

ALBANY COUNTY NEW YORK **Planning for Prosperity**



**TECHNOLOGY &
INFRASTRUCTURE**



**ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT**



**COMMUNITY
DEVELOPMENT**



**PUBLIC HEALTH
INITIATIVES**

AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN 2021

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ALBANY COUNTY EXECUTIVE

Executive Summary

The COVID-19 pandemic that waged war throughout the globe had a direct and devastating impact on so many local governments, including Albany County. Indeed, to battle back, and to build back better, stronger and smarter, it will take all of us working together in a partnership to accomplish this herculean task.

To be sure, this shall be a defining moment in our history that shall impact future generations over the next century. As such, the importance of making prudent, educated, cautious and calculated decisions cannot be overstated. In processing our decisions and developing plans, we must:

- Coordinate efforts
- Consider all ideas
- Champion diversity
- Be responsive to the public
- Be reflective of the past
- Recognize the future; And above all,
- **We must be bold and we must be brave.**

This all has to be considered in the context of our fiscal responsibility to our taxpaying citizens.

President Biden, in partnership with Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer and all of Congress, approved the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021. The destruction from the pandemic is unprecedented; and as such, the response to recover from the most devastating health and fiscal crisis needed to be greater than ever before, it needed to be bold and it needed to provide the resources to build back our communities and our economy safer, healthier, smarter and stronger. Indeed, the American Rescue Plan does just this.

With the understanding of the above, we must have a two-phase approach. Phase I shall focus on the direct fiscal impact to our county government revenues as a result of the pandemic. In 2020, we had \$89 million dollars in lost revenue. Such a loss in a single year could be absolutely crippling to the operations of government. Fortunately, during the eight years preceding the COVID-19 pandemic, Albany County Executive Daniel P. McCoy set forth prudent fiscal policies that created increases in the County fund balance. Further, during the pandemic, Albany County developed key strategies to curtail spending, including the implementation of a hiring freeze and a committee to examine the filling of vacancies, and the establishment of an Early Separation Payout (ESP) program. All of these actions were necessary in our response to COVID-19.

While we cannot recoup all \$89 million of our lost revenue, the American Rescue Plan provides for Albany County to recover \$27.25 million of qualified revenue losses. This shall occur in Phase I of our plan during 2021.

Through all of our efforts before the pandemic, and our vigilance and prudence in 2020 and 2021, together with the receipt of the critically needed federal funds, it is projected that the finances of the County shall be in a positive fiscal environment that is sustainable and strong, and one that provides opportunity for continued economic growth. Setting forth and completing Phase I is imperative to the viability and

successes planned for Phase II. A strong fiscal foundation is the key to future success in a growing and thriving economy.

With our strong fiscal position, in 2022 the County shall begin Phase II of our recovery plan. In beginning this phase, we must reflect upon what we learned through COVID-19. As we have navigated our way through this pandemic, we have:

1. **Reimagined our operations and workforce;**
2. **Developed a better understanding of the health disparities in our communities and the need to address these;**
3. **Seen the progression of growth industries and introduction of clean, green energy sources and the necessity to foster development of technology and infrastructure;**
4. **Made a commitment to economic development and are cognizant of the fact that the strategic location of some projects can be the catalyst to strengthen communities;**
5. **Developed an understanding that investment in our communities does not begin and end with economic development; but rather, requires our continued partnership and investment in businesses, not-for-profits and stakeholders to bring a sense of pride, ownership and community to our neighborhoods;**
6. **Recognized the intersection of health, mental health and recreation for our youth and the for the public as a whole and the need to break down barriers and created broader opportunities for all citizens; and**
7. **Seen the internet/broadband challenges that exist in both rural and urban areas, and the significant hindrance this has on our students.**

In Phase II, we shall use ARP stimulus relief, together with Albany County resources to address many of the issues bulleted above, and further explained below. Through outreach efforts, and inclusion of ideas and strategies from various partners and stakeholders, the specific investments for each project shall evolve over time, and as such, a supplemental and revised Phase II plan shall be published.

While Phase II is only possible with a strong and secure fiscal base, as referenced above, more is necessary to be truly successful. For ultimate success, it requires strength - strength in leadership, strength in partnerships, strength in our communities, strength in our compassion and caring, and strength in our experiences and successes. And finally, success will require us to have hope. Hope that is not blindly following an idea or ignoring the challenges that we face. Hope is more. It is not accepting that there is only one path to success; but rather, having the courage to reach out beyond our comfort zone and to accept the changes needed and to take the actions required to create a better world for our future and the future of our children. In Albany County we have the strength and we have the hope, and as such, we confidently submit this plan as a pathway to our success.

County COVID-19 Response

The COVID-19 pandemic challenged the County to be adaptable and innovative in its response. Albany County prioritized addressing inequities in its response, developing strategies related to testing, care coordination, supportive resources, data and surveillance, vaccination, and communication challenges for historically underserved populations. Ultimately, it took all of Albany County government and our

community partners coming together and working in concert to respond effectively. When gaps in services were identified, the County and partners responded in due course by creating programs in a timely fashion to fill those voids. Many of these programs were created from scratch, and as feedback on the effectiveness of those services was received, they were adjusted. Highlights of the County's response effort include:

1. **Mobile Community Testing.** At the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic it became evident that accessible and timely testing was critical to successful mitigation efforts and that lower income and minority communities faced significant challenges in accessing testing services. The County successfully advocated for New York State to establish a drive-through testing site in Albany County; however, this and other early sites were located primarily in suburban areas, limiting access for at-risk urban residents without personal transportation. Recognizing this access issue, the County partnered with Whitney M. Young Jr. Health Services, a federally qualified health center, to implement multi-site mobile COVID-19 testing services targeting low income and minority communities. The goals of the mobile program included: operating a free mobile COVID-19 testing unit; fostering community involvement in the decision-making process; providing culturally and linguistically sensitive COVID-19 health education; and identifying individuals at risk for COVID-19 in Albany County. One crucial factor contributing to the success of the program was the collaboration between Albany County, Whitney Young, the City of Albany, and numerous community-based organizations in recognizing the barriers to COVID-19 testing and designing a program to overcome them. Fiscal support from the County, philanthropies, health insurers, and the CARES Act, combined with Whitney Young's operational experience providing mobile health care services made the program a success. To reduce health inequities, the mobile COVID-19 testing service was operated free of charge and located in communities characterized by lower income and/or minority demographics, removing barriers due to lack of fiscal or transportation resources. The immediate public health impact of the mobile COVID-19 testing program was to expand COVID-19 testing to underserved populations in Albany County.
2. **Mobile Community Vaccination and Pre-Registration System.** The FDA's emergency use authorization of a COVID-19 vaccine in mid-December 2020, began a historic and unprecedented effort to mobilize the vaccination of Americans as quickly as possible. As vaccines became available to New Yorkers in early 2021, demand for the vaccine vastly overwhelmed supply, and numerous logistical challenges arose, including that residents who were both interested in a vaccine and either eligible or not-yet-eligible had no place to register their intent in being vaccinated. In response, Albany County and a host of other partners built an IT system to meet the technical challenges presented by the rollout of the vaccine. This IT system was then used to invite interested residents to register for community-based vaccine clinics near them. A public-facing website allowed residents to "pre-register" for a vaccine. Users entered their contact information, demographic data, and eligibility-related information into the form and received confirmation they had successfully pre-registered and would be contacted when vaccine became available. This tool built a virtual queue for residents, allowing them to feel seen and that they had "a place in line." Over 45,000 county residents successfully pre-registered on the site. For those residents who pre-registered, communicating with them in a regular and action-oriented manner was the goal, and roughly 93,000 messages were sent to

connect pre-registrants to vaccines. By the time the system was taken down, 88% of all pre-registrants had successfully been vaccinated.

In order to best serve residents, it was deemed critical that community-based pop-up clinics be established to bring vaccine appointments directly into their neighborhoods, meeting residents where they live, work, and play. Working together with a group of non-traditional providers such as EMS agencies and pharmacists, nearly 50 pop-up clinics were held across the county, representing nearly 9,500 vaccinations. These pop-up clinics were held in public housing buildings, public libraries, senior centers, churches, legion halls, congregate living settings, rural town halls, fire stations, local schools, cultural centers – all trusted places for residents to become vaccinated. Clinic locations were selected based on data being produced by the pre-registration system, so where there was demand, clinics were organized. These clinics were much smaller than the mass vaccination sites, handling anywhere from 75-800 vaccines per clinic, meaning there were no more than 25-30 individuals being vaccinated at one time, providing comfort and peace of mind for those who did not want to attend a large mass vaccination event.

3. ***Food Distribution to Quarantined Persons.*** Through a partnership with the National Guard and the Regional Food Bank of Northeastern New York, the County was able to deliver 5,600 boxes of food (each box contained around 35 pounds of groceries) to quarantined families in need during the first two months of the pandemic. At the time, grocery store supply chain issues, limited store-to-door delivery infrastructure, the cost prohibitive nature of grocery delivery and access to delivery services being dependent on internet, were realities residents faced. These disparities were even more pronounced in communities of color. In response to the need, an emergency food delivery program was established. By taking care of people's immediate dietary needs — the County likely depressed its infection rate by helping ensure compliance with quarantine orders. The relaxing of NYConnects eligibility criteria also kept some of the most vulnerable, older residents in the County at home and gave them access to home delivered meals. Once the immediate need subsided, the County transitioned this service to the Food Pantries for the Capital District, who continue to provide grocery delivery to quarantined persons in need today.
4. ***Mental Health Hotline.*** Early on, it became clear to Albany County that any extended economic shutdown and quarantine would have serious implications on the mental wellbeing of residents. Accordingly, within the first week of identifying the first cases of COVID-19 locally, the County deployed its disaster mental health support line to help those struggling with anxiety, depression and anyone who needed a compassionate listening ear. Over 470 crisis calls to the County's Emergency Support Line were received. The County had experts on the other end of the phone assuring residents that they were never alone during this crisis.

Recovery Efforts Underway

COVID-19 forced Counties to rapidly innovate and shift the way they operate and provide services. Over the past 18 months Albany County has taken dramatic but necessary steps to continue to be able to provide essential and supportive services at a high level. Some examples of these efforts that are completed or currently underway include:

1. Looking at the future of the County Workforce.

Strengthening Albany County workforce with a vision of forward thinking progression and the development of higher skilled personnel through the creation of a comprehensive and intuitive action plan that implements robust strategies and incentivizes employees, management and labor toward the unified goal of delivering services at a higher and more effective level while maintaining efficiencies through good government and best practices.

2. Developing Day Care Services at Shaker Place, our County nursing home. The County of Albany is seeking to contract with a New York State OCFS licensed day care center operator who will establish a child day care center in our existing building that is on the site of Shaker Place Rehabilitation and Nursing Center. The physical structure is attached to the Nursing Center and has a separate entrance with approximately 7,000 square feet of building space with adjoining outdoor areas to accommodate outdoor activities. It is anticipated that this will help retain and attract RNs, LPNs, and CNAs to work at Shaker Place Rehabilitation and Nursing Center

3. Summer Youth Programs. Recognizing that there was, and continues to be, a great need to provide opportunities for the youth of Albany County, the County provided funding to five summer programs in 2020. The programs varied, from basketball programs that provided mentorship to programs that focused on character development and community service. The County also provided opportunities to children in the County to participate in sports and crafts at Lawson Lake County Park. The County continues to provide various summer youth programs, especially to those in the more rural areas of Albany County

4. Small Business COVID-19 Recovery Grants. In partnership with the Albany County Legislature, the County used \$500,000 in local funds to support our local small businesses with grants to help them survive the negative impacts of the pandemic.

Phase I - Revenue Loss Recovery

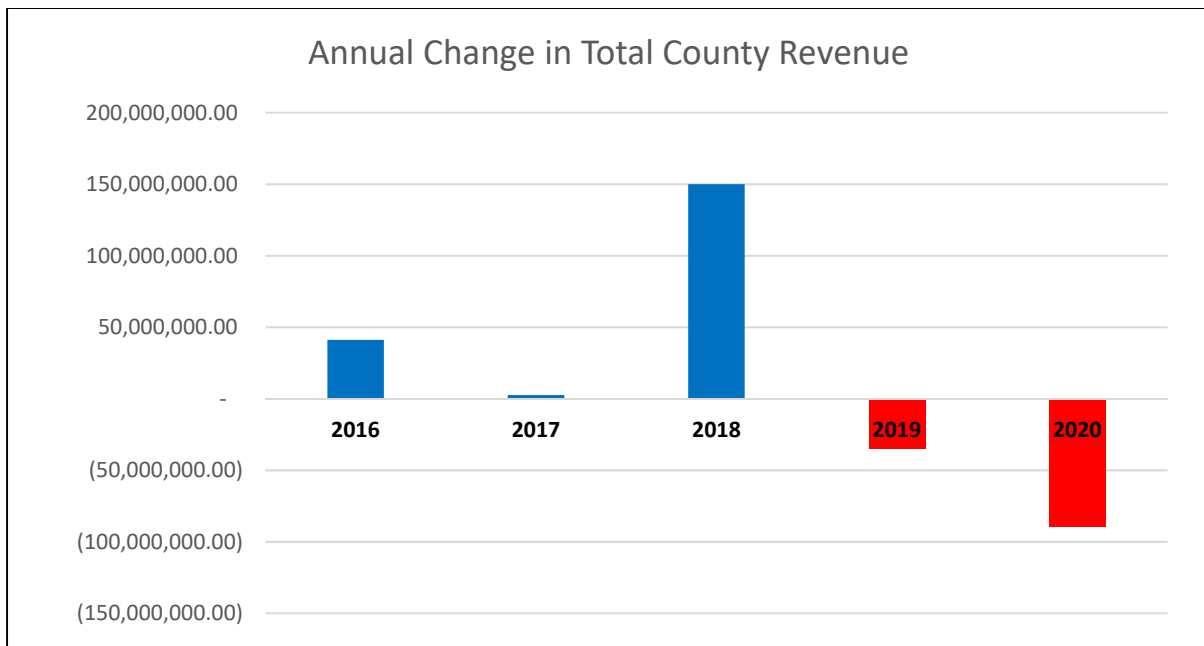
Due to the crippling economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, Albany County experienced a loss of over \$89 million dollars in 2020 compared to the previous year across all revenue streams. Under the U.S. Treasury guidelines for the American Rescue Plan, \$27,244,378 of the stimulus money received to date can be earmarked against allowable losses. As per these guidelines, we have compared actual revenues from 2016-2020 and their year over year percentage changes. The average rate of growth for the years 2016/17, 2017/18 and 2018/19 is calculated and then compared to the 4.1% allowable growth factor determined by the Treasury. The higher number between the actual average growth versus the allowable

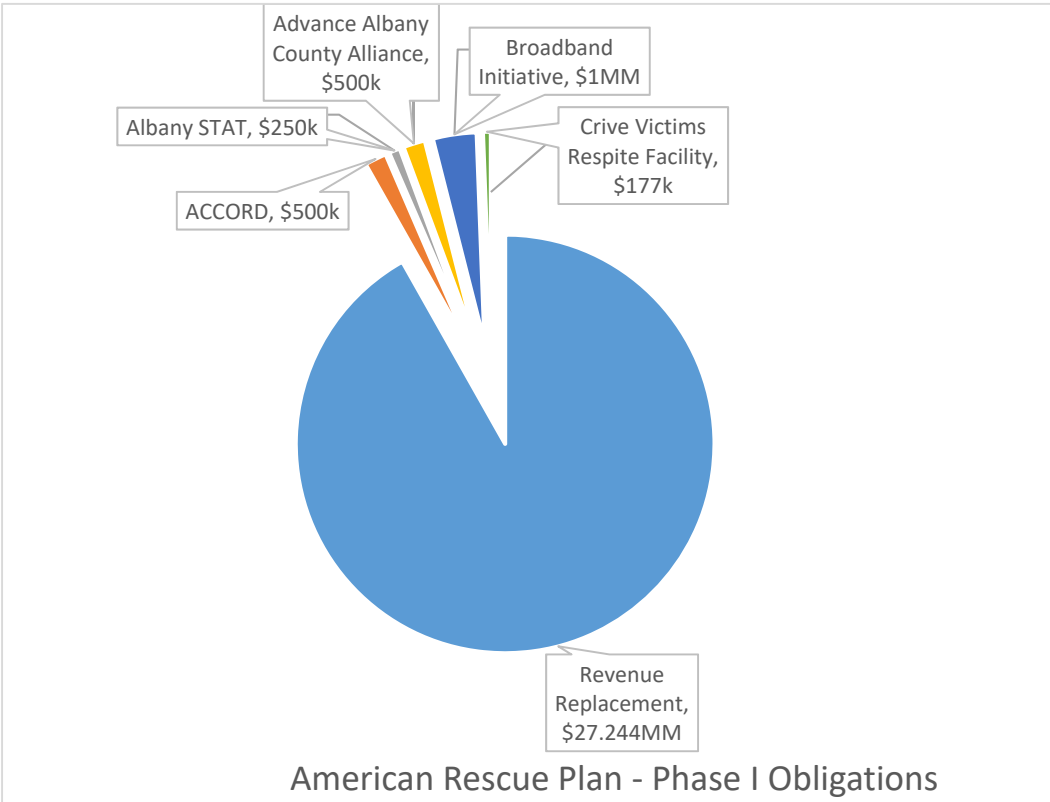
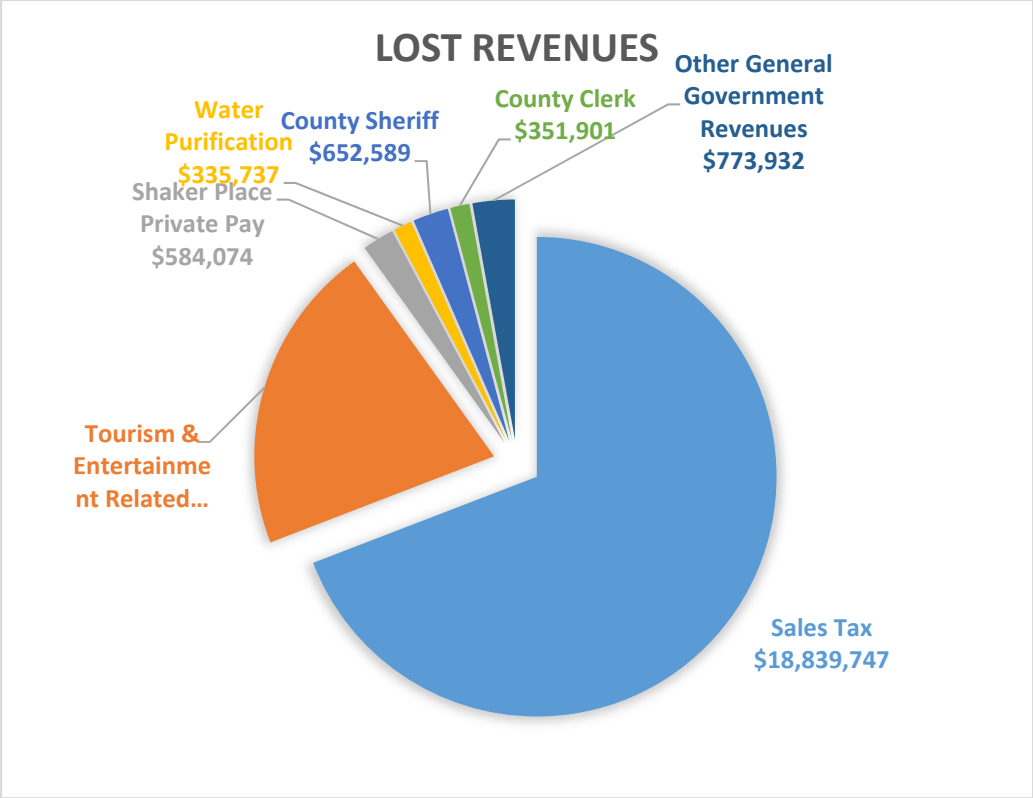
growth factor is then applied to 2019's actual revenue to determine a reasonable expectation for 2020 which is then compared to the actual for 2020. The difference between this expectation and the actual is the loss that may be taken.

Sales tax receipts represent the most significant loss in revenue by far. Albany County received \$284.7 million in 2019 sales tax revenue. The average rate of growth in this category from 2016-2019 is 3.42%, so we take the 4.10% allowable growth factor which amounts to an expected revenue of \$296,404,963 versus our actual receipts of \$265,005,385 for a full sales tax loss of \$31,399,577. The County has agreements in place to distribute 40% of this money to the municipalities in the county so the allowable share for this revenue stream is \$18,839,746.

Outside of general sales tax, the biggest impacts came to our revenue streams tied to the tourism and entertainment industries as this sector of the economy was especially hard hit. For example, our loss in revenue for our portion of the local Hotel Occupancy Tax is \$1.938 million. The lost revenue calculated for our share of Casino Revenue from the Rivers Casino is \$1.477 million. Our County owned arena, the Times Union Center, gave no revenue back to the County in 2020 compared to an expected revenue of \$1.938 million using the Treasury calculation. That is on top of a \$643,015 loss in revenue at the parking facility attached to the arena. Other losses in this category are from Off Track Betting at \$192,337 and \$30,218 in lost revenue at our County owned recreation facility.

Impacts to revenue affected other County operations as well. Our Water Purification District calculates an allowable loss of \$335,737 in revenue from private sector drop-offs of septic waste. Other notable losses were at our Departments of Public Works, General Services, and Management & Budget and at the County owned and Operated Shaker Place Rehabilitation & Nursing Center. Additionally, the County Clerk and Sheriff also showed allowable losses of \$351,901 and \$652,588 respectively. The graphs below will help to visualize the scope of these losses and the impact that they had on the County's finances.





Albany County planned early on to follow a two-phased approach in the distribution and utilization of its American Rescue Plan (ARP) funds. With a focus significantly centered on financial stabilization and the replacement of lost revenues, phase one will utilize funds received in calendar year 2021 almost entirely these purposes. By managing these allocations in this way we will build a stable foundation in 2021 that will allow for a robust and creative process in Phase II to determine how the 2022 allocation can be utilized.

Phase II - Investing in our Future

Public Process & Community Engagement

Beginning in 2022, the County will gather key community, business and non-profit stakeholders to begin the process of examining where the greatest need exists in the community. The task force will focus on several general categories that will include, but not be limited to, Parks and Infrastructure, Neighborhood Stabilization, Public Health & Human Services, and Economic Development. Since this process will also include community engagement events and focus groups, the categories will need to be flexible and dynamic as more is learned from the County community about needs, priorities and goals. Task force members will represent a broad coalition of County sectors to properly represent the many facets of the community. This group will draw upon its collective experience and understanding through this pandemic to develop an accurate representation of COVID-19's impacts on the County community, especially those populations within the community that have been historically adversely impacted socially and economically. The culmination of these efforts will be the development of a needs assessment to inform the equitable distribution of ARP funds.

Investing in our Economy

The economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic were devastating and our community will be feeling the impacts for years to come. The ARP represents a once-in-a-generation opportunity to learn from the lessons of the pandemic and make targeted investments that will accelerate a robust and equitable economic recovery. We will do that in five major ways:

1. **Continuing to invest in our economic development capacity.** In December of 2020, Albany County launched the Advance Albany County Alliance. This new economic development organization was developed to coordinate economic development efforts in Albany County, including the economic recovery from COVID-19. The first initiative of the Alliance was a Small Business Grant Program targeted at microbusinesses, and particularly MWBEs, that were negatively impacted by the pandemic. The Alliance is also utilizing EDA CARES Act funds to assist in the economic recovery. Continuing to support and grow this organization so it has the capacity and resources needed to steer our economic recovery is a priority for the County.
2. **Small Business Assistance.** Small businesses, and particularly MWBEs, were among the hardest hit by COVID-19. The County used \$500,000 in local funds to support these businesses with grants and there is still a need for additional support. This can take the form of grants, a revolving loan fund,

and/or technical assistance. Small businesses are the backbone of our economy and investing in them is the quickest way to get our residents back to work.

3. **Shovel Ready Sites.** Attracting new business to the County and providing existing County business with locations to expand has been identified as one of the most pressing needs to help bring new jobs and economic activity to our community. The above-mentioned Alliance is conducting a shovel-ready site analysis to determine the County's most attractive sites as well as the sites that need investment to become marketable. Supporting these efforts, including investments in water, sewer, broadband, energy and other site-preparation efforts is a top priority for economic development investment. Several County-owned sites, such as the vacant Ann Lee Home (a former Nursing Home located on 13.7 acres of land) will be considered as part of this effort.
4. **Tourism and Hospitality.** Tourism and hospitality were among the hardest hit sectors of our local economy. The local tourism and hospitality market is driven largely by state government and in-person conferences and conventions. Consequently, actual occupancy in 2020 was down 42.6% in 2020. This had a direct impact on the hotels, restaurants, and arts venues like our County-owned civic center and had a secondary impact by reducing County income from hotel occupancy tax. With the increase in Delta Variant cases, financial and/or programmatic support is needed to sustain and revive this important economic driver for our County.
5. **Workforce Development.** The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated and further exposed structural shift in the economy and the jobs to skills mismatch that currently exists. For that reason, strategically investing in workforce development to train our residents so they are prepared to working in our emerging industries. In Albany County those industries include: (1) Advanced Electronics/Semi-Conductors; (2) Offshore Wind/Clean Energy, (3) Biotech/Lifesciences, (4) Software/IT/Gaming, and (5) Advanced Transportation and Logistics. During the pandemic the County partnered with local trades on the launch of a pre-apprenticeship program in Albany's South End focused on the offshore wind industry and will continue to work with partners like Capital Region BOCES and Hudson Valley Community College (HVCC) to further these efforts. In addition, the County is collaborating with HVCC and the Albany International Airport to create a new Aviation Maintenance Technician School (AMTS). ARP funds will help advance these and other transformative workforce development initiatives

Investing in Our Communities

COVID-19 was harmful to our economy and our communities. Bringing our neighborhoods back to life and supporting all of our communities is important to our overall recovery.

1. **Land Bank.** The Albany County Land Bank plays a significant role in returning vacant, abandoned or tax-foreclosed properties back to productive use throughout Albany County. Since it was established by Albany County in 2014 the Land Bank has been supporting neighborhood revitalization efforts with a focus on addressing the tremendous racial housing and economic disparities that affect County residents who have been disproportionately impacted by COVID-19. Prior to effects of the global pandemic many individuals and families were still suffering from the legacy of discriminatory and inequitable housing and lending policies and practices such as

redlining, as well as the predatory lending practices and economic fallout of the 2008 Foreclosure Crisis. Through increased investment in and collaboration with the Land Bank we will leverage the Land Bank's existing programs and partnerships and multiply their impact. This approach will serve as a catalyst for more investment into rehabilitating vacant buildings, creating permanently affordable housing, transforming vacant lots, increasing affordable homeownership and eliminating blighted structures that plague neighborhoods. These investments help to reverse the cycle of disinvestment, support equitable redevelopment of entire neighborhoods and increase economic opportunity but putting more people to work, providing more jobs for minority contractors and creating new pathways for more people - including underserved youth - to become involved in skilled labor. For too long these neighborhoods have been overlooked and left behind. By working together and investing in proven, existing approaches we can transform vacant properties into assets that rebuild neighborhoods and strengthen Albany County.

2. ***Supporting Community partners (non-profits).*** COVID-19 highlighted how important the County's partnerships with non-profits within the community are. Relationships with non-profits in Albany County were strengthened and also allowed the County to form partnerships with lesser-known or new non-profits in response to COVID-19. Partnerships with organizations such as United Way were vital in the County's fight against COVID-19. Moving forward, the County will continue to support community partners who provide vital services in our communities. One such example is partnerships with organizations assisting in the resettlement of Afghan refugees.
3. ***Programming for youth/educational.*** COVID-19 had a monumental impact on universities as well as underrepresented high school students who may not see higher education as a path available to them. In an effort to address both issues, Albany County is currently exploring avenues through which underrepresented local high school students can experience college life while simultaneously bringing more students on campus. The aim is to provide high school students the opportunity to attend college classes while also being exposed to campus life and connecting with other high school students they may not have necessarily interacted with before.

Investing in our Health

COVID-19 highlighted both the importance of public health agencies and the ongoing health disparities that exist in our communities. To continue to address these issues the County will focus in several areas:

1. ***Addressing health disparities.*** COVID-19 has once again laid bare the disproportionate rate at which our minority communities are impacted by chronic disease and health challenges. Concerted efforts to focus on majority minority communities during the pandemic were made to provide testing resources early on in the pandemic and vaccination opportunities later in the pandemic, both with mixed results. These communities continue to be impacted by higher rates of infection coupled with lower rates of vaccination. Furthermore, continued efforts to increase vaccination rates are commonly met by suspicion and resistance. And the disparities continue across a broad range of health conditions, including, hypertension, diabetes, asthma and even rates of lead poisoning. Frequently these conditions are compounded by the lack of access to healthy food and affordable, approachable, healthcare. This feeds into higher rates of teen pregnancy, premature birth and negative birth outcomes. In this regard, it is obvious that a new and novel approach considering all these connected factors be developed to more effectively

combat the underlying issues that are the real root causes of these persistent health disparities. For this reason a focus on data analytics must become the dominant guide for how we provide out services to the community.

2. **Health Emergency Preparedness.** Albany County's health emergency preparedness posture was tested by the COVID-19 pandemic. One of the biggest lessons learned during the COVID-19 pandemic was the need to bolster the County's capacity to respond to all types of health-related hazards including infectious disease outbreaks, natural disasters, and CBRNE events. The County will advance its planning efforts and prioritize outreach efforts to continue to build relationships with community partners in advance of the next disaster. Investments will also be made in logistics, operations, and supplies. The COVID-19 pandemic has depleted the County's existing stockpile and has revealed limitations in asset management capability; personal protective equipment and emergency medical countermeasure stockpile will also be strategically reviewed and resupplied.
3. **Mobile Dental and Vision Services:** Oral and eye health affects lives in ways that are often taken for granted. However, two significant obstacles prevent people from receiving care: cost and access. In Albany County, there are several dental providers that accept Medicaid, but they're physically located within the City of Albany – leaving residents geographically isolated from accessible dental services. Albany County seeks to break down these barriers by bringing dental treatment directly to the places where people need care via mobile dental treatment. By partnering with community agencies and providers, the County seeks to identify populations and areas with the greatest need and gaps in services. The mobile dental initiative seeks to treat those living in poverty, people with disabilities, the elderly, people experiencing homelessness, migrant workers, recovering addicts, veterans, etc. The mobile dental services model will offer dental exams, education, and dental sealants; it's not anticipated that root canals or oral surgery will be offered. This effort would expand on and be complimentary to the school-based dental services efforts already underway through our local federally qualified health center. Additionally, the County will work to integrate mobile vision clinics with the vision screening efforts already underway at schools, as well as other locations and populations where there is need and gaps in payees and service providers.
4. **Alternative Mental Health Crisis Response:** The framework of a multi-faceted plan to change the way law enforcement responds to certain crises is under development in Albany County. In a partnership between the Department of Mental Health and law enforcement agencies, a response unit is being piloted to respond to certain incoming non-violent 911 calls for crisis assistance. The Albany County Crisis Officials Responding and Diverting (ACCORD) program pairs newly hired social workers, as well as those from the County's mobile crisis team, with EMTs from the Sheriff's Department to respond to situations where a law enforcement presence is not paramount and the situation may be more appropriately handled by mental health professionals and/or paramedics. These unarmed responders would be dispatched to non-violent mental illness and substance use disorder events, among others.
5. **Albany County "Stat" and the Development of a Data Driven Approach.** Albany County government is the largest provider of social services in the county and delivers key social safety net programs to thousands of county residents each year. These programs are both federally-, state-, and locally-funded through a variety of funding mechanisms. Ultimately, these programs

are intended to aid residents in need and move them to self-sustainability and economic mobility. In order to best do so, the County is developing a plan to restructure the underlying data infrastructure across various departments and programs in order to best serve residents. The key objectives of this work is to (1) provide senior leadership at the organization with better business intelligence regarding the populations being served by the County's programs (2) better target specific programs at appropriate recipients (3) better understand the impact and ROI of programs and (4) enable the County to innovate higher-intensity programming for residents who need additional support who are currently high-utilizers of county programming for long periods of time.

Concurrently with this effort the County is undertaking the gradual creation of a data division within its Department of Management and Budget. This unit will focus not only on the reactive effort to examine existing programs and services with the goal of improving effectiveness and efficiency, but also the proactive goal of using data to develop new programs with built in evaluation capabilities to guarantee rapid feedback on how effective our efforts and resources are in effectuating positive change on their intended target. The creation of this team will extend into each department through the Comprehensive Workforce Development Plan and will be centralized into the management unit within the Department of Management and Budget. This will provide the specific expertise and specialization within each department to know the granular detail of each department's duties and responsibilities while also preserving the more general and overarching county-wide goals that frequently cut across departmental responsibilities.

Investing in our Infrastructure

The American Rescue Plan recognizes the importance of infrastructure investments, with a particular focus on water, sewer and broadband

1. **High Speed Internet/Broadband.** The pandemic highlighted and exacerbated inequities related to connectivity and internet access. In 2020 the County partnered with local providers to increase availability to students who were forced to work remotely but lacked connectivity. Despite these efforts, it was clear that a more comprehensive approach was needed. The County Executive is in the process of engaging a consultant to conduct a Broadband Study that will include a gap analysis and recommended investments to increase the availability and affordability of broadband throughout the County.
2. **Wastewater.** The County of Albany operates a centralized wastewater treatment system that includes an extensive collection network and two wastewater treatment facilities. Both plants have been in continuous operation since 1974 and require significant capital investment to maintain their level of service. The County is exploring potential opportunities for consolidation to reduce or eliminate the use of incineration at its southern facility, which is located in an environmental justice community.
3. **County Parks.** The COVID-19 pandemic led to an uptick in outdoor recreation and the County is reinvesting in outdoor activities that include Lawson Lake, Slingerlands Trail Head and Ann Lee Pond. At Lawson Lake, several upgrades to the infrastructure like installing bathrooms and potable water need to be completed to give youth programs an opportunity to explore and

appreciate the lake and its surrounding area. The Slingerlands Trail Head is developing into an attraction that all people come to enjoy. The beautification of the area and improving this space provides residents the opportunity to enjoy the multi-use path throughout the year. Some of the next steps are rehabbing a former train depot building and creating a picnic area. The Ann Lee Pond area is being rehabbed to turn it into an attraction for residents and visitors.