing needs, but regardless of which town you call home, my office does our best to support every resident and their town's needs.

The 2024 County Operating Budget is the fifth in a row without a property tax levy increase. It is a tighter budget than we have seen in a while, but still keeps to the core values of our County. With funding for programs that protect and strengthen us, investments in our infrastructure and a focus on fiscal management, this is a well-crafted budget that keeps our County healthy, funds our current needs and invests in our future. You can read more details inside.

As someone who was elected to office during the pandemic, these have been complicated years. Although we continue to deal with fallout, including labor shortages, supply chain issues, mental and physical health issues and inflation, I am very proud of the work we have done and am incredibly grateful to have the opportunity to roll up my sleeves and begin that work again.

Very Truly Yours,



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STAY UPDATED!



Coffee & Conversations
coming in 2024



Honoring Waldie Gullen at the South Salem Fire Department Inspection Dinner



Memorial Day in Bedford Village with the Bedford Historical Society



With County Park Staff at Bedford 2030's Tree Summit



Celebrating Mimi Tesfaye at MKCCC's Feed Me Fresh



Honoring volunteers from our local Volunteer Ambulance Corps

The 2024 County Budget & Fiscal Health

I AM HAPPY TO REPORT THAT THE FISCAL HEALTH OF WESTCHESTER COUNTY IS STRONG. We, once again, have an operating budget without an increased property tax levy. Having spent the better part of November meeting with every department in the County to review their budgets, I continue to be amazed by the breadth and depth of the work being done here. The \$2.4B 2024 Operating Budget invests in areas that reflect our values and needs, includ-

ing record amounts for public safety and emergency preparedness, funding for housing, community health and mental health services, and environmental initiatives and economic development programs, including the County's new DIG Grants, from which both Mt Kisco and Bedford are benefitting.

WESTCHESTER CONTINUES TO MAKE AMAZING HEADWAY IN OUR BACKLOGGED INFRASTRUCTURE AND IN REPLENISHING

OUR FUND BALANCE. Since 2018, the County has rebuilt our unassigned fund balance - or our rainy day fund - from just \$17.9M to \$402.3M, an important achievement. That responsible fiscal management is reflected in our ratings -- Fitch Ratings just upgraded us to "AAA" and S&P has improved our outlook to Positive. These are the results of our efficient budgeting, an aggressive grant application effort, and improved County operations and asset management. ■

Making Strides for Our Environment and Our Future

The County continues to prioritize hazard and flood mitigation, projects addressing climate impacts, "green infrastructure" (including the health of trees in our County's parks), the impacts of invasive species, sustainability and energy costs. 2023 Highlights included:

ELECTRIC VEHICLE CHARGING INFRASTRUCTURE: \$25M to increase the total number of County charging stations from 33 to over 230 by end of 2024, plus providing \$5M for funding to municipalities for charging infrastructure;

GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE: \$5M in new funding to replant dying and dead trees countywide, including funding to create native tree and plant nurseries and prepare an analysis of our tree canopy;



At the "Save the Hudson" rally organized by Food and Water Watch

FLOODING MITIGATION: \$49M allocated for new projects to mitigate flooding countywide, including a project at Peach Lake in North Salem, plus the addition of a new Director of Flood Mitigation & Resiliency to oversee this important program;

HOLDING HOLTEC ACCOUNTABLE TO

better monitor the safe decommissioning of the Indian Point Nuclear Plant and prevent incidents, such as radioactive water being dumped into the Hudson River, from occurring;

NEW ENVIRONMENTAL LEGISLATION PASSED IN 2023: Including **UPON REQUEST**, my single-use plastics reduction legislation; **LEAD-FREE PARKS ACT**, a commitment to test and remediate (where necessary) drinking water in County Parks; the **RENEWABLE ENERGY DATABASE ACT**, providing for the creation of a tool to help municipalities find optimal locations for renewable energy infrastructure; and the **EQUITY IN ENVIRONMENTAL LEGISLATION ACT**, guaranteeing environmental justice is considered in making decisions for the years ahead. ■

SUPPORTING DISTRICT NON-PROFITS



In 2023, I secured over \$250K in funding for our district non-profits. For 2024, funded programs total over \$270K and will include: mental health care for area youth and female Veterans with PTSD, support for families caring for a child with special needs and that have a child with a life-threatening illness, as well as for those in our area who are unhoused.

Non-profits include:

- The Boys & Girls Club of Northern Westchester
- Community Based Services
- Friends of Karen
- The Westchester Youth Alliance
- Endeavor Therapeutic Horsemanship
- The Emergency Shelter Partnership

PICTURED LEFT TO RIGHT: Visiting Community Based Services and touring their Good Reasons dog treats facility; Announcing Funding at Friends of Karen



Keeping District 2 Safe

Westchester continues to see crime rates below levels seen pre-COVID. That being said, **WE CONTINUE TO WORK HARD TO MAINTAIN EVERYONE'S SAFETY, BOTH IN WAYS SEEN AND UNSEEN.** Ongoing programs include a multi-agency high-risk task force for domestic violence, a real-time crime center that supports our departments throughout the district as well as our school districts, and training for our emergency first responders.

SCHOOL SAFETY continues to be a focus and priority for all of us. The County trains School Resource Officers (SROs)



The Regional School Safety Symposium at the County Center

and provides those officers, on a contract basis, to our public schools when requested, including in the Katonah-Lewisboro, North Salem, and Somers School Districts. The County has developed and provides programs to train and practice for active shooters and other hazards in our school buildings. Recently, I took part in the annual Regional School Safety Symposium, held at the County Center, where regional groups worked together on emergency planning. This year, the County also passed legislation allowing for the installation of school bus stop arm cameras, so we can keep our students safe on their way to and from school.

We continue to see critical shortages in Fire and Ambulance Volunteers. In 2023, Westchester passed legislation making it **EASIER FOR VOLUNTEERS TO QUALIFY FOR PROPERTY TAX EXEMPTIONS** by changing the requirement from five to two years of service. We also launched two new programs to support the work of our Volunteer Ambulance Corps: a study of the



Narcan training at Pound Ridge Volunteer Ambulance Corps

County's ambulance system to identify opportunities for us to make improvements locally and **SUPPLEMENTAL COUNTY-PROVIDED AMBULANCES** to be deployed to our towns as needed. A third program for both fire and ambulance, the HERRO scholarship, was created in 2022. This program provides tuition and student loan reimbursement to fire and ambulance volunteers. Over 47 district residents have since received scholarships. Both the supplemental ambulance and HERRO programs will be expanded in 2024. ■

INVESTING IN OUR DISTRICT'S COUNTY PARKS

District 2 is home to many beautiful County Parks and I am happy to report that after years of deferred maintenance, we are making tremendous strides in our green spaces.

- **MUSCOOT FARM** - Long-awaited work, including new bathrooms, parking lot, and fencing (\$10M+) has begun. The Main House was completed in July.
- **LASDON PARK & ARBORETUM** - \$4M in funding for septic systems, pathways and other work, plus we completed the restoration of the historic house.
- **MERESTEAD PARK** - Design for the Farmhouse is nearly complete. Work is underway to create a new connected trail system.
- **WARD POUND RIDGE RESERVATION** - Work continues on the fire tower. New site work for the park was added to the capital plan for 2024.
- **MOUNTAIN LAKES PARK** - Allocated funding for repairs to Camp Hemlock, new yurts for Camp Morty, and a new park water system.

PICTURED TOP TO BOTTOM: At Muscoot Farm's Ground Hog Day Celebration; Planning for the restored fire tower at Ward Pound Ridge

