

Committee moves Ulster County's 2019 budget to full Legislature vote

Patricia R. Doxsey pdoxsey@freemanonline.com @pattiatfreeman on Twitter

KINGSTON, N.Y. — The Ulster County Legislature's Ways and Means Committee voted unanimously Monday to move to the full Legislature a county budget for the upcoming year that increases spending but carries a slight decrease in the amount to be raised by property taxes.

Before voting in favor of the 2019 budget, however, committee members adopted a series of amendments that would increase spending above the \$329 million proposed by County Executive Michael Hein.

They also rejected a number of amendments, including ones that would have given a confidential secretary to the county Comptroller's Office, a paralegal to the District Attorney's Office, and pay raises to some employees in the Legislature's office, along with others that would have increased funding for contract agencies such as Arts Mid-Hudson and the Ulster County Community Action Agency.

Committee members voted to reject all requests for management pay raises in excess of 2 percent after growing frustrated over the Hein administration's failure to provide them with salary information.

During its budget review last week, the Ways and Means Committee requested the Budget Office provide a "back of the envelope" analysis of the salary structure of the county's management employees.

Legislator Lynn Archer, who requested the information, said it was "beyond comprehension" that the administration was unable to quickly provide the requested information.

"I don't know how your budget is constructed without all the information at your fingertips," said Archer, D-Accord.

Legislator Joseph Maloney, who has been critical of the Hein administration since taking office in January, suggested the failure to provide the information requested was "strategic" and "par for the course."

County Budget Director Burt Gulnick said that when legislators requested the information, he was not given a timeframe in which to provide it. He said he expected to give them the information on Friday. Legislators are scheduled to vote on a final budget Wednesday.

Committee members also rejected a proposal to change the position of administrative assistant to the comptroller, which was included in the Hein budget, to that of a confidential salary, as well as one that would have changed the position of administrative assistant to that of a deputy director of audit.

They approved the creation of two new fiscal analyst positions in the Legislature's office, as well as \$5,000 for an anti-bullying program, \$100,000 for restorative justice services, and \$8,500 for the Ulster County Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals' spay and neuter program.

Committee members did not consider any proposed changes to the budget recommended by the Legislature's budget consultant, The Benjamin Center for Public Policy at SUNY New Paltz. Among the changes recommended by the center, headed by former Legislature Chairman Gerald Benjamin, were increases in estimated sales tax and hotel/motel tax revenues and a \$1 million reduction in the amount to be generated by property taxes.

In October, Hein unveiled a [\\$329 million county spending plan](#) that he said included a number of new initiatives that would pave the way for “a brighter future” for residents.

The budget calls for a spending increase of \$5.1 million, or 1.6 percent, over the \$323.8 million county budget adopted for 2018. The property tax levy is to drop by 0.2 percent.