

Atlantic County passes \$262.1M budget, \$29M bond ordinance

[Michelle Brunetti Post](#)

NORTHFIELD — Atlantic County commissioners unanimously passed a \$262.1 million 2024 budget Tuesday, with a county tax rate that drops by about five cents per \$100 valuation.

The rate will fall from 43.8 cents to about 39 cents per \$100 of assessed property value.

"There wasn't much discussion. Most of it was vetted before we get to this point," said at-large Commissioner Maureen Kern, of Somers Point.

"We were pretty confident with this budget," said county Executive Dennis Levinson, "because of the rate going down about five cents. We worked on it extremely hard."

Commissioners also passed a \$29 million bond ordinance that would allow the county to spend \$16 million on facilities improvements and about \$14 million on bridge, road, intersection and drainage improvements.

"When salt water hits iron, it rusts," Levinson said. "We have 175 bridges in the county that we continually maintain to keep safe."

The county also has 375 miles of roads to maintain, he said, which is more mileage than the Atlantic City Expressway, Garden State Parkway and New Jersey Turnpike combined.

The new budget raises about \$179.5 million through property taxes, up from about \$173 million in last year's \$256 million budget.

The increase in real estate values in the county since then allows for the rate decrease, but towns that have not had a revaluation and whose values are well under 100% will likely see rate increases, Levinson said.

"What we would like to see is countywide (property) assessment," Levinson has said, to keep all towns assessed at their true values. "Twelve towns' (rates) are going down and 11 are going up because of their assessed values."

About \$88.3 million in the 2024 budget would be spent on salaries and \$173.8 million on other expenses.

At the same time, salary costs are going up 3.78%, which equates to \$3.2 million in additional spending "based on negotiations with eight of the 23 bargaining units," Levinson has said.

Other expenses have increased 16.5% for an overall \$6.3 million increase, he has said.

The Atlantic City casinos' payment in lieu of taxes (PILOT) is expected to generate \$18.3 million for the county this year, up from \$17.9 million in 2023, according to the budget.

Last week, a state appellate court panel in Trenton heard two cases over 2021 amendments to the law determining how much money casinos pay in lieu of property taxes.

Atlantic County and the nonprofit Liberty and Prosperity won their cases in Superior Court in 2022, arguing that removing internet gaming and online sports betting from calculations of how much casinos would pay cost county taxpayers \$5 million a year, violated a 2018 consent agreement to settle an earlier lawsuit and violated the state Constitution.

A decision of the three-judge panel is likely to take weeks, according to the lawyer for the county, Ron Riccio.

Levinson said the decision is likely to be appealed further to the state Supreme Court, regardless of who wins at the appellate level.

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