

NEWS



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Orange County Executive

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10-07-11 THIS WEEK IN ORANGE COUNTY BY EDWARD A. DIANA

Well it's certainly been another busy week for Orange County Government. Our DPW crews continue to work tirelessly to repair roads and bridges washed out by last month's storms, the staff of the County Clerk's office has been working hard to get settled in their new space on Glenmere Cove Road, and the Planning Department has maintained on-going communication with the MTA, MetroNorth, and Shortline Coach USA to address the travel needs of our County's commuters. Members of Team Orange throughout the County have been committed to ensuring the needs of residents are met during this time of transition. I truly appreciate their dedication and cooperation.

After many long weeks and months of meetings, deliberation, analysis, and number crunching, I presented the proposed 2012 Executive Recommended Budget to the Orange County Legislature on Monday, October 3. Each year, the job of preparing the County's budget becomes more and more challenging as state and federal mandates force us to do more with less. In my ten years as County Executive, this has been the most difficult budget I've had to prepare; I had many sleepless nights as I struggled to determine the most fiscally responsible course of action for our County and for all of our residents.

The 2012 gross budget is \$711 million, down .69% from last year. Of that figure, \$508 million, or 79%, will be consumed by programs – largely for social services – that are mandated by Albany and Washington, DC. That means more than three-quarters of Orange County's annual budget is outside of our control, spent for us without any say in that matter. Worse than that, those mandates leave us with only 21% or \$.21 from every dollar we earn to do the business necessary to provide for the needs of more than 380,000 residents. Imagine what it would be like to deal with your daily expenses if you were forced to give someone else \$.79 of each dollar in your paycheck – regardless of your thoughts on how that money is being spent – and you were left with only \$.21 to cover the costs of the things you want and need. On top of that, the costs of the goods and services you use continue to go up and up. For 2012, the expenses related to employee benefits and pensions have gone up yet again!

It is those mandates and rising costs, coupled with a precipitous cut in New York State's Medicaid rates, that at last forced my hand and made it necessary for me to make what has been one of the most difficult decisions in my life – to defund the County's Valley View nursing home, effective July 1, 2012. My goal, as it has always been, is to work with the legislature to find a buyer so that we may preserve the quality care and the jobs here in Orange County for the people of our County.

While the decision did not come easily, and required considerable consultation and consideration, it should not have come as a surprise to anyone. For years, I have been warning that the ever increasing expenses of Valley View have become untenable. In fact, the results of the report commissioned by the legislators themselves told the same cautionary tale and recommended that the legislature work to privatize this long-standing County institution. I implore them to now take the necessary action for the good of the entire County.

Orange County is not alone in addressing the challenges presented by a system of care that no longer works in today's climate. My counterpart in neighboring Ulster County, Executive Michael Hein, announced that he too will be seeking to privatize their County's nursing home, while Long Island's Suffolk County and many other counties throughout NYS are considering the future viability and options for their county-run nursing homes.

Rest assured that decisions such as these do not come lightly. They are the tough decisions that must be made to ensure that the necessary programs and services are in place to provide for the needs of all County residents. I know that concerned community members will be forthcoming with their thoughts and feedback. I urge you to get the facts, take time to understand the issues, and know that I am committed to doing what is right for each and every Orange County resident.

Until next week, best wishes for good health and happiness,

Edward A. Diana, County Executive