



**2021 Mid-Year Report on the Board of Legislators  
from Chairman Benjamin Boykin II**

July 2021



2021 is a year of renewal and reinvention for Westchester County.

After being at the epicenter of the COVID-19 pandemic, we are bouncing back. Our vaccination numbers are increasing and our infection rates are plunging. Across Westchester, people are getting back to work and school. Social lives and family lives, put on hold for so long, are returning to something more normal and familiar. A year ago, Glen Island Park in New Rochelle was being used as one of the first State-run COVID-19 testing sites in the nation. Now it is again open to all as a County park.

There is important work to be done in the coming months. People are still struggling with lingering economic, health and housing impacts of the pandemic. Food insecurity remains a pressing concern. And, of course, we will never forget those we have lost.

Decisions will need to be made about how best to use funds from the American Rescue Plan to strengthen our economy, modernize our infrastructure, invest in health care, and narrow the digital divide. The decisions will shape Westchester for generations. It is our responsibility to ensure that our values guide our choices. We must build Westchester's renewal on the pillars of fairness, equity, sustainability, fiscal responsibility, openness and transparency.

In the first half of 2021, the Board has acted to:

- Approve an ambitious police reimagining plan for Westchester
- Dramatically strengthen the ethics rules for County government
- Increase transparency in co-op sales
- Approve a hard-fought, negotiated legal settlement that will allow Playland to operate with greater County oversight
- Invest tens of millions of dollars in improvements to County parks

- Authorize the acquisition of new hybrid electric buses to make our mass transit system cleaner
- Rehabilitate miles of County-owned roads
- Modernize our wastewater treatment and sewer systems
- Invest in housing for seniors and others who live and work in our County
- Upgrade the infrastructure at Westchester Community College
- Expand tax relief for our veterans
- Support the creation of a National Infrastructure Bank to finance the development of 21st century infrastructure

And we're not done yet.

In late 2021, we will undertake the redistricting of the Board's 17 legislative districts, as we are obliged to do every 10 years after a new census. Our work will be to ensure that our legislative districts sensibly reflect our local municipalities and population so that everyone has fair and equal representation in our County legislative districts.

And of course this fall we will take up the 2022 budgets for Westchester which will continue to focus on the needs of County residents.

I would like to thank **County Executive George Latimer** and his staff for their creative, dedicated and steadfast leadership for the past four years, and especially during the COVID-19 crisis.

I'd also like to thank Board leadership – **Vice Chair Alfreda Williams, Majority Leader MaryJane Shimsky, Majority Whip Christopher Johnson, and Minority Leader Margaret Cunzio** – and all our County Legislators. This Board has been able to achieve all it has because of their dedication to serving the people of this County, supported by the outstanding public service of the Board's tireless staff during the past 15 difficult months.

Working together, this County government has risen to the occasion to keep the residents of Westchester safe, to buoy the County's financial

health, and to provide for the people of Westchester at a time when government services have never been more essential.

To better serve the people of the County, the Board has continued the ongoing process to modernize our own technology infrastructure in a way that will improve people's access to government.

In the first half of 2021, we moved to a new system for managing our agendas and documents. This system allows the Board to reduce paper usage and waste, and has dramatically improved the ability of the public to use our website to search legislative documents and calendars, increasing government transparency.



We also installed extensive new video teleconferencing equipment and two 100-inch screens in the Board's legislative Chamber. This allowed the Board to continue to conduct the people's business throughout the pandemic — including holding remote public hearings during the New York State public health emergency. Just as importantly, it prepares us for future contingencies, and gives us innovative ways of expanding public access to the Board's proceedings. Look for additional improvements in the second half of the year, including live closed captioning of our web streams and video simulcasts to other internet platforms.

The Board of Legislators fully re-opened for in-person public access on Friday, June 25, 2021 following the expiration of Governor Cuomo's COVID-19-related public health emergency executive orders. We are excited to be able to welcome the people back into the people's house.

But we will remain vigilant to protect staff and the public in the face of unknown challenges from COVID-19.

## IMPROVING OUR PARKS



One of the best things about life in Westchester is the County's tremendous parks system. During the COVID-19 pandemic, our parks were a great refuge for residents, and the County Parks Department did heroic work keeping the parks open, safe and accessible.

Our commitment to improving our County parks continued in the first half of 2021, with our Parks and Recreation Committee chaired by **Legislator David Tubiolo**.

After three months of committee meetings and work with the County Attorney, in April the Board approved a bankruptcy court settlement with Standard Amusements regarding the management of Playland. **Legislator Nancy Barr**, Chair of our Law and Major Contracts Committee, deserves special thanks for her outstanding leadership during the long and complex process.

The settlement agreement gives the County significantly improved terms over the 2016 agreement, which the bankruptcy court could have enforced on the County in absence of a settlement. The new provisions include better financial terms, more oversight of Standard's work and operations at Playland, and more outside investment from the company. Standard will take over management of the park on December 1, 2021.

We also approved millions of dollars in improvements to parks throughout the County including:

- a connection of the Bronx River Reservation Parkway trailway from Midland Avenue in Yonkers to the Oak Street loop in Mount Vernon
- extensive improvements to the dam, playground and picnic areas at V.E. Macy Park in Ardsley
- infrastructure improvement at George's Island in Montrose

## **MODERNIZING OUR INFRASTRUCTURE**

Modern and environmentally sustainable infrastructure — from transportation, to waste management, to public facilities like Westchester Community College — is crucial to the quality of life of residents, and to attracting business investment in Westchester.

Under the intelligent and focused leadership of our Public Works & Transportation Chair **Vedat Gashi**, the Board continued the work of modernizing our facilities. I'd like to give special acknowledgement to Planning, Economic Development and Energy Committee Chair **Catherine Parker** and Environment and Health Chair **Ruth Walter**. Future generations will have them to thank for a cleaner, more sustainable County, due to their persistent focus on ensuring that County projects are energy efficient and environmentally forward-looking. And I'd also like to thank Legislator Parker for the important role she played in helping spur our recovery from COVID as Co-Chair of the Westchester County Re-Opening Task Force.

### ***Roads & Transportation***

- passed measures to fund the continued rehabilitation of Mamaroneck Avenue in White Plains, Harrison and Mamaroneck
- approved funding for, and approved plans to obtain federal funds for, the rehabilitation of Taxiway L at Westchester County Airport
- continued a program to replace our diesel bus fleet, approving a measure that will finance the replacement of 30-foot diesel buses with

electric or hybrid, clean-running, energy efficient vehicles

### ***Waste Management***



One of the least talked about, but most important jobs of County government is to provide and maintain wastewater systems and facilities. Many of our wastewater recovery facilities are older, or could benefit from upgrades to decrease odor and disruption to neighboring communities. I'd like to thank **Legislator Jose Alvarado** for his vocal and effective advocacy for improvements at the Yonkers plant and the surrounding area. During the first half of 2021, the Board:

- approved significant upgrades to wastewater treatment facilities in Mamaroneck, Port Chester and Yonkers, as well as sewer rehabilitation in Ossining
- joined the County Executive in requesting \$69 million in federal funding for long-term odor-control repairs at the Yonkers Wastewater Treatment Plant, to improve the quality of life and ensure environmental justice for the residents of Southwest Yonkers

### ***Bridging the Digital Divide***

President Joe Biden's American Rescue Plan will provide Westchester County with tens of millions of new infrastructure dollars, some of which could be earmarked for technology investment to help bridge the digital divide. The COVID-19 pandemic revealed just how important equitable access to internet technology is. I'd like to thank **Legislator Terry Clements**, Chair of the Board's Committee on Intergovernmental Services, for convening our local service providers to discuss

efforts to close technology gaps and improve access.

### ***Westchester Community College***

This spring we approved financing for a range of substantial and important physical improvements at Westchester Community College (WCC). These included the first phase of renovation of the school's Academic Arts Building, as well as replacement of the roofs of that building, the Library, and the Science Building. We approved funding as well for a project at the Library to replace windows with new energy efficient ones that are up to current code. We also approved financing for important enhancements to WCC's technology infrastructure.

## **POLICE REFORM**

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In March, the Board of Legislators voted unanimously to adopt the report of the County's Police Reform and Reimagining Task Force, which included public safety personnel, community leaders, representatives of the County Executive, and **Legislators Terry Clements, Colin Smith and Damon Maher**.

**Public Safety Committee Chair Colin Smith** led the Board through an in-depth, deliberative consideration of the 177-page report. That process included nearly a dozen committee meetings and a public input session, taking a deep dive into the report's 51 recommendations, plus a 52nd recommendation submitted by Majority Leader Shimsky, for the County police, correction and other public safety operations, including discussions with Task Force leadership, public safety leadership and the public.

Among those recommendations are:

- implicit bias and intercultural competency training for law enforcement personnel
- a formal review of the County Department of Public Safety's use of social media for branding and community outreach
- creation of community liaisons

- increased multi-lingual communications
- training in implicit bias and restorative justice for School Resource Officers
- joint de-escalation training with the Department of Correction
- increased Police Academy training in procedural justice, cultural diversity and bias-related crimes
- creation and implementation of a County-wide electronic database for mental health behavioral cases and special needs populations
- creation of a County Office of Police Accountability

The report's adoption establishes a road map for police reform in Westchester County. Many of the report's recommendations are already being implemented by the County's Public Safety Department. Others will require longer-term work by this Board, the Executive Branch and NY State government, to iron out details, explore legal requirements, and establish fair and practical policies and processes. This work is already underway.

## **STRENGTHENING GOVERNMENT ETHICS**

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In March, the Board passed a major overhaul of the Westchester County ethics law, designed to make the rules for good governance stronger and more transparent, with user-friendly forms and ethics training for County employees. It is the result of years of work by **Legislator Kitley Covill**, Chair of the Board's mandated Legislation Committee and the members of the County's Board of Ethics.

The new regulations explicitly cover things like the use of County positions for personal gain, requirements related to contracts where employees might have a material interest, prohibitions on inducements to making political contributions and more. The new provisions also will make the annual financial disclosure form that is required of elected officials and other County employees easier to understand and complete.

Good government starts with good employees and officials committed to the well-being of the people. Strong ethics laws provide necessary guidance and allow for greater transparency.

The new provisions also change to the way members of the Board of Ethics are appointed — previously all seven were appointees of the County Executive. Under the new provisions, five will be appointed by the County Executive, and two will be appointed by the Chair of the Board of Legislators. This will ensure a more equitable process for appointing members to this board. The new legislation will require a public referendum that will be held during this November’s general election before it can become law.

## **INCREASING TRANSPARENCY IN THE CO-OP MARKET**

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In June, the Board voted to strengthen the County’s disclosure law for the buying and selling of co-operative real estate.

I’d like to thank **Legislator Catherine Borgia** who, in addition to her outstanding work leading the Board’s charter-mandated Budget and Appropriations Committee, worked long and hard to champion this new law.

The new provisions require co-op boards to provide written notice of a reason for rejection when a prospective buyer’s application is declined. The reason, along with the notice of rejection, will have to be filed with the County’s Human Rights Commission.

The measure is similar to one that has been in effect in Suffolk County since 2009.

The new law does not change any of the reasons that co-op boards may legally reject buyers.

Co-ops have wide-ranging discretion in choosing who to approve and why, but under fair housing laws, applicants cannot be rejected on the basis of race, familial status, national origin, religion, disability, or sex.

The new requirement will allow the County’s Human Rights Commission to better identify any pattern of illegal discrimination if it occurs. The Human Rights Commission will prepare a form that co-ops will have to use for the notification.

The new legislation also requires co-ops to inform prospective buyers of their co-op’s minimum financial requirements or financial preferences before home seekers file an application, and requires fair housing training for co-op board members.

## **IMPROVING ACCESS TO HOUSING**

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According to an assessment prepared for the County in November 2019 by Hudson Valley Pattern for Progress, Westchester needs more than 11,000 new units of housing that are accessible to our local workforce, keep seniors at home in their communities, and provide for our less economically advantaged residents.

In the first half of 2021, the Board continued our efforts to invest in that need as we approved financing that will enable construction of:

- 146 new units of rental housing on 1.38 acres of land at 60 & 76 Point Street and 81 Ravine Avenue in Yonkers for residents with incomes at or below 40% and up to 80% of the Westchester County area median income, 44 of which will be set aside for seniors aged 55 and older
- 45 units of rental housing on 2.26 acres of property at 1 Dromore Road in Greenburgh for residents with incomes at or below 40% and up to 80% of the Westchester County area median income

- 113 units of rental housing on a long-unused lot at 76 Locust Hill Avenue in Yonkers which will feature 44 one-bedroom apartments, 45 two-bedroom apartments, 19 studio apartments and 5 three-bedroom apartments for those earning 40%, 50% or 60% of the area mean income, in a five-story energy-efficient building that includes parking and retail space (the building will also provide rent access and social services to 45 formerly homeless households)

I'd like to thank **Legislator Damon Maher**, Chair of the Board's Committee on Labor & Housing, for his work championing housing access.

### **INDIAN POINT DECOMMISSIONING**

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The shutdown and cleanup of the Indian Point nuclear power plant in Buchanan will have environmental and financial consequences for communities in the northwestern portion of Westchester and the County as a whole, for years to come.

Last year, all legislators, as well as County Executive Latimer, wrote to insist that the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) grant a hearing on an application by decommissioning company Holtec to take over the plant from its one-time operator, Entergy. Although the NRC did not grant the public hearing, legislators took part in a New York State Public Service Commission (PSC) Hearing, urging the PSC to maintain oversight of the process and negotiate for adequate financial and environmental protections from Holtec.

The PSC, before approving the transfer, negotiated a deal that addressed many of our concerns, required the maintenance of hundreds of millions of dollars in important decommissioning trust funds, State oversight of hazardous materials and residual radiation cleanup, money for State and local emergency response, and robust public reporting by Holtec.

I'm proud of the important work that **Legislators Colin Smith and Catherine Borgia** are doing — first as members of the New York State Indian Point Closure Task Force and now as members of the State's Indian Point Nuclear Decommissioning Oversight Board. That Board, which has the crucial job of ensuring Holtec's compliance with its terms with the PSC as well as with other regulatory standards, began meeting in June.

### **VETERANS' TAX RELIEF**

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There are few things more important than supporting those who have served to protect us. That's why this June the Board voted unanimously to increase the property tax exemptions for veterans to the maximum level allowable under New York State law, raising the caps by nearly 39%.

### **APPOINTMENTS**

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During the first half of 2021, the Board approved more than 75 appointees to serve in crucial County positions, including on the County's many important Advisory Boards. Our Advisory Boards provide an important seat at the table for Westchester residents to help shape County policy.

We have approved appointments to the African American Advisory Board, the LGBTQ Advisory Board, the Arab American Advisory Board, the Advisory Board on People with Disabilities, and the County's first Asian-American Advisory Board, created in 2019 by County Executive George Latimer, whose creation has taken on

special significance this year in light of the increasing attacks on Asians and Asian-Americans.

I would like to thank **Legislator Tyrae Woodson-Samuels** for his work in steering such a significant number of important appointments through the process.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Benjamin Boykin II". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'B'.

**Benjamin Boykin II**  
*Chairman of the Board*



## IMPROVING OUR PARKS

- negotiated improved settlement agreement between Westchester County and Standard Amusements for the management of Rye Playland
- approved funding for a connection of the Bronx River Parkway Reservation trailway from Midland Avenue in Yonkers to the Oak Street loop in Mount Vernon
- approved funding for extensive improvements to the dam, playground and picnic areas at V.E. Macy Park in Ardsley
- approved infrastructure improvement at George's Island in Montrose, among other parks projects



## ROADS AND TRANSPORTATION

- passed measures to fund the continued rehabilitation of Mamaroneck Avenue in White Plains, Harrison and Mamaroneck
- approved funding for, and approved plans to bring in federal funds, for the rehabilitation of Taxiway L at Westchester County Airport
- continued a program to replace our diesel bus fleet, approving a measure that will finance the replacement of 30-foot diesel buses with electric or hybrid, clean-running, energy-efficient vehicles



## MODERNIZING OUR INFRASTRUCTURE

- Waste Management
  - approved significant upgrades to wastewater treatment facilities in Mamaroneck, Port Chester and Yonkers, as well as sewer rehabilitation in Ossining
  - joined the County Executive in requesting \$69 million in federal funding for long-term odor-control repairs at the Yonkers Wastewater Treatment Plant, to improve the quality of life and ensure environmental justice for the residents of Southwest Yonkers
- Westchester Community College
  - approved financing for a range of substantial capital improvements including:
    - the first phase of renovation of the school's Academic Arts Building
    - replacement of the roofs of that building, the Library and the Science Building
    - replacement of windows with new energy-efficient ones that are up to current code
  - approved financing for important enhancements to WCC's technology infrastructure including:
    - replacement and installation of servers, switches, tape drive replacements, and wireless points
    - cybersecurity improvements and replacement of PCs, laptops, printers, routers, and other essential computer and network equipment



## RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE POLICE REFORM & REIMAGINING TASK FORCE

- implicit bias and intercultural competency training for law enforcement personnel
- a formal review of the County Department of Public Safety's use of social media for branding and community outreach
- creation of community liaisons
- increased multi-lingual communications
- training in implicit bias and restorative justice for School Resource Officers
- joint de-escalation training with the Department of Correction
- increased Police Academy training in procedural justice, cultural diversity and bias-related crimes
- creation and implementation of a County-wide electronic database for mental health behavioral cases and special needs populations
- creation of a County Office of Police Accountability



## ETHICS REFORM & CO-OP TRANSPARENCY IMPROVEMENTS

- passed major overhaul of the Westchester County ethics law to address issues such as:
  - instituting user-friendly forms and ethics training for County employees
  - the use of County positions for personal gain
  - requirements related to contracts where employees might have a material interest
  - prohibitions on inducements to making political contributions
  - revision of the process for appointing members to the Board of Ethics from all seven members being appointed by the County Executive to allowing two appointees by the Board Chair and five by the County Executive
- voted to strengthen the disclosure laws regarding the sale and purchase of cooperative real estate by:
  - requiring the filing of the reason, along with the rejection, of a prospective buyer's declined offer with the County Human Rights Commission
  - requiring co-ops to inform prospective buyers of their co-op's minimum financial requirements or financial preferences before home seekers file an application
  - requiring fair housing training for co-op board members

## IMPROVING THE SOCIAL SAFETY NET

- Housing Access Funding Approvals:
  - 146 new units of rental housing at 60 & 76 Point Street and 81 Ravine Avenue in Yonkers for residents with incomes at or below 40% and up to 80% of the County area median income, 44 units set aside for seniors aged 55 and older
  - 45 units of rental housing at 1 Dromore Road in Greenburgh for residents with incomes at or below 40% and up to 80% of the County area median income



- approved financing for 113 units of rental housing at 76 Locust Hill Avenue in Yonkers for those earning 40%, 50% or 60% of the area mean income in a five-story energy-efficient building that includes parking and retail space
- Helping Our Vets
  - voted unanimously to increase the property tax exemptions for veterans to the maximum level allowable under NYS law, raising the caps by nearly 39%

## OTHER ACTIONS

- Appointments
  - approved over 75 appointees to serve in crucial County positions, including on the County's many important Advisory Boards
  - approved appointments to the African American Advisory Board, the LGBTQ Advisory Board, the Arab American Advisory Board, the Advisory Board on People with Disabilities, and the County's first Asian-American Advisory Board
- Decommissioning Indian Point
  - legislators took part in a New York State Public Service Commission (PSC) Hearing, urging it to maintain oversight of the process and negotiate for adequate financial and environmental protections from decommissioning company, Holtec
  - the PSC negotiated a deal requiring the maintenance of hundreds of millions of dollars of decommissioning trust funds, State oversight of hazardous materials and residual radiation cleanup, funds for state and local emergency response, and robust public reporting by Holtec

