

Get Unlimited Access To Local News

30¢ For the First Month

Subscribe Now

([http://offers.lohud.com/specialoffer?](http://offers.lohud.com/specialoffer?gps-source=BENB&utm_medium=nanobarap2&utm_source=bounce-exchange&utm_campaign=2018DO30CENTS)

gps-

source=BENB&utm_medium=nanobarap2&utm_source=bounce-exchange&utm_campaign=2018DO30CENTS)

VIZIO 60 Inch Class Full Array LED Smart HD TV (2 Pack) (Certified Ref...	Sceptre 50" Class FHD (1080P) LED TV (X505BV-FSR)	Refurbished TCL 32" Class HD (720P) Roku Smart LED TV (32S301)	Refurbished TCL 55" Class 4K (2160P) Roku Smart LED TV (55S401)	Refurbished Philips 50" Class 4K (2160p) Smart LED TV (50PFL5602/F...
\$1,258	\$199.99	\$109.99	\$309.99	\$259.99
More info	More info	More info	More info	More info

Audit: Westchester had \$81.1M in deficits over 5 years, facing 'deteriorating' condition

Mark Lungariello, Rockland/Westchester Journal News Published 3:09 p.m. ET Oct. 23, 2018 | Updated 4:21 p.m. ET Oct. 23, 2018

County will consider asking state to increase sales tax, other revenues.



(Photo: Albert Conte/The Journal News)

New York state auditors said a dwindling reserve fund and a series of budget deficits indicates Westchester County is facing a “deteriorating financial condition.”

The county experienced planned operating deficits totaling \$81.1 million over the past five years, a report released Tuesday by the office state Comptroller Thomas P. DiNapoli said.

[MOUNT VERNON: Is the city having a toilet paper crisis? \(/story/news/local/westchester/mount-vernion/2018/10/23/mount-vernion-having-toilet-paper-crisis/1731799002/\)](https://www.lohud.com/story/news/local/westchester/mount-vernion/2018/10/23/mount-vernion-having-toilet-paper-crisis/1731799002/)

The county’s fund balance in accounts including water and sewer funds declined \$201 million, or 23 percent over that time, the audit said. Westchester County Executive George Latimer, a Democrat who took office in January, had criticized his predecessor on the campaign trail for budgeting practices.



Westchester County Executive George Latimer speaks with the Editorial Board at Lohud.com at their offices in White Plains on July 30, 2018. (Photo: Carucha L. Meuse/The Journal News)

“It is my job to dig our way out of it and if I do well, or I do it poorly, that’s on me but I had something to dig out from and that’s what this report shows,” he told The Journal News/lohud. “It points in very great detail the things that could’ve, should’ve, would’ve but weren’t and now we have to both respond to the audit and then have more rational policy.”

Former County Executive Rob Astorino, a Republican who served from 2010-17, aimed to stick to a pledge of keeping the property tax flat during his tenure. Budget balance was achieved through cuts, but also relying on one-shot revenues and by tapping into reserves to close deficits as costs increased year to year.

Buy Photo 

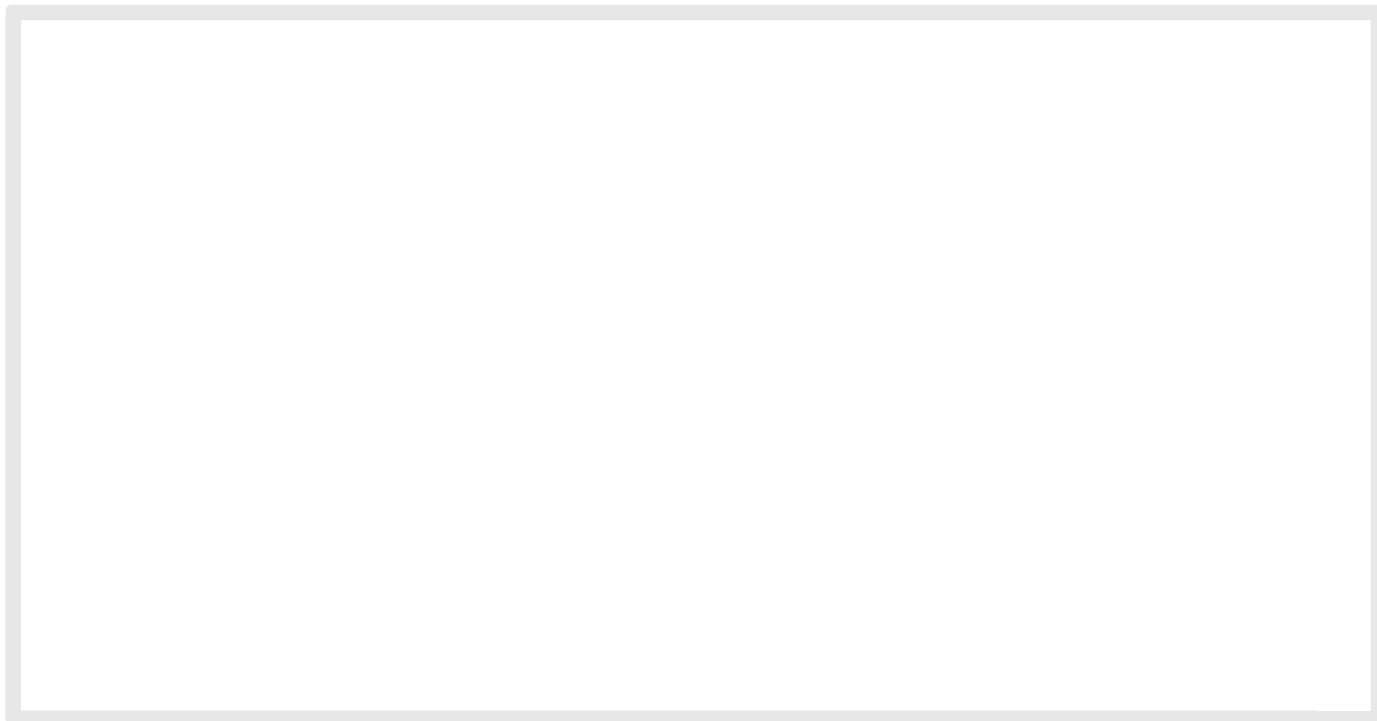


County Executive Rob Astorino gives an interview at the Westchester County Office Building on Tuesday, December 12, 2017. (Photo: John Meore/The Journal News)

The general fund saw its fund balance sapped by \$32.2 million in 2017. Fund balance of \$44.8 million was appropriated to balance the budget again this year, the audit showed.

- Outstanding debt grew to \$1.6 billion, an increase of \$65 million, or 5.6 percent, during the five-year review period.
- In 2016, the county used \$20.4 million from the sale of properties to balance the budget, closing what would've otherwise been an \$18.9 million budget gap.
- Although a small portion of overall debt, \$11.8 million, was used to pay for corporate back-tax settlements, auditors said those expenses should be paid as an expense rather than through bonding.

ADVERTISEMENT



The comptroller recommended the county stop using one-time revenues to balance the budget, and increase revenue or decrease spending on a recurring basis to stabilize the budget.

Westchester should also enact a long-term financial plan that eases the county off reliance on debt and its practice of deferring obligations.

The county will be exploring several options to stabilize the budget over several years, said Latimer, whose first budget proposal is due next month.

Beyond increasing the property tax levy, the county will analyze if it's time to ask to increase the local sales tax.

The county executive, who previously served in the New York State Senate, said he would also look for state approval to install red-light cameras in the county to generate revenue and potentially get a several-million-dollar increase funding to police local parkways.

"We're going to try to make a much more robust effort up in Albany to capture revenues that other counties have," Latimer said. "No one of these is a killer stream and we're going to look at all the other levies that we have."

There are no long-term cutting plans, Latimer said, but Westchester is expecting some retirements to take hold now that all eight of its labor unions have up-to-date contracts and retroactive pay settled.

The audit looked at the county general fund, sewer fund, water fund, airport fund and refuse fund over a five-year period.

The county's general budget is \$1.8 billion.

DINAPOLI: See the complete comptroller report (<https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/5017667-October-2018-audit-of-Westchester-County.html>)

Follow Mark Lungariello on Facebook: [@lungariello](http://facebook.com/lungariello) (<http://facebook.com/lungariello>); Twitter: [@marklungariello](http://twitter.com/marklungariello) (<http://twitter.com/marklungariello>).