

Westchester & Fairfield County Business Journals

County executives are upbeat in State of the County messages

Peter Katz | May 2, 2022

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It may come as no surprise, but county executives in Westchester and the Hudson Valley have upbeat views of where their counties stand financially, in the recovery from Covid, as hosts to businesses and in helping residents enjoy the highest possible quality of life. The season for messages about the state of the various counties peaked recently with addresses by the county executives in Westchester and Dutchess.

Westchester County

The people of Westchester County are united, the county is in solid financial shape, projects are underway to preserve and enhance landmarks and infrastructure and Covid is no longer the threat it once was, according to Westchester County Executive George Latimer.

Latimer delivered his 2022 State of the County address in the Board of Legislators' chamber at the County Office Building in White Plains on the evening of April 21. It was the fifth such address Latimer has given since taking office and the first during his second four-year term.



“A war of aggression rages just across the ocean, bringing fear and death. We pray for Ukraine,” Latimer said. “And here, locally on our streets, where our children play, where we close deals and inquire about new opportunities, where we take our parents for care and stop for coffee, in each of these corners of our small patch of land, we must continue to stop division.”

Latimer thanked the people of Westchester for putting their faith in him to manage the county on their behalf and reaffirmed his strong belief in governing through democracy.

Latimer decried autocrats whether in Albany, Washington or “in the Kremlin with the power to execute millions of lives at whim. We are stronger and better when we find ways to work together. United, even in our disagreements.”

Latimer said that an example of Americans caring about each other was found in “the way nearly 90% of Westchester County residents got vaccinated against Covid-19, to protect their families and each other.” He said the county closed out 2021 with a \$64 million operating surplus and that the 2022 budget of \$2.2 billion allows for another property tax cut, the third consecutive one during his administration. He said it’s the largest in a decade, totaling \$7 million. He said that he hopes to be able to continue the tax-cutting trend. He pointed out that Westchester County’s bond ratings now stand as “stable” by all three major rating agencies.

Latimer recapped the county’s efforts to attract business and new jobs, including funding the Westchester County Association’s Healthcare Talent Pipeline Program that will recruit, train, support and place up to 100 job seekers with health care employers. Latimer reported that the county’s parks

have been undergoing upgrades and noted that the county has pledged \$10 million toward building a waterfront park in the Ludlow section of Yonkers. He also pointed to the \$125 million in construction and rehabilitation that is underway at Playland Amusement Park. He pointed to the county's Launch1000 program that has already helped almost 300 start-up businesses and recently added programs in Spanish.

Latimer said that crime is down in the county and 34 of 38 recommendations of a task force on policing in the county have already been put into place. These include steps enhancing community outreach, providing body cameras to all county police officers, installing dash-cams in all county police vehicles and increasing and diversifying recruitment efforts for county police.

Dutchess County

Dutchess County Executive Marc Molinaro presented his 2022 State of the County Address on April 20 during an in-person event at the Stissing Center in Pine Plains.

"The state of Dutchess County remains strong, as our county has overcome unforeseen obstacles and come through the other side more united and robust than ever," Molinaro said. "Today we are poised for more growth and prosperity because of our decade-long commitment to smart, fiscally conservative and compassionate government."

Molinaro pointed out that when he took office in January 2012, the county had a \$40 million budget deficit. By contrast, in 2022, the county had a positive fund balance of \$60 million.

Molinaro reported that 2022 has seen the seventh consecutive property tax rate decrease for homeowners and businesses, this time amounting to a 10% cut. He said Standard & Poor's has again given Dutchess County an AA+ bond rating, the highest among any county in New York.

Dutchess recently released a 2022 housing assessment and is creating a housing trust fund, with a recommended initial funding of at least \$2 million per year, which Molinaro presented as being a valuable source of flexible funding to aid the implementation of a variety of affordable housing efforts. Molinaro also elaborated on the county's plan to build a countywide emergency housing facility, which will provide both temporary housing and wrap-around services for those experiencing homelessness all under one roof, transforming the county's emergency housing response system.

Ulster County

Ulster County Executive Pat Ryan reflected on his county's achievements, ranging from retaking control of a former IBM site, to attracting a leading marijuana-growing company in Ellenville, to an historic re-investment in mental health, to the deployment of the county's first electric buses.

He urged residents to begin to look "beyond the pandemic," and outlined a series of "generational investments" that the county is making to curb the housing crisis, protect the environment and grow the economy through an anticipated half-a-billion dollars in future investments in major economic hubs in the towns of Ulster and Ellenville.

He pointed out that Rockland's unemployment rate is down to 3.3% and is among the lowest rates across the Hudson Valley region.

“We have improved and streamlined county government for the benefit of both the people we serve and for our taxpayers,” Day said. “Our years of conservative budgeting have paid off; we are fiscally healthy and can now focus on reviving and rebuilding Rockland for the future.”

Putnam County

Putnam County Executive MaryEllen Odell in her State of the County Address given at the Putnam County Courthouse. She underscored the strength of the county’s fiscal position and laid out plans to keep property taxes flat, increase the amount of sales tax the county shares with Putnam’s municipalities and equip the Sheriff’s Department with body cameras.

“Tonight, we set forth a vision laying the groundwork for a better quality of life for future generations, and its implementation will require our dedicated efforts through the remainder of our term,” said Odell, who is not seeking re-election. “We will continue to meet the challenge of fulfilling our fiscal and social responsibilities to our constituents right through our last day of public service.”

“Putnam County has endured many challenges. That’s for sure. Putnam County has endured many successes. That’s for sure,” Odell said.

She took time to reflect on the war in Ukraine.

“I ask that you please continue to pray for the innocent and beautiful families and brave soldiers fighting for independence in Ukraine,” she said. “Pray for the safety of the people in Poland and Hungary and the other Eastern European countries who are standing in solidarity against Russia and the tyranny of Putin.”