

**ERIE COUNTY FISCAL STABILITY AUTHORITY  
ANALYSIS OF THE ERIE COUNTY  
SEPTEMBER 2016 BUDGET MONITORING REPORT  
November 21, 2016**

**Overview**

Starting in May of each year, Erie County publishes its Budget Monitoring Report (BMR). The document delineates county revenues and spending vs its budget spread, generally on a monthly basis. The ECFSA uses the BMR and associated comparisons to review the county's financial condition and report on potential fiscal bright spots and issues that may require attention/action for the current fiscal year.

In its analysis, the ECFSA will report on major 2016 items from the county's over \$1.4 billion budget that can have a material impact in the county's finances, such as:

- **Sales Tax Revenues** – At just over \$444 million, sales tax revenues are the largest single source of income for the county, encompassing approximately 30% of the operating budget. There are twenty six individual sales tax transfers each year that are processed and analyzed separate of this report, by the ECFSA.
- **Appropriated Fund Balance** - For 2016 the county has appropriated \$8,480,096 from its accumulated fund balance to be used as revenue to offset anticipated county spending.
- **Salaries** – The county has budgeted over \$207 million in salaries for 2016, including a \$2,000,000 reduction for the value of positions kept vacant during the year. The corresponding vacancy figure for 2015 was also \$2,000,000.
- **Fringe Benefits** – The county has budgeted over \$128 million in fringe benefits for 2016.
- **Overtime** – The county has budgeted \$13.97 million for overtime expense in 2016. Overtime spending has been problematic for the county for a number of years. The 2015 overtime budget was \$13.92 million.
- **Contractual Services** – The county has budgeted over \$482 million for contractual services in 2016, up from \$478 million in 2015. The largest

portion of this spending is for just over \$339 million in sales tax transfers to local governments. This expense category includes some of the transfers to the Erie County Medical Center Corporation (ECMCC).

- **Program Specific** - The county has budgeted \$486 million in program expenses for 2016, down from \$496 million in 2015. The largest item in this category is over \$206 million for Medicaid Local Share payments, down from \$210 million in 2015. This expense group also includes \$16.2 million in Disproportionate Share (DSH) payments for ECMCC.

### **Specific Items**

1. **Sales Tax Revenues** – At this point, county expectations of sales tax revenues are not being met. The county budgeted \$325.48 million in revenues for the first nine months of 2016 and received \$323.67 million in sales tax revenues. The \$1.81 million negative variance represents 0.56% of the nine month budget. However, ECFSA analyses of payments received through November of 2016 indicates county sales tax receipts for the current year are running 0.17% above 2015 actuals. For the county to meet its sales tax budget, that rate of increase has to be 1.53%. At the current rate of increase, the county would incur a \$5.95 million deficit in this account.
2. **Appropriated fund Balance** – Through the first nine months of 2016, the county has not used any of the appropriated \$8.48 million fund balance as a revenue to balance its finances. However, legislation has been put forward that would use \$1.5 million of that account for security for the Rath Building. Communication 4E-22 was approved on July 14<sup>th</sup> that would authorize the use of up to \$1.5 million in fund balance for this purpose.
3. **Salaries** - Salary expenses for the first nine months of the year are running \$8 million below budget. The county has done a good job in keeping a significant number of full-time positions vacant, while not negatively impacting overtime expense (more on this in the “overtime” section of the report). Vacancy levels were down for the first part of 2016, but have picked up in the last few months. After being in the 140-150 range for a number of months, they have been in the 170-180 range until recently. The most recent vacancy report shows 175 vacancies with an annualized net (after lost reimbursements) of \$4.2 million.
4. **Fringe Benefits** - The county is showing a \$5.4 million positive variance, which is about 5.68% of the period budget. What this positive variance is attributed to at this point is unclear. The county does not sufficiently break out individual components to allow a reasonable analysis of this set of accounts.

5. **Overtime** – For the first nine months of 2016, the county is running a deficit of \$1,266,002 in this account, representing a negative variance of 12.28 % of budget. At the same time last year, the county was running a \$861,398 deficit in this account which translates to a 8.34% negative variance. At the current rate of deficit, the county would have a negative variance of \$1.7 million in this account at year-end.
6. **Contractual Services** – For the first nine months of 2016, the county is running a positive variance of \$5.4 million in this account, representing 1.53% of budget. Last year at this time, the figures were slightly better – \$2.26 million positive variance, equating to 0.65% of budget. There appear to be no major issues with this account for 2016 thus far.
7. **Program Specific** – For the nine months of 2016, the county is running a deficit of \$3.9 million in this account. For the same period last year, the county had a deficit of \$2.5 million. For the period, the county has recorded a \$27.1 million expense against an annual budget of \$16.2 million for ECMCC related Disproportionate Share (DSH) spending – a \$10.9 million deficit. MMIS Medicaid Local Share expenses, due to a 2013 NYS reconciliation of indigent care expenses being charged to the county is currently over budget by \$3.3 million. There is a county borrowing proposal that would create a credit system in return for borrowing savings to relieve the county of future, originally unanticipated, expenses in ECMCC related expenses..

The administration attempted to designate \$5 million for this 2016 item from 2015 surplus funds in an amendment to the county's budget balancing amendments. The proposal was rejected by the legislature. The county has indicated negotiations are ongoing with ECMCC regarding DSH and IGT related expenses. It appears that ECMCC related expenses are not being reduced as anticipated in the county's assessment of the Affordable Care Act.

## **Summary**

For the first time in four months, the county is showing a positive budget variance, totalling \$537,696.

In the first nine months of 2016, there are a number of concerns for the county:

- Sales tax revenues are not growing at a rate that meets the year-to-date and full-year budget. This has been a recurring issue for the county.

- In the first nine months of the year, the county is accessing up to \$1.5 million of the \$8.48 million budgeted fund balance for Rath Building security measures.
- Overtime, is once again problematic for the county and bears watching.
- ECMCC related expenses are problematic for the county. There is currently a \$10.9 million shortfall in the related account that the county is attempting to address through negotiations with the Medical Center.
- Vacancy control numbers, are down, as compared to 2015, leaving the county with less of a cushion in the event of a series of negative variances during the year. However, the net vacancy savings exceeds the budget for those savings.

At this point, the county is showing a slight surplus. There are a number of items that bear watching to provide reasonable assurance that the county's budget will balance at year-end.