

Most support tax hike at county budget hearing

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Again this year, the annual public hearing on the proposed Erie County budget was dominated by cultural agencies and the library system.

County Executive Poloncarz's spending plan calls for a 3.4 percent hike in the property tax, in a budget dominated by mandated spending.



Credit File photo
Erie County Hall

The discretionary part of the budget pays for everything from library books to roads and bridges. Republicans say it's a budget that was dead on arrival, although they only have five votes in the 11-member Legislature.

The plan provides more than \$5 million for cultural organizations, but provides only a portion of the additional money the libraries want.

The legislature chamber was packed with supporters of culturals and the libraries, many waving cards for the cultural group they support. More than 50 people spoke at the 2 1/2 hour forum.

Randall Kramer, artistic and executive director for MusicalFare Theatre, chairman of the Arts Services Initiative, and spokesperson for the Greater Buffalo Cultural Alliance, says culturals pay for themselves.

"Cultural institutions in Erie County return \$5.8 million back into the local economy through sales tax collected at their events. That's more than the county's proposed cultural allocation for 2013. That's also more tax revenues in future county budget for roads, health

clinics and libraries. What this means is that the cultural are actually economically supporting this very budget we are here to talk about," Kramer said.

There was little opposition to the spending plan among hours of speakers. One of the opposed was Aurora Supervisor Jolene Jeffe, who says taxpayers just can't afford more tax increases.

"Utilize part-time labor. Share labor during peaks and valleys of service demand. Combine departments. Find new technologies in order to be able to reduce personnel. If union contracts don't allow for some of these changes, make sure they do before you reach an agreement with union leadership," said Jeffe.

Jeffe says if her town can make cuts, the far larger county government should be able to, as well.

<http://news.wbfo.org/post/most-support-tax-hike-county-budget-hearing>