

# RECORD REVIEW

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## Hard at work for Westchester

By KITLEY COVILL

The reinvigorated Westchester County Board of Legislators has been hard at work since 2018, with five new legislators and a new county executive and administration. We've started fixing a local government long crippled by a culture of cuts, fiscal mismanagement and deteriorating services and are moving Westchester forward again.

For those not familiar with the BOL, we make important laws, advocate for residents of our districts and review

**Guest  
COLUMN** and approve the approximately \$1.8 billion county budget, which accounts for 10 to 15 percent of your property taxes and is used for such services as transportation, parks, the County Center, public safety, the airport, labs, social services, infrastructure, mental health, emergency services, planning, debt service and other items.

Accordingly, during this current term, the BOL has quickly enacted a variety of helpful and sensible laws and policies, such as banning the sale of tobacco products and e-cigarettes to anyone under 21 and eliminating polystyrene. We've made sure all new programs and policies consider the environment; this includes buying hybrid and electric buses, electric vehicles and installing charging stations and solar panels. We've voted for safe leave, ensuring that domestic violence survivors can take time off from work to attend court. We've reinvigorated the capital projects that languished for years and are now investing in roads, bridges and parks. We've lobbied the utilities for more investments in their

electricity delivery systems and better service and communication with residents. We have restored employees to the County Planning Department so that planning expertise for local towns is a phone call away. We struggled with a leftover structural deficit in the county budget and, instead of raising property taxes, reached parity with surrounding counties with a 1% sales tax adjustment, and a 30% sharing of that income with schools and local towns and villages. We have looked for innovative ways to share services and grappled with the challenges of raising the age of criminal responsibility to 18.

Northern Westchester has benefited from an invigorated County government by investing your tax dollars in paving Long Ridge Road, rebuilding a bridge in North Salem, designing a new bridge for Greenwich Road, new road signage, and restoring our long-neglected area county parks with millions in capital projects for Muscote, Ward Pound Ridge Reservation, Merestead and Mountain Lakes.

More money has flowed to local water infrastructure projects, and designs and scope for sewer and septic projects, and our towns have worked collaboratively with the county to support our small businesses and attract new families.

Much has been done, but much remains to be done. We want to help our local nonprofits with funds and in-kind support. We need to respond to the crises in our health care with sensible vaping laws, preventive mental health care measures and battling opioid addiction. We need to continue to upgrade our local county parks with investments in the buildings and trailways. A number of county roads still need rebuilding and repaving, and,

with competing voices for capital project dollars, we must lobby hard to ensure that northern Westchester receives sufficient funds. We must continue to press our utilities for better communication and fewer outages before granting rate increases. And we need to make sure our volunteers, veterans, law enforcement and other first responders have the resources they need.

I am looking forward to working with our towns on such regional issues as our much-stressed transportation corridors and our access to mass transit. We must do more to ensure that our emergency services can respond to fires and health calls promptly. That work includes sharing services, not only through the rerouting of 911 calls through the County's 60 Control, but the installation of cellular towers that improve coverage and response times. We know that many residents will work remotely and that our children will continue that trend. Cell coverage is a challenge in our rural areas, so we must find workable solutions as we embrace the new model for employment. I also want to find ways to encourage small businesses and support our local main streets with incentives to locate here and support to keep them vibrant.

Since there's more that needs to be done, it's important to keep the county legislature in experienced hands with a great, dedicated team in order to keep up the momentum and continue to deliver results. As we look to the future, we're expecting great things for northern Westchester and for all the families and residents of beautiful Westchester County.

*Kitley Covill, a Katonah resident, is seeking a second term as Westchester County Legislator, District.*