

# INSIDE INSIGHTS

THE NEWSLETTER OF  
THE SULLIVAN COUNTY MANAGER



## A BUDGET THAT PUTS TAXPAYERS FIRST

BY JOSHUA POTOSEK, COUNTY MANAGER

I am beyond pleased to have introduced a Tentative Sullivan County Budget that not only proposes to eliminate the Solid Waste Access Fee but aims to reduce property taxes for the first time in four years.

If you're a local taxpayer, you know how heavy the tax burden is. County taxes represent one of the smaller portions of your overall property tax burden, but it all adds up.

The proposed 2023 County Budget aims to do something about that.

Thanks to increased revenues and consistently paying down debt ahead of schedule, we're in a financial position to be able to remove the Solid Waste Access Fee that's been a part of your tax bill for more than a dozen years. For residents, that means an immediate savings of \$45-\$50 per parcel per year, and up to \$750 per parcel per year for commercial property owners.

But I'm also proposing that taxes not increase - and, in fact, bills may go down for many taxpayers, as our calculations indicate a .127% decrease in the tax rate will accompany this budget, if legislators approve it as-is.

All this comes without layoffs or cuts to programs and services, and features historic investments in roads, bridges & buildings. And it's on the heels of the settlements of all our union contracts, so our employees are provided for, as well.

The County Legislature, of course, will have the final say. Prior to adoption of the budget in mid-December, they'll have the chance to tweak what I presented to them, and that could change the numbers.

Regardless, it's a rare opportunity for me to be able to present such a well-balanced budget, considering the fiscal pressures usually squeezing us.

And I'm glad to be able to pass that good news on to you via more than just words but a real plan to offer relief to every property owner in Sullivan County. See for yourself at [county-sullivan-ny-budget-book.cleargov.com/5073](https://county-sullivan-ny-budget-book.cleargov.com/5073).

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# BOLSTERING THE RANKS OF OUR RESPONDERS

Our local BOCES has partnered with us to provide a valuable new course for teenagers, with the aim of generating more interest in becoming either a volunteer or paid firefighter or emergency responder - and we need many more of them.

The Fire Science/EMS Program is designed for students who think they may be interested in these fields, as positions are always in high demand. Our Bureau of Fire enthusiastically supports this new program, since it promises to swell local volunteer ranks.

"Instead of having to choose between afterschool activities and firefighter training, our local young people will be able to take fire service classes during the day and still participate in sports and clubs in the afternoon and evening," says our County Fire Coordinator John Hauschild. "The end result is that we'll have more well-trained members in our local fire departments, who themselves will be able to help us recruit even more critically-needed volunteers."

This unique program consists of one year of study for each component. Year one focuses on fire science, and year two focuses on emergency response and becoming an emergency medical technician (EMT). Throughout both years, students will learn from industry professionals and follow the New York State Office of Fire Prevention and Control curriculum and the New York State EMT curriculum, allowing them to take the necessary exams to become paid or volunteer professionals. Additionally, students of these classes will earn credits toward graduation and get training that will benefit them throughout their lives.

The program is being prepared for a January rollout, and more information will be shared with local school districts as that time draws near.

BOCES exists to make these kinds of opportunities happen. It's actually in their name: Board Of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES). I'm grateful to their team for seeing the potential in this concept - and agreeing to offer it.

And there's more coming, which I hope to share in a future newsletter!



**Firefighters practicing on a reusable simulator at our Fire Training Facility in White Lake**

## JOIN THE RANKS!

The need is extreme for volunteers with our local fire departments and ambulance corps. The only way to save them from disappearing is to join their ranks - and encourage others to do so.

By the way, you don't have to become a firefighter or an emergency medical technician.

Our first-response agencies need drivers, bookkeepers, fundraisers, organizers - just plain reliable folks who can lend a hand when called. And you can set your available hours according to your schedule.

Yes, it's tough to find time to help these days, but our communities rely on volunteers to accomplish an array of vital services.

I can't think of a service more vital than what these organizations provide.

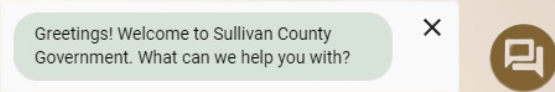
Find out more at [facebook.com/joinsullivanfire](https://facebook.com/joinsullivanfire), or email [joinsullivanfire@gmail.com](mailto:joinsullivanfire@gmail.com).

## WOW... GOOGLE IS ON OUR TEAM NOW!

You read that right - we've been working with Google for several months to develop what's informally known as a "chatbot" or, as we call it, the Sullivan County Virtual Agent.

Though a lot of people have applied their skills to its creation, our Virtual Agent is actually a piece of artificial intelligence designed to answer your questions about County government and learn from those interactions to ultimately better serve you.

We quietly debuted this new service on our website, [sullivanny.us](http://sullivanny.us), in early November. You may have noticed the little dialogue box in the lower right side of your screen when on the site.



Greetings! Welcome to Sullivan County Government. What can we help you with?

If you click on that box, you'll see a list of items to ask about, or you can type in your own question in your own words, and our Virtual Agent will quickly determine the best answer. It's designed to be easy, quick and efficient, but only you will be able to tell us whether it really is.

That's why, at present, we're only offering answers about services provided by our Treasurer's and Clerk's offices (including DMV). We want to see how you and the rest of Sullivan's residents and visitors react to this offering and whether it will prove truly useful. If it does, we'll talk with Google about expanding this innovative concept to other offices, potentially cutting down on the time you and we have to spend answering questions on the phone and via email.

So please, try it out, and let us know if it helped or slowed you down. Feedback can be sent to [dan.hust@sullivanny.us](mailto:dan.hust@sullivanny.us).



As anyone with a teen in their life knows, it takes patience and persistence to ensure their mental, emotional and physical health. But the result of these "small steps" can be incredibly rewarding.

Fittingly, the theme of this year's National Adoption Month is "Small Steps Open Doors."

And that's what Sullivan County is asking you to do: open your doors to local young people who need a stable, loving home at this very moment.

As of the writing of this newsletter, we have 16 teenagers in our local foster care system who are up for adoption.

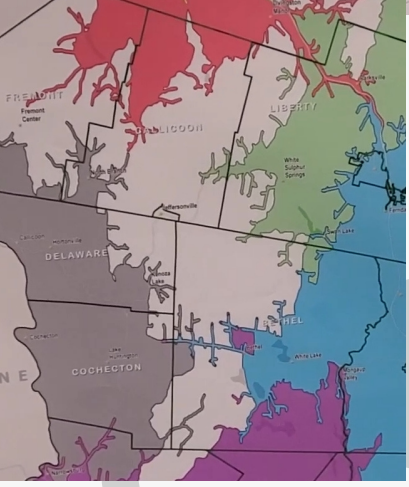
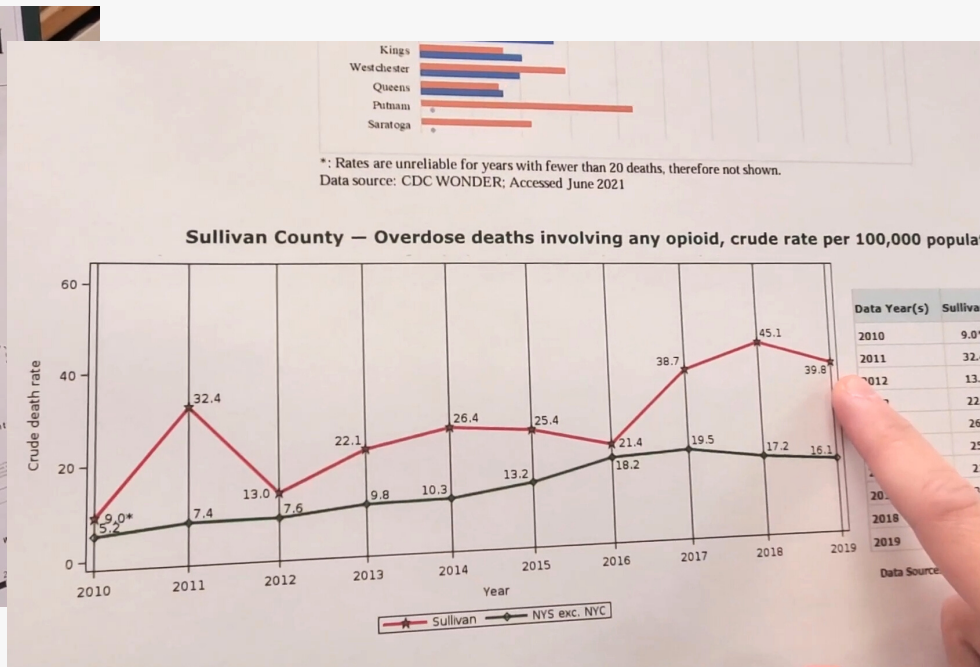
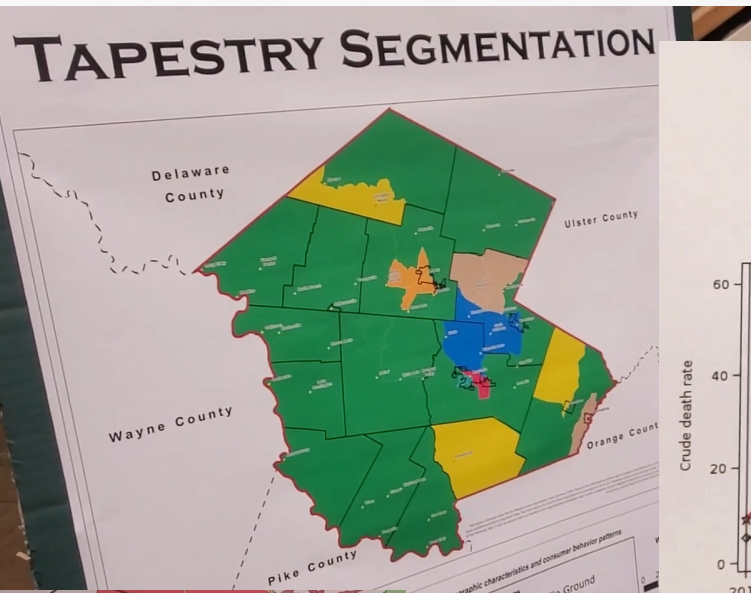
Yes, this is no small commitment. But it's worth it to help raise a new generation and give them a fresh chance for a rewarding adulthood.

Not sure? Talk with our foster/adoption team about the options and obligations, then decide for yourself. There's an information session set for Thursday, December 8 from 5:30-6:30 p.m., and all you need to do is RSVP to our Homefinder Alyssa Wowk at 845-645-6544 or [awowk@chowc.org](mailto:awowk@chowc.org).

Foster parent classes (appropriate for those who want to adopt, as well) launch on January 5 and March 23, and you can find out more via Alyssa.

I'd also like to thank our employees in our foster and adoptive care offices who work very hard to ensure the safety and security of our youngest and most vulnerable. They define the words "compassion," "caring" and "competence," and local families are so much the better for their efforts.

What would make them the happiest is knowing another local child has found a "forever" home. Please consider opening up your heart and house to someone who could use what only you can offer. Learn more at [sullivanny.us/Departments/Family services/Childrenandfamilyservices/Fostercare](http://sullivanny.us/Departments/Family%20services/Childrenandfamilyservices/Fostercare).



## GIS REALLY IS EVERYWHERE

With the theme of "GIS Is Everywhere," our GIS (Geographic Information Systems) team put on a spectacular display of GIS tools, products and applications on National GIS Day, November 16. The lobby of the Government Center showcased just how many useful ways GIS can be applied to everyday situations and extraordinary needs, and it was amazing to see. Take the video tour at <https://youtu.be/D8isrwFEqDI>.

