



News from the Somerset County Board of Chosen Freeholders

Patricia L. Walsh, Freeholder Director • Peter S. Palmer, Freeholder Deputy Director
Patrick Scaglione, Freeholder • Mark Caliguire, Freeholder • Brian D. Levine, Freeholder

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Freeholders Adopt 2016 Somerset County Budget

The Somerset County Board of Freeholders has adopted a \$239-million county budget for 2016 that preserves needed services to the county's more than 332,000 citizens with minimal tax impact.

"We've continued to streamline our operations so we can provide essential services to residents while maintaining Somerset County's triple-A bond rating and keeping the property tax impact to a minimum," said Freeholder Patrick Scaglione. "We've kept the increase in our inside-cap costs to 1.51 percent, well within the 2-percent state cap, and the increase in county property taxes on the average home in Somerset County is only \$9 annually. Our fiscally prudent management of county resources continues to be a hallmark of Somerset County government."

"Somerset County is still ahead of the curve in providing shared services," said Freeholder Mark Caliguire. "In addition to 911 dispatch for 20 towns, we provide curbside recycling collections in 19 municipalities, transportation services to three towns and four nonprofits, vehicle maintenance to 11 communities, vehicle fueling to over 50 agencies and a statewide cooperative purchasing program, just to name a few. These are value-added services that benefit taxpayers every day and they are the kinds of benefits you can provide when you manage operations efficiently and effectively."

The 2016 budget:

- minimally raises the county tax rate by only \$9 per year on an average home of \$411,000, a less-than-three-quarter-percent increase
- maintains 248 center-lane miles of county roads and 752 county-owned bridges.
- maintains 38 park, recreation and open-space areas encompassing 14,382 acres.
- fully funds 911 communications dispatch for 20 municipalities (since 2008 this shared service has saved participating towns well over \$3 million).
- funds nearly 200 shared services with local governments and other organizations in the county.
- partially funds budgets for the county Vocational-Technical Schools, Raritan Valley Community College, Board of Social Services and Park Commission.
- fully funds the county jail and the county emergency services training academy.

The amount to be raised by taxation in 2016 will increase only 1.99 percent, to \$185.8 million. The county tax rate is up slightly from 31.7 to 31.9 cents per \$100 of assessed value.

Since 2008, the total number of county employees has been reduced by 8 percent, from 1,329 to 1,220, while county services have been maintained and in some cases expanded.

"Even though we've reduced spending, we've also continued to invest in vital infrastructure, including two major parks, a new senior wellness center, a new social services building and major road improvements such as the Route 22/Chimney Rock Road interchange," Freeholder Scaglione said, "thereby adding to the quality of life for all county residents."

After following the nationwide housing slump for several years, ratables in Somerset County saw another slight rebound of 1.3 percent this past year, from \$57.4 billion to \$58.1 billion.

To view the full budget document on the county website, go to <http://bit.ly/2016BudgetIntro> To see the budget overview, visit <http://bit.ly/2016BudgetFacts>