

Tompkins County Public Safety Departments Present Recommended 2022 Budgets

Tompkins County District Attorney

District Attorney Matt Van Houten presented his department's \$2.1 million recommended budget. Van Houten thanked his dedicated team of 15 employees, which includes 9 staff attorneys. Two over-target requests included an additional Confidential Investigator position who would aid with "discovery" during investigations including body camera and surveillance footage review, and private laboratory testing services for drug-related cases.

Van Houten added that major influences on the budget include discovery reform, a backlog of jury trials slowed previously due to the pandemic, his participation in the Reimagining Public Safety Collaborative, the launch of the Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion program, and the local Felony Wellness & Recovery Court operations.

Legislator Shawna Black (D-Ithaca) inquired as to the expansion of the Wellness & Recovery Court, which began in the City of Ithaca. Van Houten explained that the Court has expanded to the rest of Tompkins County for misdemeanor level offenses and that he is unsure of the level of State funding coming into the Court.

Legislator Mike Lane (D-Dryden) inquired about the available space for the DA's office, and Van Houten responded that his team is using the space as efficiently as possible but that it is increasingly tight and that more room for employees and operations will be valuable as the County makes further space decisions in the future.

Van Houten spoke to how his office is handling discovery reform (which requires more evidence and discovery to occur for cases), adding that it helps to screen out non-violent, low level offenses that his office chooses not to prosecute. He added that compared to other counties, Tompkins County has taken the law and applied it in "good faith" coming up with a process that works well locally.

Tompkins County Assigned Counsel

Lance Salisbury, Director of the Office of Assigned Counsel presented his department's \$2.6 million recommended budget, an increase from 2021, returning to pre-pandemic budget levels. One over-target request is being sought for \$50,000 for family court costs as a result of New York State broadening the income eligibility for who can be represented by assigned counsel, and that in the last half of 2021 following the reopening of the court system there is a backlog of cases burdening attorneys.

Tompkins County Sheriff & Jail

Tompkins County Sheriff Derek Osborne and Undersheriff Jennifer Olin presented the recommended \$6.6 million Sheriff's office budget. Osborne reported that an increase in the 2021 revenue line was due to a Homeland Security grant accepted by the office. Osborne also reported a decrease in expenditures due to increased retirements of deputies and new hires starting at the hiring rate.

The Tompkins County Sheriff's Office has 48 full time employees and is requesting four additional full-time positions in the 2022 budget, each of which would be in the civil administration office. Osborne stated, "The idea behind that is to have a non-law enforcement response to some of our calls, and to have our sergeants help with accreditation and training and overseeing telephone response to calls that we currently send armed officers out into the field for." TCSO is identifying calls that civilians can handle over the phone and how civilian staff can best work with the impending Community Justice Center which will be started this year to help implement the Reimagining Public Safety plans. A pilot program to have unarmed civilians respond to non-emergency calls was passed under the Reimagining Public Safety plans earlier this year. Legislator Shawna Black (D-Ithaca) stated, "We put a lot of work into Reimagining Public Safety, and it would have been very easy for Counties to not put money in, and it would just be lip service, and the fact that we're willing to support this program and work with the Sheriff's office and give additional staff to roll this out effectively says a lot about our commitment to the program."

Sheriff Osborne and Undersheriff Olin also presented the \$5.4 million Tompkins County Jail recommended budget. Following an inquiry from legislators, Osborne reported that due to the current layout of the jail building there are no opportunities to reduce staffing at this time even as the incarcerated population has decreased. The layout to staffing ratio is a mandated structure from the NYS Commission on Corrections and can only be changed if the jail were to be constructed in a different manner. Part of the Tompkins County Capital Plan is to put \$4 million (not included in the jail budget) towards facility renovations.

Tompkins County Department of Emergency Response

The Tompkins County Department of Emergency Response presented their recommended 2022 budget, totaling \$4.9 million (\$1.6 million of revenues come through grants and other smaller programs). The 2022 budget includes over target requests to restore personnel including a systems manager, emergency services dispatcher, and professional development coordinator. A half time position to help manage the backup dispatch center project is also proposed.

Probation Department

Department Director Dan Cornell presented Probation's \$3.5 million 2022 recommended budget, reflecting a maintenance of effort from 2021. There are 32 full time equivalent employees at the Probation department.

For more information on the previous budget presentations, visit:

<https://www2.tompkinscountyny.gov/news/highlights-september-14-2021-meeting-expanded-budget-committee-tompkins-county-legislature>