

Board of Legislators

BOL Meeting Minutes - Final



800 Michaelian Office Bldg.
148 Martine Avenue, 8th Floor
White Plains, NY 10601
www.westchesterlegislators.com

Wednesday, April 23, 2025

6:45 PM

Legislative Chamber

Special Meeting

CALENDAR 9

Please note: Meetings of the Board of Legislators and its committees are held at the Michaelian Office Building, 148 Martine Avenue, White Plains, New York, 10601, and remotely via the WebEx video conferencing system. Legislators may participate in person or via Webex. Members of the public may attend meetings in person at any of its locations, or view it online on the Westchester County Legislature's website: <https://westchestercountyny.legistar.com/>. This website also provides links to materials for all matters to be discussed at a given meeting.

CALL TO ORDER

The Honorable Vedat Gashi in the Chair.

The Chair opened the meeting at 7:01 PM with the salute to our flag and a prayer.

The roll call resulted as follows:

Present: Majority Leader Tyrae Woodson-Samuels
Minority Leader Margaret Cunzio
Colin Smith
Benjamin Boykin
Catherine Parker
Emiljana Ulaj
Judah Holstein
Majority Whip Terry Clements
David Imamura
David Tubiolo
Minority Whip James Nolan
Shanae Williams
Vice Chair Jose Alvarado
Chairman Vedat Gashi

Absent: Erika Pierce
Nancy Barr
Jewel Williams Johnson

STATE OF THE COUNTY

County Executive Kenneth W. Jenkins will deliver his annual State of the County Address in the Legislative Chamber of the Westchester County Board of Legislators, 148 Martine Avenue, WhitePlains, New York, 10601.

See the text of his speech below:

Standing here with you tonight, I'm reminded of the poem created for me by Westchester's Poet Laureate Phylisha Villanueva, "Hope for Us is a Deep Current," where she says:

This is legacy covered by ancestral winds, a generational ebb and flow continuously rising like rain returning to the sky.

A poet at a podium, books are banned, history blurred, and freedom of speech - a light switch flickers under hands that try to shut it off.

I know for some, this time can feel discouraging, as if history is doomed to repeat itself, as if we are just passengers on a carousel that never stops spinning.

But – I don't believe that.

Not here. Not now. Not at this moment, standing here with you in Westchester County, in the Michaelian Office Building, where I have spent decades in public service. Yes, history may echo. Yes, the same players may find themselves in the same rooms. But it is what we choose to do in each moment that defines us.

And tonight, I can proudly say—WE have chosen progress. Anchored in who we are, yet evolving in who we become.

At a time when many people are feeling disheartened and disturbed by the chaos in Washington, we stand here as pillars of stability, competence and civility.

Westchester's Poet Laureate says:

"We need someone that will help us believe, serve steady with trust to reflect the sun like the Hudson, a river that never forgets the villages and voices that carried us here. So we gather like a tide, pulled by something greater, because hope for us is a deep current."

Video 1 of 5 - Anchored in Westchester

Tonight, I am honored to stand alongside my colleagues in government for my first State of the County Address—my first as your County Executive. I'm proud to be in the People's Chamber, where the Board of Legislators and the public come together.

Chairman Vedat Gashi, Vice Chair Alvarado, Leader Woodson-Samuels, Whip Clements, Leader Cunzio and Whip Nolan, members of the Board of Legislators, my friends—I extend my sincere gratitude for your leadership and for the opportunity to address you tonight. And, I also want to acknowledge those who have paved the way before us.

My appreciation goes to County Clerk Tim Idoni, District Attorney Susan Cacace, past Chair and current Legislator Ben Boykin, immediate past Chair and Special Advisor on Women and Families Catherine Borgia, former Chair and current Deputy Commissioner of Environmental Facilities Michael Kaplowitz, former Leader, Legislator and current Director of Consumer Protection Jim Maisano and all the elected officials here with us tonight. We won't always agree, but we'll always respect each other—as colleagues, and more importantly, as friends.

To my executive team: Deputy County Executive Richard Wishnie, Director of Operations Joan McDonald, Deputy Director of Operations Emily Saltzman, County Attorney John Nonna, Director of Communications Catherine Cioffi, Director of Intergovernmental Relations Steve Bass, Chief of Staff Andrew Ferris and Lila Kirton — I thank you. While we may have welcomed one or two new faces, the core team that has dedicated nearly a decade of tireless service to this County remains unchanged. I am deeply humbled and grateful for your commitment, your friendship and the passion you bring to this work.

I owe a deep sense of gratitude—starting with my parents, Mel and Lorraine. They were my

very first role models, instilling in me the true meaning of public service. To my mother-in-law, Pearl and to Henry—thank you. And to my beloved wife, Deborah Hudson Jenkins, and our incredible family—to my daughter Alana, her husband Erick, and my two sons Jamal and Terrell, our grandchildren Jaiden and Alex, and our newest blessing, baby Levi—thank you for your love and support.

And to the County workforce, let me say this: I see you. I am you.

I am the son of a police officer and a nurse. A kid from the Bronx who dedicated my life to serving the people of my home city, Yonkers, and my home County—the beautiful, resilient, steadfast Westchester County. We'll dive deeper into the topic of public service shortly, but I won't miss a single opportunity to say this – so let me start now: you are valued, you are appreciated and we all recognize the hard work you put in every single day for the people of this County. If you are a County employee, stand up right now please – and let us applaud you.

To those of you here in the Chamber, watching from home, joining us on Facebook Live, or following along on the County's webpage—thank you. Thank you for staying engaged, for being active participants in our democracy. Now more than ever, we need your voices—your calls, your emails, your ideas, your feedback. This is democracy in action. It's not always pretty; it's sometimes tough and unfiltered. But it's the strongest system we have, and it only works when we all come together and make it work. And, we need to make it work!

And tonight, my friends, that is exactly what we are here to do.

And that's what we've been doing for the past 100-plus days...

Video 2 of 5 – The First 100+ Days

We have been taking advantage of that momentum and we are just not going to stop. Remember, it is what we choose to do in each moment that defines us.

As you heard in that video, I have been putting the pressure on Con Edison. I have been clear that the Public Service Commission should pull the plug on their proposal, and demand a plan that actually works for consumers, not just Con Ed's bottom line.

I signed legislation that solidifies the County's commitment to challenging these rate increases. This action follows a unanimous, bipartisan vote by the Westchester County Board of Legislators to join the major rate case in New York State.

I fought for—and secured—a public hearing right here in Westchester County, because if Con Edison plans to raise our bills, they should have to look us in the eye and explain why.

I also took a stand against the Trump Administration's decision to reject a bipartisan effort—led by the County—to keep the Social Security Hearing Office in White Plains open. Despite the County's offer to house the office in County-owned space to ensure continued access, Trump's Administration said no. Let me be clear, I will not stand by while Washington abandons our communities. I will continue fighting alongside our Congressional representatives to ensure our residents are not left behind.

Unlike other places, we don't just say we are focused on finances and then try to destroy the place. Our strong fiscal management and economic stability have earned Westchester County a AAA bond rating from both S&P Global Ratings and Fitch Ratings. Moody's Investors Service upgraded Westchester's financial outlook from stable to positive, while affirming the County's strong Aa1 issuer and debt ratings. This accomplishment speaks to our careful budgeting, strategic planning and resilient economy—making us the only county in New York State to achieve this distinction from S&P.

I want to thank our Budget Director Larry Soule, Finance Commissioner Karin Hablow and their respective Staffs for their work on these accomplishments.

The County continues to do everything it can to support the development of affordable housing – whether it's building new housing units or preserving the current affordable housing stock that exists throughout our municipalities.

One of my first acts as County Executive was signing a Land Acquisition Act, allocating \$10 million dollars for the purchase of property in downtown White Plains to support the development of 108 affordable homeownership units, and 89 parking spaces. We also allocated \$7 million dollars in funding to four Public Housing Authorities for critical property improvements, enhancing living conditions for thousands of residents.

Soon we're launching the newly redesigned HomeSeeker platform—the County's interactive, web-based portal that helps individuals and families find fair and affordable housing. This user-friendly program is designed to connect residents with available housing opportunities across the County, empowering them to find a place they can truly call home. I encourage everyone to register with HomeSeeker today and explore all that it has to offer.

Westchester also allocated \$90 million dollars in ARPA funds to launch a first-in-the-nation affordable housing program for individuals at or below 65% AMI. All 15 developments were approved by the IDA, creating 2,000 new units County-wide. Seven have closed, with the rest expected to close by the fall. I've attended two groundbreakings—one in Mount Vernon and the other in Ossining—and I look forward to the rest.

And in a few weeks, we will be announcing the availability of \$15 million dollars through Westchester County's Complete Streets Program, which will assist municipalities with the design and implementation of Complete Streets projects on municipal roadways. Municipalities may apply for up to 50% of total project costs.

I want to thank our Commissioner of Planning Blanca Lopez and the Planning Department for their work on these important initiatives.

In the Department of Public Safety, under the leadership of Commissioner Terrance Raynor, violent crime continues to be down through the collaborative work with law enforcement at every level. Thanks to our work together, DPS continues to be fully funded. For the first time in four years, we are holding civil service exams for police officers. Exams for Police Officer and Police Officer (Spanish Speaking) will take place next month. A diverse police force is an effective police force, and our goal is to encourage a broader and more inclusive applicant pool.

We have taken a bold step in addressing gun violence by forming the Westchester County Gun Violence Prevention Task Force. The task force is creating a new data framework for analyzing gun violence in and around the County. This data will assist law enforcement and community leaders to better understand the problem and inform potential policy priorities.

Recently, I spearheaded the launch of the Free Client Phone Access Program at the Westchester County Jail, in partnership with Office of Assigned Counsel Acting Administrator Stephanie Perez, the Department of Correction, under the leadership of Commissioner Joseph Spano, and the Department of Information Technology, under the leadership of Chief Information Officer Marguerite Beirne. This initiative guarantees that all incarcerated individuals will have free phone access to communicate with their attorneys—because everyone is presumed innocent until proven guilty, and financial hardship should never be a barrier to legal representation.

I also want to highlight the important work being done in the area of victim services and restitution, under the leadership of Probation Commissioner Rocco Pozzi—work that makes a real difference in people's lives. Over the past year, the Probation Department collected more

than \$274 thousand dollars in restitution and dispersed over \$266 thousand dollars to 163 victims. That's tangible support delivered directly to those affected by crime.

In Westchester, we're not just about making history, we're about making a difference. A few days on the job, I made history by appointing Susan Spear as the first woman to serve as Commissioner of the Department of Emergency Services, breaking barriers and promoting diversity in leadership.

On the Emergency Services front, to enhance public safety, I signed legislation to improve oversight and notification requirements for Battery Energy Storage Systems, ensuring we protect both residents and first responders while advancing energy technology responsibly. And, I expanded the County's tax exemption for volunteer firefighters and ambulance service members.

Also since being in office, I appointed Joshua Gaccione as Westchester County's Director of Veteran Services. A U.S. Army veteran, Gaccione brought with him a strong background in military service, higher education, leadership and veteran advocacy.

Under his leadership, I'm proud to announce that our Veterans Advisory Council is now meeting on a regular basis. Our vision is to create a supportive and accessible environment where veterans and their families can thrive.

We are fortunate to have the best County employees right here in Westchester. They are smart, dedicated and deeply committed to public service. Every day, they go above and beyond to make this County stronger, safer and more responsive to the people who call it home.

Some of our employees have been here for 20, 30, even 40-plus years — and that kind of long-term commitment is something rare and remarkable. It's not just a job to them. It's a calling. They've helped shape the very foundation of what makes Westchester County work.

And while there may be some folks further south — say, in Washington — who don't always understand or respect the critical role that government employees play, I want you to know this: I do. I see your work. I value it. And I will always stand up for the people who make the government run — because what you do matters, and it deserves respect.

Video 3 of 5 - Proudly Serving Westchester

I am proud to honor the strong and enduring partnership Westchester County shares with our public sector unions—a collaboration grounded in mutual respect and a shared commitment to service.

I also want to extend my deepest gratitude to our outstanding Human Resources Commissioner, Lisa Denig, and her dedicated team, whose tireless efforts ensure that our workforce and retirees receive the support, dignity and care they so rightly deserve.

Here in Westchester we are focused on the whole person. We have been working with the County Legislature and are beginning the process of opening our Mental Health Safety Net Clinic which will be located in White Plains, under the leadership of DCMH Commissioner Michael Orth. After securing funding, I am pleased to announce that the clinic has received its provisional state licensing and ground has been broken to build a state-of-the-art facility to meet the growing demand for mental health services in our County. I look forward to the ribbon cutting this summer.

Westchester's "Project Alliance" continues to be a success. Through the support of St. Vincent's Hospital and the 988 Crisis Line, 18 thousand calls for help were handled in 2024. Our Mobile Crisis Response Teams, along with our community partners, handled another two thousand responses for unique individuals across the County.

To address the opioid crisis, our Opioid Response and Overdose Prevention Initiative has allocated nearly \$5.8 million dollars from legal settlements to fund treatment, prevention,

recovery and harm reduction programs. We're also supporting Corrections and Probation by launching new efforts like the Lives Forward peer initiative.

As we look ahead, the Westchester County Health Department, with Dr. Sherlita Amler at the helm, is making colorectal cancer screening a top public health priority. During Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month and beyond, we're partnering with hospitals and health systems throughout Westchester to expand access, raise awareness and encourage early screening.

Colorectal cancer is the second leading cause of cancer deaths in the United States. It's now the leading cause of cancer death in men under 50, and the second leading cause in women under 50. Each year, more young adults in their 30s and 40s are being diagnosed, and that trend is deeply concerning. But we know screening saves lives. When it comes to your health—especially something as serious as colorectal cancer—early action can make all the difference. So, get checked!

In partnership with the City of Mount Vernon, the Westchester-Putnam Workforce Development Board, led by Executive Director Thom Kleiner, launched the Financial Empowerment Center at the Mount Vernon Career Center. It offers free financial literacy and advice to help residents manage money and improve financial stability.

For over 20 years, the County's Volunteer Income Tax Assistance Program has provided free tax prep, helping residents claim millions in refunds. So far in 2025, more than 12 hundred tax returns have generated \$1.5 million dollars in federal refunds—supporting families and the local economy.

Today, I'm proud to share a bold new step forward for Westchester. We are launching a groundbreaking initiative in partnership with Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute—one of the nation's most respected engineering institutions—to bring high-quality engineering education right here to our region. This is more than just a partnership. It's a multi-year commitment to creating new pathways for our local talent—especially young people and working professionals—to access cutting-edge STEM opportunities, meet the demands of today's workforce, and fuel the growth of our economy.

For several years, we've been listening to our employers who've made it clear: there's an urgent need for engineering programs that reflect the pace of technology, and the skills that today's industries require. So, we're answering that call. This initiative will address the critical shortage of engineering talent. It will bring new investment and research opportunities to our region. And it will help ensure that historically underserved communities have access to real, local pathways into high-demand STEM careers.

Westchester has always been a place where ideas take root. Now, with RPI as our partner, we're building the next generation of engineers—right here at home.

Video 4 of 5 - Westchester and RPI Partner for the Future

I want to thank Economic Development Director Bridget Gibbons for her vision and her tireless work on this project.

And now, it is my great honor to invite the President of RPI Martin A. Schmidt to join me at the front of the chamber as we sign our Memorandum of Understanding.

(Stage Direction: Invite President of RPI to the Front of the Chamber to Sign MOU)

This was a historic moment - you have all witnessed history - and I am excited for more announcements with RPI in the future.

We are building here in Westchester - and we are also protecting what we have and hold dear. Under my direction, the Westchester County Department of Environmental Facilities is inviting public input as part of a Waste Reduction Study. Through participation in NYISO and Con Edison Demand Response programs, the County earned over \$212 thousand dollars while helping reduce energy use and prevent blackouts.

To address extreme weather, I approved a \$1.2 million-dollar bond and signed an agreement with Briarcliff Manor for \$2.4 million dollars for a flood mitigation project at Law Memorial Park. Finally, we installed 25 new EV chargers at the County Center's South Lot—offering free charging for up to 50 vehicles and advancing our Climate Action Plan goals.

I want to thank Environmental Facilities Commissioner Vincent Kopicki, and the DEF&L team, and Director of Energy Conservation and Sustainability Pete McCartt for their work on these projects.

After an extensive review and competitive bidding process, we awarded Liberty Lines a five-year contract to continue operating the County's Bee-Line Bus system. We saved County taxpayers millions of dollars with this deal but more than that we listened to the public, our riders, advocates, transportation professionals and elected leaders. Their concerns were at the forefront of our evaluation process.

Also, I'm pleased to share that Westchester County will be issuing a Request for Proposals in early May for the modernization of the terminal at Westchester County Airport. This RFP will be directed toward architecture and engineering firms with a strong, proven track record in airport terminal design.

Our goal is to select a consultant who will work closely with the County to develop three distinct design options for consideration. These options will be guided by one central question: how can we make the airport experience better for our passengers?

This is not expansion, but this is an exciting step forward for the County, to offer a seat, a cup of coffee, and a bathroom, and we look forward to a transparent and competitive process that puts the needs of our residents and travelers at the forefront.

I want to thank Department of Public Works Commissioner Hugh Greechan and his team for their dedication in advancing these projects.

I'm also proud to announce that Westchester County is expanding its Small Business Incentive Program, under the leadership of Peri Kadanoff, Executive Director of the Westchester Solid Waste Commission, to support local haulers. Phase II will reduce licensing and vehicle fees for small "junk" haulers, easing financial barriers for entry and compliance.

Launched in 2024, Phase I offered discounts to C-2 haulers with one truck. Phase II expands eligibility to include small businesses focused on cleanouts and household removals, which often struggle to afford standard fees.

Westchester County Tourism & Film, led by Natasha Caputo, received a Gold Award in the 22nd annual Service Industry Advertising Awards for its 2024 Official Travel and Meeting Guide, recognized for outstanding execution, creativity and consumer appeal among national tourism publications.

I'm thrilled to be here as we celebrate some incredible anniversaries in our beloved parks across Westchester County. Our Nationally Accredited, award winning, Westchester County Parks Department, with Commissioner Kathleen O'Connor leading the way, has a deep-rooted history in the County and we can't wait for the upcoming celebrations.

First, the 100th Anniversaries:

- Ward Pound Ridge Reservation kicks off with a 100-Mile Hike Challenge through May, followed by a celebration in May with nature walks, historical talks, and fun activities.
- Bronx River Parkway Reservation will celebrate with a Bicycle Sunday in September, featuring classic cars and a grand event at the County Center parking lot.
- Mohansic Golf Course will celebrate in July with vintage clubs and discounted fees for Westchester residents.

- Saxon Woods Park launches a 100-Lap Challenge in June, with a celebration in August, including anniversary merch and a movie night.

For the 95th Anniversary of the County Center, we're planning an event in the fall and inviting visitors to submit their favorite memories.

And for the 50th Anniversaries:

- Muscoot Farm celebrates in September, with a fundraising dinner, live music, tours and a festival.
- Cranberry Lake Preserve marks its anniversary in August, with a history hike and a birthday party for the kids.

These anniversaries are a testament to the importance of preserving our natural spaces, and providing places for the community to connect.

One last thing in Parks. There is one place that holds many of our memories, for us, our kids, our grandkids – Playland. Playland is more than just a park; it is a cherished treasure, the crown jewel of Westchester—a place where memories are made, and community thrives. Despite the legal challenges we face with Standard Amusements, on a bad deal handed to us by a previous administration, a deal that I ultimately voted against because it requires the County to repay all of Standard Amusements' investments, my intentions remain to open Playland for the 2025 season. Since 2018, we've worked with purpose and resolve to preserve and enhance this historic landmark, investing nearly \$150 million dollars, and that commitment will continue to drive us forward. This park belongs to the people of Westchester, and we will protect it for generations to come.

As we close tonight, let us remember "Hope for Us is a Deep Current," it is our choices in each moment that shape the path ahead. We are not bound by the past, but empowered by the present to create a future that reflects our shared values.

The State of our County is defined not by any single moment, but by the choices we make in each one. The State of our County – our Westchester County – is anchored in who we are yet evolving in who we become.

Video 5 of 5 - The Link Between

We've chosen progress, and that is what we will continue to choose, together, every step of the way. In a world that often feels uncertain, we stand firm as beacons of stability, competence and civility.

So, let's embrace this journey, knowing that we are not repeating history—we are making it. And that, my friends, is how we move forward.

Villanueva says:

To move like the Hudson To hold both storm and stillness is to know the weight of ice, the promise of tides returning. To hold both resistance and renewal, to carry what came before, what could not hold itself, and still push forward.

This is legacy covered by ancestral winds, a generational ebb and flow continuously rising like rain returning to the sky. Hope for us is a deep current. Leadership that sounds like care and feels like courage. Thank you, and goodnight.

ADJOURNMENT

Next Meeting: May 5, 2025, at 7pm.

On motion of Majority Leader Woodson-Samuels, seconded by Minority Leader Cunzio, the Board adjourned at 8:19 PM to meet on May 5, 2025 at 7 PM.