



COUNTY OF ERIE

OFFICE OF THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE

Brenton Davis,
Erie County Executive

December 11, 2023

Erie County Council
140 W 6th St
Room #114
Erie, PA 16501

Dear Chairman Shank and Council Colleagues:

The administration presented Erie County Council with an honest budget containing a .85 mills tax increase, which Council has opted to reduce to .65 against the advice of both Administration and County Council's Fiscal Advisors. This pathway creates the likelihood of a \$5M deficit in 2025 and a \$9M deficit in 2026 factoring in inflation and all known costs at this time. Additional unforeseen costs are likely.

Additionally, County Council voted to fund required legal services to the indigent with American Rescue Plan Act monies (ARPA) further deepening the financial deficit. The Administration has no other recourse; difficult but very necessary adjustments must be made to County government operations with more work to come in 2024 to best prepare for the upcoming financial challenges through strategic elimination of positions, elimination of duplicative services, and systematic restructuring.

With this letter, I am returning the budget with vetoes and line item reductions.

Line item vetoed Action Sheet 25d "Adoption Subsidies," a crucial part of the OCY budget funded through state and federal sources, providing vital services for one of our most vulnerable populations at 100% funding. Reducing this line offers no savings to the taxpayers or the general fund of Erie County.

Vetoed Action Sheet 29 "2020 CDBG Administration," grant funding originally awarded in 2020, required for the mandatory advertising of CDBG programming in 2024 and in the future. This funding is received and currently being expensed.

Vetoed Action Sheet 70 "To reduce advertising," an action sheet approving union increases for the Erie County Department of Planning and Community Development. Director Horan had already budgeted the union increase in her submission to the administration, making the action sheet duplicative. No other departments had taken this action.

Vetoed Action Sheet 72 "To eliminate position #002200-010 that was created as a DEI Specialist Position but shifted to HR Generalist." This position is vital to Erie County's employee-focused diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts, as well as recruitment and retention. Erie County has many vacancies, and this position will help fill high demand jobs, which enable the delivery of the highest quality services.

Also, vetoed Action Sheet 73 "To eliminate new IT Specialist II position #002812-005 requested in the budget." This proposed position is 80% funded by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and 20% grant-funded for the first year. The funding of this position comes at no cost to the Erie County taxpayer for year one.

The final veto is Action Sheet 74 "To utilize ARPA money for the outside counsel department." We are grateful that County Council funded this vital activity, providing legal services to our indigent population. However, the use of one-time revenue to fund this required activity would further aggravate looming budget problems in 2025 and beyond. This is most responsible and sustainable approach long term is funding through general fund dollars.

One of the most difficult decisions in any budget is the elimination of positions. Strategic restructuring and right-sizing government are essential in light of our current financial position and in the best interest of those who fund our government – The Taxpayers of Erie County. It is our intention to realign ALL displaced workers with job offers to serve in other departments with a higher demand for their skillsets. This is in the best interest of both the Taxpayers and our employees.

The following line items are reduced:

Over a 10-year period, library use has decreased, with circulation down by 36%, and visits down by 42%. Despite overall budget increases, there has been a persistent decline in library use by the community over the past decade.

First reduction is 054-017100-043 occupied bargaining (Blasco) Library Clerk (\$51,755.78). Reduced this line to \$0.

- Reduced 054-017100-047 occupied bargaining (Blasco) Library Clerk (\$31,865.80). Reduced this line to \$0
- Reduced 054-017100-040 occupied bargaining (Blasco) Library Clerk (\$31,865.80). Reduced this line to \$0.
- Reduced 054-017100-038 occupied bargaining (Blasco) Library Clerk (\$81,491.86). Reduced this line to \$0.
- Reduced 054-017100-042 vacant part-time bargaining (Blasco) Library Clerk (\$17,144.91). Reduced this line to \$0.
- Reduced 054-017100-066 occupied part-time bargaining (Blasco) Library Clerk (\$22,397.89). Reduced this line to \$0.
- Reduced 054-017100-039 occupied bargaining (Blasco) Technical Services Clerk (\$46,650.01). Reduced this line to \$0.
- Reduced 054-017100-002 vacant non-bargaining (Blasco) Social Media Coordinator (\$46,650.01). Reduced this line to \$0.

- Reduced 054-017100-002700 Fees and Services. (\$40,200) This is a reduction of \$18,000, which leaves \$22,200 in the line item. This funding allocation supported paid interns. The demand does not exist to warrant interns at the library.
- Reduced 054-017300-006 occupied part-time bargaining (Millcreek Branch) Part-time Clerk (\$37,975.11). This line is reduced to \$0.
- Additionally, reduced 054-002330 Maintenance & Repair (\$70,000) for a reduction of \$20,000, leaving \$50,000 remaining. Historically not used to this level and the Operations Department has stated this funding is projected to be sufficient for 2024.
- Reduced 001-003210-013 Realty Records Clerk (\$42,618.14), a vacant bargaining position in the Recorder of Deeds office, proposing a reduction to \$0. The Clerk of Records has agreed to eliminate this position.
- Reduced 001-004010-006 Clerk Typist/Receptionist (\$40,271.28), a vacant non-bargaining position in Adult Probation, proposing a reduction to \$0. The Court Administrator has agreed to eliminate this position.
- Reduced 050-003710-025 Administrative Clerk (\$55,517.56), a vacant non-bargaining position in Domestic Relations, proposing a reduction to \$0. The Court Administrator has agreed to eliminate this position.
- Reduced County Council 002520 – Professional Fees (\$270,400), a reduction of \$31,000 leaving \$239,400 in the line. County Council has two solicitors for seven part-time council members, but the workload does not warrant two solicitors for the entire county.
- Reduced various budget lines under the Human Relations Commission, totaling \$258,380. This leaves \$1 in each line item. The reduction of line 044420 returns the City of Erie's \$15,000 contribution to the Erie County HRC. The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania already enforces state laws through its Human Relations Commission, rendering Erie County's HRC duplicative.
- Reduced 001-003230-4051 Register of Wills (\$60,000) and 001-003240-4051 Prothonotary (\$133,000) to \$0, proposing to fund new computer software from the ARPA budget.
- Reduced General Fund Transfer 008650 – Pleasant Ridge Manor (\$999,996), a reduction of \$499,996, leaving \$500,000 in the line item.

I urge you to sustain these against the status quo. Erie County needs growth and development to avoid future budget pain and service reductions. Initiatives like RESOLVE and NePTWNE, attracting new businesses and developing sites, will spawn future growth, minimizing taxation increases by broadening the tax base.

In conclusion, the vetoes and reductions outlined here total \$1.5M returning the \$1.6M to the ARPA fund to be later leveraged for future projects. I strongly encourage your support for these measures, despite opposition, as they are crucial for steering Erie County toward necessary change. Our government must adapt to the evolving needs of our community. To safeguard against future fiscal challenges and service cuts, Erie County must prioritize growth and development initiatives, such as Projects RESOLVE and NePTWNE paired with strategic investment in shovel ready sites such as the proposed Fairview and Girard Business Park. By attracting new businesses and enhancing our infrastructure, we can foster sustained growth, ultimately minimizing the need for tax increases and ensuring a prosperous future for our constituents. Making tough decisions now is an investment in Erie County's long-term success.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "B. Davis". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letter of each word being capitalized and prominent.

Brenton D. Davis
Erie County Executive