ERIE COUNTY, PENNSYLVANIA · 2027 PROPOSED BUDGET

Erie County's 2027 proposed budget, explained

The median homeowner in Erie County pays the county about $669 a year in property tax. The county's proposed budget for 2027 is $565 million. This explainer connects those two numbers, in five questions.

$565.4M
Proposed spending, all 17 funds

≈ $109M
Local cost of government

$669
Median county tax bill

6.94
Mills: the tax rate, unchanged

THE STORY IN FIVE ANSWERS

1	**How big is it, really?**	$565 million on paper.
2	**What does your money pay for?**	About $109 million of it.
3	**What's going up, and why?**	About $5 million, mostly pay.
4	**Where are the risks?**	Prison overtime, the nursing home, and the contracts.
5	**How is it paid for?**	Savings and gaming money, not a higher tax rate.

This explainer draws on the budget proposed by County Executive Christina Vogel, with added explanation from Councilman Rock Copeland's public presentation on the budget. It's a proposal: council can change it before it votes.

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QUESTION 1 OF 5

1 How big is it, really?

Counting every fund, the county proposes to spend about $565 million next year. It isn't one budget. It's seventeen, one for each fund.

Two buckets

Seventeen is a lot to follow, so sort them into two buckets. The General Fund, about $144 million, is the flexible one. The county decides how to spend it: the prison, the courts, the district attorney, running the government.

The other bucket holds the remaining sixteen funds, about $421 million. It's locked, because each fund is set aside for one purpose. Most are grant programs, restricted by law or grant rules. Some are separate operations with their own budgets, like Pleasant Ridge Manor, the county nursing home.

FLEXIBLE
≈ $144M
General Fund

LOCKED
≈ $421M
The other sixteen funds

Money moves between them

The buckets aren't sealed off. Start with local money: property tax, plus some savings and some gaming money, which is the county's share of casino revenue. About $109 million in all. It lands in the General Fund.

Then about $35 million moves out to the locked bucket, as the county's share of programs like children's services and 911. There it meets about $385 million from the state and federal government. That outside money is the biggest piece of the whole budget, and it comes with rules the county has to follow.

Money also comes back. Other funds pay the General Fund about $5 million for shared services, like human resources, finance and technology. And every department pays into one benefits fund, about $40 million, which then pays the health insurance bills.

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FOLLOW THE MONEY

≈ $109M	Local money into the General Fund: property tax, savings, gaming money
≈ $35M	Out to the other funds, as the county's share of their programs
≈ $385M	State and federal money that meets it there
≈ $5M	Back to the General Fund for shared services
≈ $40M	From every department into the employee benefits fund

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The same dollar, counted more than once

Each time a dollar moves, the budget counts it again. A tax dollar is counted in the General Fund. Sent on to public safety, it's counted there. Passed along to pay off bonds, it's counted a third time. One dollar, three times.

Add up that overlap: about $87 million. Count each dollar once, and it takes an estimated $478 million to run county government, not $565 million.

$565M	– ≈ $87M	= ≈ $478M
On paper	Counted more than once	Counted once (estimate)

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Where property tax fits

Property tax brings in about $103 million. That's 18% of the headline budget, or counted once, closer to 21%. Most of the rest is state and federal money.

The number to watch

What do people here pay for? Councilman Copeland has looked at this, and the measure he uses is the local cost of government. To get it, take what the county spends, and subtract the grants, fees and other outside money. For 2027, it's about $109 million, the same local money the map started with. It's what your tax bill pays toward.

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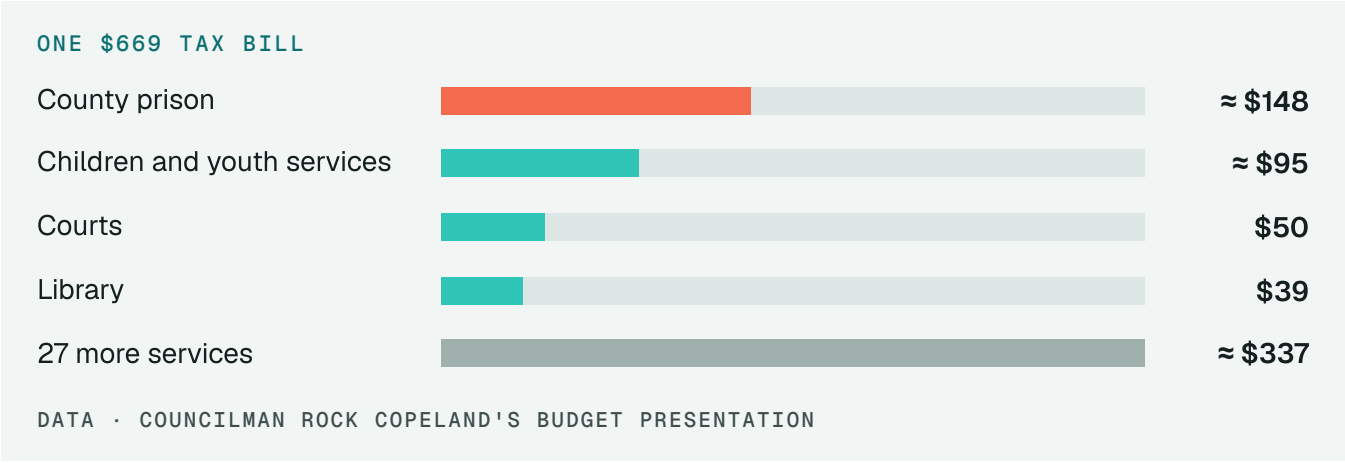
QUESTION 2 OF 5

2 What does your money pay for?

Start with one tax bill. The median county bill is $669 a year. Split that bill across thirty-one county services, and here's where it goes.



The prison is the largest line

The budget book shows the same thing. Corrections, the prison and probation together, is the biggest slice of the General Fund: about $39 million of $144 million. The prison alone is about $26 million, up from about $20 million in 2022.

Human services work the other way

The programs are large, but the state pays most of the cost. The county pays about 18% of the cost of children and youth services, and about 3% for mental health and intellectual disability services. The library is the exception. It's mostly county money.

HealthChoices

The biggest single pot isn't county money at all. HealthChoices, about $148 million, is Pennsylvania's Medicaid program for mental health and drug and alcohol treatment. The county oversees it, the money goes to local providers, and none of it comes from your property tax.

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Money that only passes through

Hotel tax, about $6.8 million, goes straight out to Erie Events and Visit Erie. About $6.3 million of gaming money goes to the county's gaming authority and the land bank. Council has tried to save the rest of the gaming money for big projects, like the community college.

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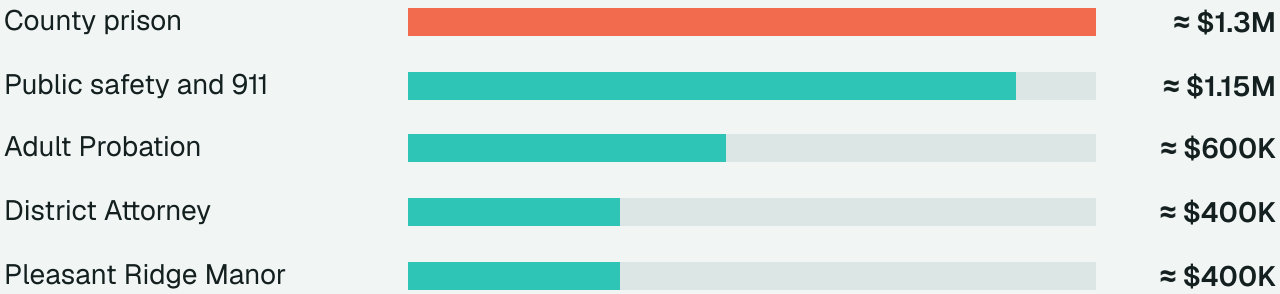
QUESTION 3 OF 5

3 What's going up, and why?

The local cost rises about $5 million in 2027, about 5%. Here is where most of it lands.

WHERE THE INCREASE LANDS



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Pay

Employee pay is behind most of those lines. The proposed raise is 4%, or $1.19 an hour, whichever is more. For a full-time worker, $1.19 an hour is about $2,300 a year.

The formula helps lower-paid workers most. Employees making under $30,000 would average about 7.5%. Above about $58,000 a year, the raise is the 4%.

The cost: General Fund wages and benefits rise about $3.2 million, to about $65 million. Wages are the biggest driver of the increase. The County Executive's letter says nine long-vacant positions are eliminated, without layoffs.

One pay change is separate from the formula. A new floor of $40 an hour lifts fifteen attorneys: four assistant district attorneys and eleven assistant public defenders. It answers a pay gap with attorneys who work for the courts.

Benefits

Health insurance cost about $13.5 million in 2025; the 2027 budget sets aside about $18.3 million. The county's audit expects higher medical and prescription costs. Workers' comp premiums go from about $772,000 to about $1.08 million, up 40%.

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Small offices, big percentages

Some of the biggest percentage jumps are in small offices, where a little money moves the number a lot.

County Executive	**+23%**	About $64,000 in wages and benefits, plus $20,000 for a convention. The County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania, the statewide association of county governments, holds its annual convention in Erie County in 2027. County Executive Vogel's response: most of the office's other lines were cut; one position went from part time to full time, and benefit costs rose because more of the staff have families.
Solicitor	**+19%**	A new paralegal.
Public Defender	**+10%**	Adds two paralegals and a chief deputy, citing heavy caseloads.
Adult Probation	**+9%**	Includes about $161,000 for body cameras.

The prison

At the prison, the budget notes point to a $4.6 million medical contract and rising clothing costs. The county also ended its ICE contract. That removes about $400,000 in expenses, along with the revenue the contract brought in. New limits on inmate phone charges cut another $191,000 in revenue.

Public safety and 911

The county's cost rises from about $3 million to about $4.2 million. The main reason: the 911 fund had been covering about $1 million of its bills from its own reserves, and those reserves have run out. County Executive Vogel told YourErie that when you call 911, you want someone there in a timely manner.

A cost that moved

One office goes the other way. Administration and county facilities looks $472,000 cheaper. But it's billing other funds $491,000 more for custodial work. The cost moved. It didn't disappear.

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What was cut

Gaming money for municipal projects, the America 250 line, and a $200,000 grant to GECAC, the agency on aging. The agency has warned it may close senior centers. The county's pandemic relief money is also gone.

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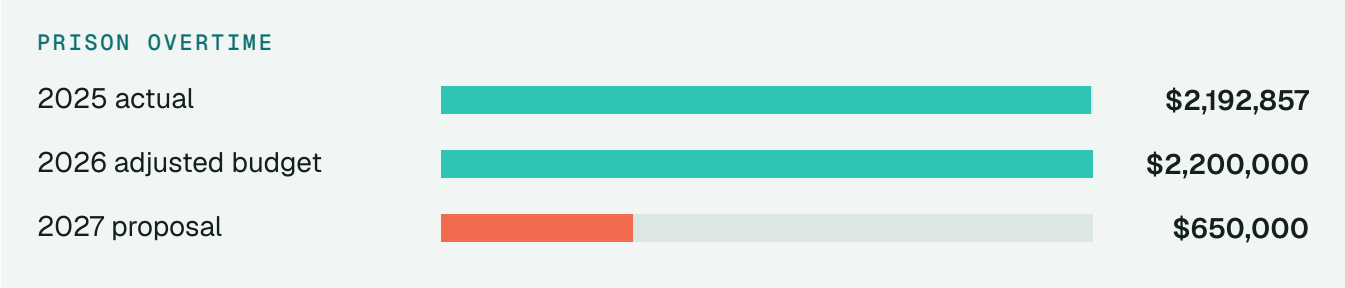
4 Where are the risks?

Some costs in a budget are certain. Others are estimates, and estimates can miss. The County Executive names two to watch.

Prison overtime

It cost about $2.2 million in 2025, and this year's adjusted budget allows $2.2 million. The 2027 proposal sets aside $650,000, about 70% less. The County Executive says the 2027 figure may be optimistic, and she calls prison overtime the acute threat. She has said it's not sustainable to have so many people working overtime.



Here's how it works. Vacant positions leave wage money unspent. Officers cover the shifts with mandatory overtime. And during the year, finance moves the unspent wages over to pay for it. An officer may not know whether a shift will be eight hours or sixteen. This makes it hard on the officers and on budgeting.

Pleasant Ridge Manor

The second is Pleasant Ridge Manor, the county's 300-bed nursing home. A large part of its money is Medicaid reimbursement. The county adds support from the General Fund: about $2 million budgeted this year, about $2.4 million for 2027. The actual support ran above budget in three of the last five years.

≈ $2.0M
Budgeted support, 2026

≈ $2.4M
Budgeted support, 2027

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Years actual support ran above budget

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Why the strain? The county's audit points to no increase in Medicaid or Medicare rates for several years. And with 300 beds, the County Executive notes, the home's revenue is finite. Its operating loss grew from about $1.2 million in 2023 to about $4.3 million in 2024.

The budget book's annualized figure for 2026 is far higher: about $9.5 million. The County Executive says that is IRG transfers. The county provides them so the home can draw extra reimbursement from the state, and the home is supposed to pay the county back. She says it had stopped. It is paying again, but it has not made the county whole.

She calls Pleasant Ridge the chronic threat. Its census is up ten this year, and it is using fewer agency nurses and nursing assistants. But she doesn't expect it to break even next year unless the turnaround speeds up. Council is working to make the home more self-sufficient.

The contracts

For non-union staff, the raise is in the budget. For union staff, it's an offer, not a settlement. And raises don't end. The roughly $3.2 million in raises for 2027 carries into every year after.

Buildings

The county had about $11.5 million in repairs waiting, and all five courthouse elevators were down at once this year. In September, council moved $5 million into a new capital reserve. 2027 spends about $4.4 million of it, mostly on elevators and the library roof. But this budget puts no new money in, and it moves about $565,000 of yearly costs, like sheriff's vehicles, out of the General Fund.

The steadier side

The long-term bills look steadier. And to be fair, the General Fund has come in under budget the last two years.

≈ $7.2M
Bonds outstanding, paid off by 2030

94%
Pension funded

≈ $33M
Retiree health promises, the largest of the three

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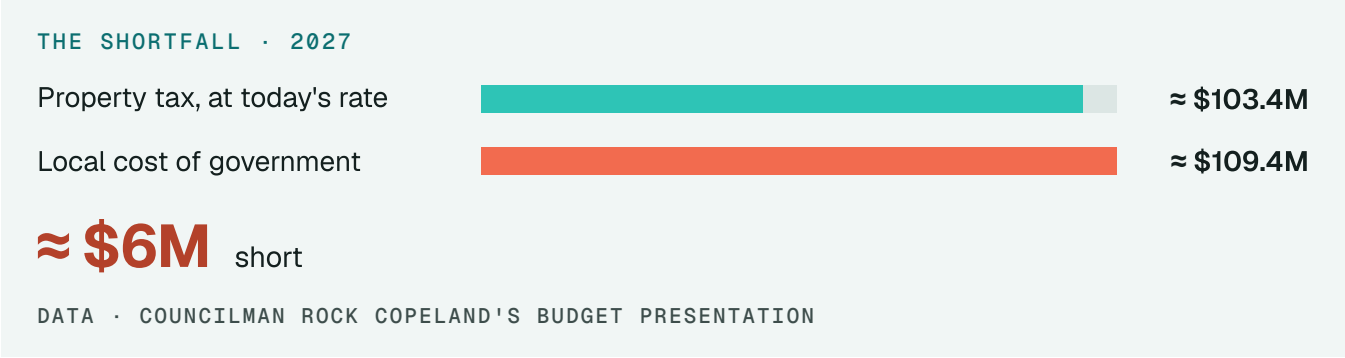
QUESTION 5 OF 5

5 How is it paid for?

Not with a higher tax rate. The rate stays at 6.94 mills. At that rate, the median county bill is $669.

The shortfall

Property tax will bring in about $103 million. The local cost of government is about $109 million. So the county is about $6 million short.



Where the money is found

The proposal finds nearly all of it in two places: about $4.5 million from savings, and about $1.2 million from gaming money.



The savings

The savings are the General Fund's reserve. It grew from about $30 million in 2016 to just over $51 million at the end of 2025. Council policy says keep at least two months of spending. The County Executive's letter says using it is in lieu of raising taxes.

And a planned draw isn't always spent. In 2025, the county planned to use just over $4 million of savings, and used about $300,000. The County Executive says spending is running about 7% under budget this year, and she expects 2027 to look like 2025. In her

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words, “we have demonstrated we can control costs.”

How the shortfall has been covered

This isn't new. Each of the last four budgets has planned on savings to close the gap. Two of them also raised taxes.

2024	2025	2026	2027
Tax increase, savings and gaming money	Savings and gaming money	Tax increase and savings	Savings and gaming money (proposed)

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YOU HAVE A SAY

Council holds budget hearings before it votes. Only two people spoke at the last one. Show up, speak during public comment, or call your council member. It's your money. It's worth a look.

THE WHOLE BUDGET
eriecountypa.gov

MORE LOCAL INFORMATION
erieunfiltered.com

SOURCES

County Executive Christina Vogel's 2027 proposed budget, budget letter and written responses; Councilman Rock Copeland's public presentation on the budget; the county's audit; YourErie. Figures marked ≈ are rounded. This is a proposal: council can change it before it votes.

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