



State of New York County of Broome Government Offices

Office of the Broome County Executive
Jason T. Garnar, County Executive

2027 Budget Address Delivered by Jason Garnar, September 14, 2026 Vestal Senior Center, Vestal

Good evening.

Tonight, I'm here to present the 2027 Broome County budget.

But more than that, I want to talk about what this budget means for the people we serve – the investments we're making in our community, the challenges we're facing, and what we can do to make Broome County a place where people can afford to live, work, raise a family, and build a future.

A county budget is about a lot of things.

It's about making sure we can provide the services people count on every day. It's about being responsible with taxpayer dollars. It's about planning ahead and making smart investments in our community.

But at the end of the day, this budget is really about people.

It's about the seniors who call Broome County home. It's about families trying to make ends meet. It's about businesses creating jobs. And it's about the people who turn to County government when they need a helping hand.

Putting a budget like this together takes a lot of people working together, and I have many people to thank tonight.

I want to start by thanking Chairman Dan Reynolds, Majority Leader Matt Pasquale, Minority Leader Kim Myers, and all the members of the County Legislature for working alongside me to improve the lives of the people of Broome County.

I want to thank the countywide elected officials and community leaders who could be here tonight.

And, as always, thank you to our department heads and the 2,000 county employees who keep this government running every single day.

If it weren't for your dedication, this government simply wouldn't function. I'm truly grateful for the work you do for the people of Broome County.

I also want to thank Mary Turbush, our Office for Aging Director, and Lucia Esposito, our Deputy Director, for everything you do for seniors across Broome County.

Let's give them a quick round of applause.

And I want to thank all the seniors who are joining us tonight.

Thank you for allowing me to join you for dinner – and for letting me be your entertainment for the evening.

I'll try to make this as painless as possible.

You have spent decades raising families, building businesses, serving your neighbors, volunteering, and helping make Broome County the community it is today.

We're grateful for everything you've given to this community, and it's an honor to have you with us tonight.

Here in Vestal, there's a special history to this senior center.

A lot of the people who come here today actually walked these same hallways when they were young students, back when this building was an elementary school and later a junior high school.

In fact, there's a couple who first met here as students at Vestal Junior High and, years later, came back to this same building together as members of the senior center.

That's pretty special.

And really, that's what a senior center is all about. It's a place to have a meal, stay active, see some friends, and stay connected.

Last year, 448 seniors came through these doors, and more than 8,500 meals were served here.

Across Broome County, our Office for Aging served more than 3,300 seniors at our centers and provided more than 68,000 meals.

We delivered another 176,000 meals to seniors in their homes and provided more than 26,000 rides to help people get where they need to go.

But those numbers really tell a pretty simple story.

They mean that when a senior needs a little help, somebody is there.

Maybe it's a ride.

Maybe it's a meal.

Maybe it's just somebody to talk to.

And there are a lot of good people behind that work.

Thank you to Rita Fluharty, our Nutrition Manager, and Mary Jane Lawrence, our Health and Wellness Coordinator, for everything you do for seniors across Broome County.

And here at the Vestal Senior Center, I want to recognize Jenn Fontana, who has been here since 2015, and Pixie Bliss, who joined the center this year.

Jenn and Pixie, if you could please stand for a moment.

Let's give them a big round of applause.

Jenn says the best part of this job is, hands down, the people.

And when you look around this room tonight, you can see exactly what she means.

That's really what we're doing this for.

We're doing it for the people sitting in this room.

We're doing it to make sure seniors can stay healthy, stay independent, and continue living in the neighborhoods they call home.

That's why the 2027 budget puts \$1 million into new programs focused on senior independence.

That includes helping seniors make their homes safer and more energy efficient, expanding opportunities to stay active and involved, helping with access to healthy food, and making sure seniors have the tools and information they need to avoid scams and stay connected.

Independence is something we all value.

And for the seniors in this room, it's something you've worked a lifetime to build.

We want to help you keep it.

That's also why the 2027 budget increases the County's senior property tax exemption.

For seniors living on fixed incomes, every dollar matters.

As the cost of everyday necessities continues to rise, we want to do what we can to make it a little easier for seniors to remain in the homes and communities they know and love.

And that brings me to a larger point about this year's budget.

If there's one thing all of us are feeling right now, it's that the cost of living keeps going up.

Over the last five years, the overall cost of goods and services has gone up by more than 20 percent.

Groceries, utilities, insurance, housing – people are paying more for just about everything.

We can't control the price of everything people buy.

But we can control what we charge as a county.

Let's start with property taxes.

I'm proud to announce that for the eighth year in a row, this budget lowers the County property tax rate.

And since 2018, we have cut the County property tax rate by more than 24 percent.

We're doing that at a time when a growing number of counties across New York State are choosing to override the state's property tax cap.

The State Comptroller's Office reported that nearly one in four counties are planning to override the cap.

We're not doing that here in Broome County.

We're going to continue to live within our means and look for ways to give taxpayers some relief.

That same approach carries over to the other costs people see from County government.

We've kept our landfill tipping fee among the lowest in New York State.

We've kept our parks free, while continuing to invest in them and improve them.

And when it comes to public transportation, we haven't raised the fare to ride a BC Transit bus in 14 years.

It's still just \$2.

That matters, especially for people who rely on the bus to get to work, to an appointment, or to the grocery store.

We're continuing to look for ways to make it easier and more affordable for people to live, work, raise a family, and grow older here in Broome County.

Because when the cost of almost everything else is going up, County government shouldn't make it harder for people to make ends meet.

But affordability isn't just about taxes and fees.

It's also about making sure people have a place to live that they can actually afford.

Housing continues to be one of the biggest challenges facing communities across the country, and we're seeing that right here in Broome County.

Over the past year, we've continued to move a record amount of housing projects forward.

Between projects that have just opened this year, projects under construction, and projects getting ready to break ground, we're talking about more than 1,500 units of housing.

That includes:

111 units at Confluence Court.

75 units at Riverside Gardens.

73 units at Homesteads on Grand Avenue.

And 75 units on Hooper Road.

These are just a few of the projects recently completed and now home to families and individuals.

On top of that, we're looking at more than 1,000 additional units in projects awaiting funding.

The Broome County Land Bank is also doing its part every day, helping revitalize neighborhoods and turning vacant and neglected properties back into productive homes and community assets.

The most recent example is a great partnership with Broome-Tioga BOCES.

Together, they're working to build affordable tiny homes while also giving BOCES students hands-on experience in the trades.

And the 2027 budget provides \$300,000 to support that effort and build more tiny homes.

That's a win for our neighborhoods, a win for our students, and a win for families looking for an affordable place to call home.

Our Department of Social Services is also continuing to help people who are struggling to find or maintain stable housing.

In 2025, Broome County spent approximately \$9.5 million placing people and families in hotels and motels because they had nowhere else to go.

That's a lot of money to spend on an emergency solution.

And the truth is, it's not a solution that gets people into stable housing.

So we're taking a different approach.

The 2027 budget adds three new positions in the Department of Social Services focused on getting people help earlier, connecting them with the services they need, and helping them find a path to permanent housing.

We also released a Request for Proposals in May to work with an organization focused on providing short- and long-term solutions for people experiencing homelessness.

I'm proud to announce that we have selected Health Management Associates to provide that service and work with us toward a more permanent housing solution here in Broome County.

The goal is pretty simple:

Help people get out of emergency shelters and into stable housing.

A motel room in Broome County costs about \$2,400 a month.

A one-bedroom apartment costs about \$900.

So getting people out of motel rooms isn't just about saving taxpayer money.

It means safer housing and better outcomes for the people who need help.

And that same idea – helping people before they reach a crisis point – applies to families and children as well.

One of the biggest challenges facing working families today is childcare.

If parents can't find affordable, reliable childcare, they can't go to work.

And if businesses can't find workers, our entire economy feels the impact.

That's why I'm really excited about a new opportunity coming to our community.

Earlier this year, Governor Hochul selected Broome County to participate in a new childcare pilot program.

Beginning in 2027, families in Broome County will have access to high-quality childcare for children ages 0 to 3 – the most expensive age range for childcare – at a fraction of what families are paying today.

We're talking about childcare that will cost Broome County families about what a couple of coffees cost – instead of hundreds of dollars a week.

That means the money families save on childcare can go toward groceries, gas, a mortgage, or right back into our local economy.

And this isn't just a one-year program.

The state is providing Broome County with \$22 million a year for the next three years to expand childcare capacity and make this program work.

That's a total of \$66 million.

There are only three counties in the entire state that will have this opportunity in 2027 – and Broome County is one of them.

And the 2027 budget puts another \$1.5 million of our own resources into this effort because we know how important it is to our residents, our businesses, and our local economy.

We're also investing in our own childcare center, Broome County KinderCare at Oakdale Commons.

That brand-new, 200-slot center is currently under construction and is expected to open in the spring of 2027.

The need is there.

We hear it from parents.

We hear it from employers.

We hear it from businesses trying to find people who are ready to go to work.

So we're doing what we can to meet that need.

This is an investment in children.

But it's also an investment in parents, employers, and our local economy.

And it's another example of what I mean when I talk about affordability.

Government can't control the price of every gallon of milk or every kilowatt of electricity.

But we can make smart investments that help families deal with those costs.

We can make childcare more affordable.

We can help people stay in their homes.

We can keep taxes and fees down.

And we can make sure the people and systems our community relies on in a crisis are there when they're needed most.

Over the past year, our Office of Emergency Services has continued to invest in the tools and services that help keep people safe.

We launched the Ready Broome app, which has already been downloaded more than 4,000 times.

It gives residents another way to get emergency alerts and important information when something happens in our community.

We also launched our fly car program about a year ago to put advanced emergency medical care closer to the people who need it.

In its first year, that program responded to nearly 800 calls for service and helped with more than 250 transports.

Those numbers tell us something pretty simple:

The investment is working.

And it's helping people when they need it most.

We're seeing that same kind of progress in our work to address the opioid crisis.

In 2025, suspected fatal overdoses in Broome County dropped by 43 percent.

Every dollar of our opioid settlement funding is focused on one thing:

Saving lives and helping people get on the path to recovery.

That means investing in prevention, treatment, recovery, education, and harm reduction programs that are making a difference right here in our community.

We're seeing the impact of the work being done by our Health Department, our local treatment and recovery providers, law enforcement, and community organizations across the County.

I also want to recognize the work happening in our Department of Mental Health.

Last year, we made the decision to separate mental health from the Department of Social Services and make it its own department within Broome County government.

We did that because we're seeing a growing need for mental health and supportive services in our community.

And we want to make sure we have the resources and the focus to respond to that need.

One of the biggest examples of that work is our mobile crisis program.

Earlier this year, we partnered with the Mental Health Association of the Southern Tier with a \$1 million investment to expand mobile crisis response throughout Broome County.

It's pretty simple.

When someone is experiencing a mental health crisis, we want to get the right people to them, wherever they are, before that crisis turns into something more serious.

This program started April 1st and is expanding mobile crisis services beyond our larger communities and into the more rural areas of Broome County.

We want this to be something that lasts.

We're committed to making this program sustainable and continuing to invest in mobile crisis services in the 2027 budget and into the future.

Because someone shouldn't have to live in Binghamton or Johnson City to get help.

If someone is in crisis, we want to meet them where they are and get them the help they need.

And when it comes to keeping people safe, our law enforcement agencies are doing that work every day as well.

I want to recognize Sheriff Fred Akshar, Undersheriff Sam Davis, and the men and women of the Sheriff's Office for the outstanding work they're doing to keep our communities safe.

Part of that work is making sure the public has confidence in the people who serve them.

That's why the 2027 budget includes funding for new body cameras for corrections officers at the Broome County Jail.

Transparency matters.

And we want to make sure our corrections officers have the tools they need to do their jobs, while also giving the public confidence in how those tools are being used.

That's an important part of good government.

We're also investing in the resources of District Attorney Paul Battisti.

One example is the dedicated DWI deputy we funded to work with the DA's Office.

After that position was added, DWI arrests nearly tripled in 2025, and they're on pace to increase again this year.

That's what we want to see from our investments.

Put resources where they can make a real difference in keeping people safe.

But County government is about more than responding when something goes wrong.

It's also about investing in our communities and creating opportunities.

That's something we've continued to do through our Small Community Grants program.

The Legislature and I started this program in 2018 with a pretty simple idea:

Sometimes a relatively small investment from the County can help a local organization or community do something they otherwise wouldn't be able to do.

Over the years, we've invested more than \$2 million through this program, supporting more than 150 projects across Broome County.

And the 2027 budget continues that effort with another \$500,000 set aside for community projects across the County.

One example of what this program can do is our partnership with GiGi's Playhouse.

Last year, Small Community Grant funding helped support the expansion of GiGi's Playhouse and a new workforce initiative for people with Down syndrome.

The program will give participants opportunities to build job skills, gain hands-on work experience, and develop the skills they need to enter the workforce.

That program will be up and running this year, and it's just one example of the kinds of projects these grants can help make possible.

Investing in our people is only half the equation.

We also have to invest in the places and infrastructure that support them.

And that brings me to this year's Capital Improvement Program.

The 2027 Capital Plan puts \$61.1 million to work fixing what needs fixing and building what our community needs next.

At SUNY Broome, we're putting over \$10 million into modernizing the campus – new HVAC, roofing, and updated classrooms – so our kids have a place they're proud to learn.

Our engineering and buildings crews are tackling nearly \$12 million in bridge and facility work, including continued upgrades at the Public Safety Facility, the Forum Theatre, and the Arena.

BC Transit is getting a real facelift too, with \$11.5 million going toward four new hybrid buses, two fully electric buses, and solar charging infrastructure.

That means cleaner, more efficient rides for years to come.

Out at Willow Point, we're investing over \$10 million to make sure our residents have comfortable, well-maintained facilities.

And we're taking care of the everyday items that people may not notice, but that we rely on.

Highway equipment.

Solid waste infrastructure.

Technology upgrades.

The things that may not make the headlines, but keep County government running day in and day out.

This is a budget that takes care of what we've got while building toward what's next for Broome County.

And I want to make one thing very clear tonight.

This budget has zero layoffs.

We are protecting the people who provide the essential services our residents count on.

But we're also being realistic about the financial pressures we're facing.

When you step back and look at this budget as a whole, all of these things are connected.

Housing.

Childcare.

Transportation.

Workforce development.

Public safety.

Infrastructure.

They all come back to the same basic questions:

Can people afford to live here?

Can they afford to work here?

Can they raise a family here?

Can they grow older here?

That's what we're trying to build in Broome County.

Those are the things that matter to people.

But while we're making these investments, we also have to be honest about the challenges we face.

We're getting hit with rising costs just like everyone else.

Our health insurance and retirement costs are going up over \$9 million in 2027.

And the federal government is cutting funding for programs that counties rely on.

We saw that recently with changes to the federal reimbursement for administering SNAP.

Starting October 1st, the federal reimbursement to counties will drop from 50 percent to 25 percent.

For Broome County, that means an additional cost of more than \$1 million in the 2027 budget alone, and millions more in 2028.

These are costs we don't control.

So we have to be disciplined about the things we can control.

That means taking a close look at how we spend every taxpayer dollar.

It means being more deliberate about when and where we fill positions.

We're slowing down hiring where we can and making sure that when we do add to our workforce, we're filling positions that are truly needed to provide the services our residents rely on.

That's how we can make these investments, protect essential services, and keep this budget responsible.

This budget is about making the investments we need to make while continuing to look for savings wherever we can find them.

It's about protecting essential services.

It's about preparing for the future without losing sight of what people are dealing with today.

And, most importantly, it's about making Broome County a place where people can afford to stay.

We cannot control everything that's happening in the world.

But we can control how we respond.

We can keep our taxes down.

We can keep our services affordable.

We can make smart investments.

We can plan ahead.

And we can continue building a Broome County that people are proud to call home.

Thank you to everyone who helped put this budget together.

Thank you to our department heads and County employees for the work you do every day.

Thank you to the Legislature for working with us.

And thank you to the people of Broome County for trusting us with the responsibility of running your County government.

As always, we have a lot of work ahead.

But I believe in this community.

I believe in the people who live here.

And I believe our best days are still ahead.

Thank you, and God bless.