

2025 Executive Budget Initiatives

The 2025 Executive Budget strives to balance the needs of our community now and in the future by making fiscally responsible and strategic investments that yield the most ‘bang for our buck,’ bolstering County services and investing in our people.

Holding Property Taxes Flat

The 2025 Executive Budget does not raise property taxes.

Guarding Against Future Economic Uncertainty

Ulster County’s Fund Balance Policy, as amended last year, requires the unrestricted fund balance to be between 15 and 20 percent. This “rainy day fund” helps protect taxpayers against changing economic and fiscal conditions from one year to the next. The Executive Budget takes a prudent approach by keeping a 19.9% percent unrestricted General Fund balance after appropriations and reserves.

New Reserves

\$10M Bridge Reserve Fund. The 2025 Executive Budget proposes to establish a \$10 million fund to support bridge repairs and replacements, reducing borrowing costs for taxpayers in the future while keeping the unrestricted General Fund balance in compliance with the County’s Fund Balance Policy.

\$2M Retirement Reserve. The 2025 Executive Budget proposes the creation of a \$2 million Retirement Contribution Reserve Fund to help protect taxpayers by offsetting the projected rising costs of retirement contributions while keeping the unrestricted General Fund balance in compliance with the County's Fund Balance Policy. Over the past two years alone, the cost of retirement contributions paid to New York State have increased by \$4 million, making this reserve a prudent move for the future.

Improving Government Efficiency

In 2025, the County will enhance operational efficiency and save taxpayer money by consolidating certain County government functions into two new departments: General Services and Risk Management. The Department of General Services will handle purchasing, central services (mail and printing), and a new business services division to streamline

administrative support for smaller departments. The Risk Management Department will integrate the Safety and Insurance Departments.

Programmatic Highlights

Housing Investments

In the face of a housing affordability crisis, the 2025 Executive Budget includes a suite of initiatives to help preserve and expand housing that residents can afford while improving services for those in immediate need:

- **Housing Action Fund (\$15M, with additional \$1.5M of dedicated occupancy tax revenues annually)** - The Executive Budget builds upon the new \$15M Ulster County Housing Action Fund (HAF) created in partnership with the County Legislature to catalyze development of housing that is healthy, green, and most importantly, affordable to our residents. To ensure a sustained investment over time, the County Executive worked with the Legislature to adopt a policy that allocates 25% of annual occupancy tax revenues for housing.
- This year saw approval of the first round of Housing Action Fund awards, with \$2M committed to five projects in five different communities (City of Kingston and Towns of Hurley, New Paltz, Saugerties and Ulster) that will provide affordable homes for over 200 individuals and families. These projects represent a diverse mix, with both home ownership and rental opportunities, supportive housing for our homeless residents, senior housing for our elders, and new homes for families for whom homeownership has been out of reach.
- **ADUs / “Plus One” Home Program** - The Ulster County Planning Department has successfully secured a \$5 million state award to expand the ‘Plus One’ Home Program, offering grants of up to \$125,000 to homeowners for the construction of Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) on their properties in exchange for keeping the rent for the units affordable. This program not only increases housing availability but also provides homeowners with supplemental funds to manage their expenses. This state award will go directly to RUPCO, the County's non-profit administrator for the program, with no County budgetary allocation.
- **Homelessness Prevention (\$260,000)** - Bipartisan legislation to extend and expand the contract with Legal Services of the Hudson Valley to assist residents facing eviction, and additionally utilize nearly \$155,000 In ARPA funding to help with rental arrears.
- **"Better Homes for All" Program (\$200,000)** This energy equity initiative will directly connect struggling households with state and federal energy programs that cover all or

most of the costs of weatherization and energy efficient upgrades and appliances, reducing carbon footprint and energy bills and improving residents' health, safety, and comfort.

- **Outreach & Implementation (\$60,000)** - The “Better Homes for All” Program will be coordinated by a Climate Justice Fellow, who will collaborate with County service departments, state agencies, and local community-based partners to implement this initiative. The Fellow will be assisted by Climate Corps interns doing outreach in their own communities as part of “Better Homes for All,” helping neighbors and fellow community members.
- **Mobile Home Resilience Grants Program (\$140,000)** - A proposal to create a grant program, thanks to federal funding, to fill a gap in state funding for improvements to mobile and manufactured homes. The grants will be administered through a contract with Ulster County Community Action, the local administrator of the federal Weatherization Assistance Program, to enable these households to shift from costly propane heat to an efficient heat pump that provides both heating and cooling more affordably.
- **Protecting Renters from Home Lead Hazards (\$550,000, fully state-funded)** - To address lead paint hazards in rental housing, a new New York State law establishes a statewide lead rental registry and requires County Health Departments to inspect rental units in designated communities of concern. Building owners must remediate hazards, and a lead safety certificate will be issued and tracked in a state registry. More than 4,200 buildings will require inspection in Ulster County, 85% of them in Kingston and the rest, in nearby towns. The County will partner with the City of Kingston’s Building Department for lead-hazard inspections, leveraging their existing code compliance inspections for efficiency.

Investments in Transit & Infrastructure

The free UCAT bus system serves as an essential and affordable means of transportation for residents, facilitating access to work, education, and appointments, and also supports our Tourism industry by providing convenient transportation to attractions around the County.

- **UCAT Route Optimization Assessment** - Undertaken by the Ulster County Transportation Council, the goal is to better meet riders’ needs by increasing the frequency of service, extending certain routes, and reducing wait times at connections. The public will have opportunities to provide input on proposals in the Fall, with changes expected to be finalized by the end of the year. Service improvements will be implemented over three years, and the budget will be amended to reflect added costs, if any, in 2025. Thanks to a new Occupancy Tax policy, which dedicates 25% of tax

revenues from visitor stays to transportation, the additional revenue is expected to offset the cost of improvements.

- **Microtransit** - The County has applied for \$3.4 million in funding from the NYS Department of Transportation's Innovative Mobility Initiative — a five-year pilot program to provide on-demand bus service in three areas of the County where there are higher numbers of residents without personal transportation. In the County's proposal, small UCAT buses would provide service to appointments, shopping plazas, and other local destinations, either directly or by connecting riders to buses on fixed routes. News on this grant application should come by the end of the year.
- **Improving our Bridges (\$10M capital reserve; \$350,000 operating)** - The impacts of climate change, including more severe weather and flooding, increases wear and tear on transportation infrastructure and underscores the importance of preventive maintenance and resilient design.
 - **New Bridge Reserve Fund (\$10M)** The County Executive proposes to establish a \$10 million reserve to reduce borrowing costs for the bridge replacement program, which will provide long-term savings to taxpayers.
 - **New Department of Public Works Positions** - Four positions would be added to road and bridge crews to meet increasing needs and reduce costs by keeping more of the work in-house rather than contracting it out.

Helping Local Governments Go Green

- **Clean Energy Municipality Assistance (\$2.5M)** - Using federal American Rescue Plan Act funding, the County is helping local governments reduce climate-damaging emissions and provide long-term taxpayer savings. Twelve municipal solar and electric vehicle charging projects were awarded funding in 2024 totaling \$750,000. A second round of grants, drawing on remaining funds, will be made available in 2025:
 - **Energy Manager & EV Charging Grants** - The County will offer grants to offset the local share of a NYSERDA-funded program for local governments to hire an on-site energy manager for up to two years. The program will also continue to offer grants for public electric vehicle charging facilities.
 - **Intermunicipal Climate Task Force** - The County will also establish an intermunicipal climate task force of the Environmental Management Council, with staff support from the Department of Environment, to coordinate and enhance municipal climate initiatives and facilitate information-sharing.

Emergency Medical Services Investments

In an emergency situation involving health or injury, it is critical that our residents can count on prompt medical service. While many areas of the county have robust Emergency Medical Service (EMS) coverage, certain regions face significant gaps, reflecting wider state and national trends in declining recruitment and other challenges. This budget proposes initiatives to enhance EMS recruitment, provide necessary training and equipment for volunteers, and support a multijurisdictional approach to address service gaps.

- **Legal Services to Support a Shared Model (\$10,000)** - Several County municipalities are discussing a joint contract for Advanced Life Support (ALS) services to improve emergency response for critical situations (like heart attacks and strokes), which make up about 60% of calls. The Emergency Services Department is facilitating these talks, and the Executive Budget proposes contracting with a law firm specializing in EMS contracts to supplement this support with legal expertise.
- **EMS Recruitment & Training (\$176,000 net County cost)** - The County, in partnership with SUNY Ulster, will seek state approval to offer EMS certification programs, incentivizing program completion and field service with a work-study stipend, modeled on the State Fire Service work-study program. Additionally, the County will establish an EMS Training Unit within the Department of Emergency Management to ensure first responders are current on all training requirements and best practices.
- **EMS Grant Program (\$500,000)** - The County would establish an EMS Grant Program to assist volunteer EMS services with purchasing equipment that bolsters their capability to provide a higher level of patient care.
- **EMS Advisory Board:** An EMS Advisory Board will be established to gather and relay information regarding ongoing needs and possible solutions related to Emergency Medical Services.

Investing in Our People

- **Supporting Veteran Families (\$50,000)** - The County will launch a new program to support caregivers of current or former military members. These caregivers often lack formal support and frequently care for individuals with service-related mental health challenges. This funding will establish peer support for military-connected families and ensure they have access to the necessary local, state, and federal resources.
- **Supporting Youth in Emergency Housing (\$215,000)** - The Executive budget includes funding to extend after-school and summer programming opportunities to youth in emergency housing. The Youth Bureau, in partnership with the Department of Social Services, will coordinate placements and also ensure that transportation is available if

needed. In 2025, the primary focus will be on the Kingston Motel, where the majority of families in emergency housing are currently placed.

- **SUNY Ulster (\$7.1M)** - To help all our young people realize their full potential, education is key, and the Executive Budget continues to reflect a strong commitment to our community college with an increase in operational support of over \$200,000 in 2025, for a total County contribution of \$7.1 million.
- **A New Start for Incarcerated Individuals (\$38,000)** - “Corrections to Careers,” a partnership with the Carpenters’ Union Local 279 launched by the County Executive in partnership with the Sheriff, provides incarcerated individuals with pre-apprenticeship training. In 2025, the program will be expanded to include next-level training in the union apprenticeship program upon release from jail for a rewarding career in the trades.
- **New Entrepreneurs and Small Business Opportunities** - The County Economic Development Department is applying for a \$300,000 Community Development Block Grant to fully fund a new **Ulster County Entrepreneur Employment Grant Program**. The program would offer micro-grants and support services to entrepreneurs and businesses, with more than half of the grants dedicated to entrepreneurs with incomes at or below 80% of the area median income. The goal is to expand opportunities, foster a diverse and inclusive business environment, and create jobs.
 - In addition to the micro-grant program, the County will restructure and re-energize the existing **Revolving Loan Fund, (already capitalized at approximately \$1.2 million)** to help small businesses facing barriers to accessing capital, including minority-, women-, and veteran-owned businesses. These low-interest loans can be used for working capital, energy efficiency and facility upgrades, as well as machinery and equipment purchases.