



THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS®
OF WESTCHESTER, INC.

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To: Members of the Westchester County Board of Legislators

From: The League of Women Voters of Westchester, Inc.

Date: December 5, 2016

Enclosed is our statement about the proposed budget for 2017 as submitted on November 10, 2016. It will be read by members of the LWV at the Board of Legislators' public hearing on Wednesday, December 7.

cc: County Executive Robert Astorino



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LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF WESTCHESTER **STATEMENT ON THE** **2017 WESTCHESTER COUNTY BUDGET**

The League of Women Voters of Westchester (LWVW) thanks the Board of Legislators for this opportunity to express our views on the proposed 2017 County Budget. The adopted changes in the Charter that mandated an October release of the Capital Projects budget and a November 10 release of the Operations Budget have been extremely helpful. We thank Budget Director Larry Soule for having met with us both informally and then at a public meeting the League held at the Scarsdale Public Library on November 17th, when he provided needed information and insights.

Of paramount concern to us is the fact that the budget as submitted is not balanced. It relies on revenues from a proposed contract for management of the County airport that may or may not be approved. The League has studied and reached consensus on the County budget for many years; never before have we had to study and reach consensus on an unbalanced budget.

In January 2016 the County Executive announced that for the seventh year in a row a property tax increase would not be an option for the 2017 budget. However, new revenues are essential. Not only have previous budgets resulted in expenses and staffing for most county departments being cut to the bone, but income from sales tax revenues for several years has not met goals set in adopted budgets. The sales tax gap in the 2015 budget was filled by a one-time revenue infusion from the sale of the Austin Avenue property, yet the 2016 budget again is in deficit, in part because of lagging sales tax receipts. Hence, we presume, the public/private partnership announced to both the public and to the Board of Legislators on the same day as the release of the proposed 2017 County Budget.

The League of Women Voters repeats the recommendation we made in December 2015. Raise the property tax. The County could remain well under the two percent cap and still provide extra monies that would close the budget imbalance and allow many aspects of the proposed budget to remain in place, including keeping flat the funding of non-profit agencies, so many of which complement the work of County departments and contribute to Westchester's quality of life.

We worry about managing the budget by not filling vacancies, as has been done to a certain extent in the Department of Public Safety. This department increasingly has been asked to handle municipal police duties and has been forced to shift personnel from one place to another to meet emergency situations. The Department should be fully staffed.

One department that has had an increase in staff is the Board of Elections. That is appropriate. This Board now is responsible for conducting municipal elections and for the provision and maintenance of voting machines for all elections, including those for school boards and budgets. There has been an increase in the number of elections held as well, as more primaries have been conducted.

We note that all County personnel now are working out of contract. However, the proposed budget contains not even one expense line that might cover raises and benefits resulting from upcoming contract negotiations. If negotiated raises are covered by drawing down the fund balance, this might affect the County's credit rating.

One item proposed in the capital projects budget is an outdoor ice rink at the Kensico Dam. We believe County resources, both financial and human capital, are better directed toward improvement and maintenance of the County's existing infrastructure, with attention specifically to roads, bridges, and flood mitigation.

We are pleased to see in the budget a decrease in tax certiorari expenses. We note that these could be reduced even further if more municipalities would conduct property revaluations and then keep them up to date. Although revaluation is a local matter, the county could help facilitate both this and flood mitigation projects that cross municipal lines.

In summary,

- The budget is not balanced.
- We propose increasing the property tax to balance the budget.

Marylou Green,
President

Betsy Shaw Weiner,
Co-chair, County Government Committee