

County Residents Asked for Input in New Budget Survey

Dutchess County government continues to face daunting fiscal challenges and crafting the 2013 county budget is certain to be a difficult process. Input from residents will be vital to the process, so Dutchess County Government is launching a new way for county residents to get involved in the 2013 county budget development. Dutchess County Executive Marcus J. Molinaro encourages county residents to share their input about the county government programs and services they value most through a new survey unveiled this evening at the Dutchess County Legislature's Board meeting. The survey is also an opportunity for residents to get a better understanding of how the county budget works.

"County Executive Molinaro has based his administration on core principles of focus, inclusion, logic and fairness. He wants the budget process to reflect those principles," said Michael Ellison, Assistant to the County Executive. "Our budget survey initiative lets county residents share their thoughts and opinions about the county programs and services that are important to them. This is going to be a very difficult budget to formulate, so the feedback we receive from residents will be vital in the decision making process."

Dutchess County Budget Director Valerie Sommerville expects the 2013 budget development process to be the most challenging budget she has faced in more than 20 years of service. "There is simply not enough money to pay for all of the programs and services we currently have. There are going to be many tough choices that have to be made, and it is important to us to hear from residents about what their priorities are," Ms. Sommerville said.

The goal of the budget survey is to give county residents a tool to weigh in on the budget development and educate the public about the budget process. It is designed to help county officials learn what services residents want and need and importantly, what their expectations are.

The survey also serves as an educational tool. It provides residents with a snapshot of the programs and services provided by county government and how their tax dollars are spent to provide those services. It also takes residents through the budget development process and timeline.

The sixteen page survey takes approximately 20 minutes to complete online. The first portion of the survey provides educational information about the budget such as where do county revenues come from (sales tax, state & federal aid, property tax and other revenue) as well as where does the money go (mandated and optional programs and services.) The remainder of the survey focuses on the county's major optional service cost areas with specific program and services components broken out and asks residents to decide how much they support each of those programs and services areas: Strongly Support, Support or Do Not Support. It also asks for the resident to share their opinion on whether or not the service should be eliminated, reduced or if they are willing to see property taxes raised to continue to support it.

The budget survey is available on the county website at www.dutchessny.gov. The survey will be available online until July 31st, 2012. Survey results will be reviewed and utilized as final 2013 budget decisions are being made in the fall before the November 1st release of the Executive budget. For those who do not have internet access or want to complete a paper survey, copies of the survey will be available by request at the Dutchess County Budget Office in the County Office Building at 22 Market Street in Poughkeepsie or at Dutchess County Department of Motor Vehicle offices in Poughkeepsie, Beacon, Millbrook and Wappinger.

The survey was developed in a collaborative effort between the Dutchess County Budget Office and the Office of Computer Information Systems (OCIS). Senior Budget Research Analyst Jessica White and OCIS Project Leader Bill McVicker spearheaded the work, including development and focus group review. "Thank you to all of the employees, particularly Jessica White and Bill McVicker, who have spent many weeks working on this project. Their efforts will help provide us much needed insight from our county residents," said County Executive Molinaro.

The budget survey is being lauded as an important public outreach tool. Dutchess County Comptroller Jim Coughlan said, "I commend County Executive Molinaro, Budget Director Sommerville and those in the administration who worked on this initiative for their proactive effort to engage residents in this important budget dialogue. The County Executive and his administration are living up to their commitment to address the difficult challenges facing our community with focus, logic, fairness and, as highlighted by this budget survey, valuable inclusion. Well done."

Dutchess County Legislature Budget & Finance Committee Chairman James Miccio said, "Getting this feedback from residents early in the

budget development process is an excellent idea, rather than waiting until the Public Hearings in November to hear what people think. I appreciate how the County Executive has taken many steps to be more open and transparent and I think this budget survey continues his efforts to encourage engagement from the public.”

County Executive Molinaro concluded, “We are here to work for the people of Dutchess County, so we need to hear from the people about what they want and expect from their county government. This is another great tool to help us to do that. I encourage every resident to spend just a few minutes to take the survey and have their voice heard in Dutchess County Government.”

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