

**Office of the Erie County Executive  
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**What is the Erie County Executive's contact information?**

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**Who is the current Erie County Executive?**

Chris Collins was elected as the seventh Erie County Executive on November 6, 2007.<sup>ii</sup> Previous County Executives have included Edward Rath, Edward Regan, Ed Rutkowski, Dennis Gorski, and Joel Giambra.

**What are the duties of the Erie County Executive?**

The County Executive's powers and duties are listed in the Erie County Charter.<sup>iii</sup> The County Executive shall:

- Be the chief executive officer and administrative head of the county government.
- Appoint the head of each department in the county (with some exceptions).
- Supervise the organization of each department (with some exceptions);
- Be the chief budget officer of the county.
- Determine and fix real property tax equalization rates and file them with the county legislature annually.
- Have the authority to appoint and terminate temporary advisory boards comprised of county citizens.
- Examine and approve or disapprove the sufficiency of sureties on official bonds and undertakings.
- Report the annual activities of each county administrative unit to the county legislature.

- Perform duties proscribed by law, administrative code, county ordinance or resolution.
- Be responsible for all executive and administrative functions of county government not mentioned in the county charter.
- Have all powers necessary to perform the functions delegated to him. Contract with a firm of Certified Public Accountants to audit the county finances annually.
- Determine the amount of borrowings needed to fund projects approved by the county legislature.
- Provide an annual listing of planned capital projects to the comptroller.
- Advise the comptroller of any unexpected borrowing needs.
- Approve the content of all official statements needed for the county to issue bonds or notes.

### **What key staff does the Erie County Executive hire?**

The County Executive hires all of the employees in his or her own office.<sup>iv</sup> In addition, the County Executive also appoints the head of most departments in Erie County, such as those listed below:<sup>v</sup>

- Deputy County Executive – Al Hammonds
- Social Services Commissioner – Mike Wiener
- Emergency Services Commissioner - Greg Skibitsky
- Department of Personnel – John Greenan
- Parks Department Commissioner - Jim Hornung
- Veterans Services Director - Patrick Welch
- Erie County Attorney - Cheryl A. Green
- Budget Director – Beth Kornbrekke
- Economic Development, Environment and Planning Commissioner – Holly Sinnott
- Senior Services Commissioner – Brenda Ward
- Health Commissioner – Dr. Anthony Billitter
- Public Works Commissioner – Gerard Sentz
- Office of the Disabled, Executive Director – Emily Kanzica
- Division of Equal Employment Opportunity – William Lobbins

The County Executive also has the power to appoint citizens to serve on any one of thirty-six Volunteer Boards. These Boards often compile information in their respective areas and advise the County Legislature and County Executive. The Volunteer Boards include the Buffalo and Erie County Historical Society, the Council on the Disabled, the Fisheries Advisory, the Health Board, the Local Early Intervention Council, and the Youth Services Board, to name just a few.<sup>vi</sup> There are nearly 400 volunteer board positions and citizens may apply for them by mailing their resumes and other requested information to the Erie County Executive's Office.<sup>vii</sup>

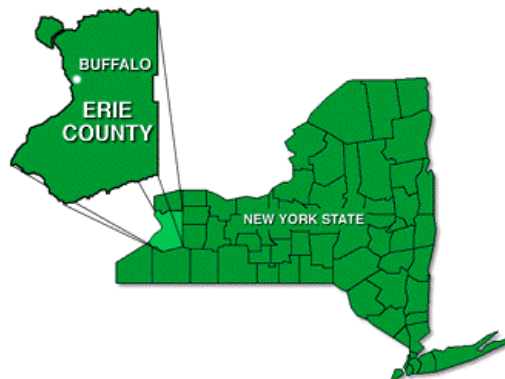
In addition the Volunteer Boards, the County Executive selects citizens to serve on eleven Volunteer Advisory Committees. The purpose of the committees is to bring "private sector skills to government in [an] effort to deliver vital services in a more effective and efficient manner."<sup>viii</sup> The committees include Economic Development, Energy Efficiency, Public Health and Veteran's Services, among others.

### **When is the County Executive elected and what is the term of office?**

The County Executive is elected by the county at large for a term of four years beginning on the first day of January following the election.<sup>ix</sup> The election is to be held on an odd numbered year.<sup>x</sup> There is an exception providing that an interim election may be held in any year to fill the remainder of an unexpired term.<sup>xi</sup> The office of County Executive is a full time position and the Executive may not hold any other public office simultaneously.<sup>xii</sup> Additionally, "the County Executive may be removed by the Governor in the manner provided in the public officers law for the removal of county officers".<sup>xiii</sup>

### **What geographic area does the County Executive serve?**

Erie County is one of 62 counties in New York state and is comprised of 33 municipalities<sup>xiv</sup> and 15 legislative districts.<sup>xv</sup> The population of Erie County as of the 2000 census was 950,256.<sup>xvi</sup>



### **How does the County Executive report to the public?**

The County Executive delivers an annual State of the County Address. The address is usually aired on public television and written copy of it may be found on the Erie County Executive's website.<sup>xvii</sup> The County Executive also publishes a monthly newsletter entitled "The Erie County Taxpayer Newsletter"<sup>xviii</sup> to provide an "overview of what we have accomplished and what we are currently working towards."<sup>xix</sup> The newsletter also includes updates on new projects and civil service announcements.

All press releases from the County Executive's office are archived on the County Executive's website under the "News and Archives" section.<sup>xx</sup> There are usually between one and four printed each month.

### **What are some highlights from the most recent State of the County Address?**

- Installation of new playgrounds, park shelters and pedestrian bridges.
- Erie County is the first "large county" in the United States to implement "Lean Six Sigma."
- Improvement of social services by way of increased job placement.
- A full inventory of county property took place for the first time in ten years.
- The county renegotiated leases of county property which will save a substantial amount of money over the next five years.
- The county negotiated a new contract with ECMC nurses, reducing the total cost of retiree benefits.
- Future plans to promote tourism, promote regional agriculture, promote arts and culture, and focus on entrepreneurship, small businesses and innovation.<sup>xxi</sup>

### **What recent issues has the County Executive addressed?**

- On March 23, 2009, Chris Collins started an online petition to urge investigation of the New York Power Authority's plan to raise rates and issue bonuses to its employees.<sup>xxii</sup> The petition urges the state Attorney General to make a formal investigation in the proposed rate increases.
- Chris Collins recently stated that he will support any effort made to keep the Bills in Buffalo.<sup>xxiii</sup> The local economy derives a great economic benefit from the Buffalo Bills and would suffer a severe loss if the team stopped playing in Erie County.
- Chris Collins signed a property tax exemption for cold war era veterans on November 25, 2008. "The law allows Cold War era veterans a 15 percent reduction in their county property taxes, up to \$12,000, beginning in 2010."<sup>xxiv</sup>
- On September 19, Chris Collins effectively suspended Erie County's Apprenticeship law, first passed by the County Legislature in 2006.<sup>xxv</sup> The County Executive stated that "the Apprenticeship Law prevented contractors without apprenticeship programs from competing for county construction work. By effectively suspending the County's Apprenticeship Law, we opened county construction business to all contractors making the process more equitable and more cost effective."<sup>xxvi</sup>



- The County Executive has been overseeing the Space Utilization Initiative, which reduces the amount of property used by the county government. This project has eliminated the need for five leases with third party entities. In total, the county government will save nearly \$2.6 million in lease payments over the next five years.<sup>xxvii</sup>

**What role does the County Executive have regarding the annual budget?**

The County Executive produces an annual Proposed Budget and a proposed four year plan. Both must be approved by the Erie County Legislature (which is comprised of 15 elected officials).<sup>xxviii</sup> The Erie County Charter requires that the Proposed Budget must be submitted to the Legislature on or before October 15th of each year.<sup>xxix</sup> "The Proposed Budget contains estimates of operating revenues and expenses for each administrative unit of county government, a capital budget and a six-year capital program. It must be presented in the form of a line item budget."<sup>xxx</sup> The County Executive will also submit a Budget Message along with the Proposed Budget. The Budget Message "highlights key features of the Proposed Budget and outlines the key assumptions, policies and initiatives on which it is based."<sup>xxxi</sup>

The Legislature will then approve or make changes to the Budget and return it to the County Executive for review. "The County Executive may veto any items added or increased by the Legislature to which he objects. Deletions or decreases are not subject to veto."<sup>xxxii</sup> The County Executive must submit a statement containing the reason for each veto to the Legislature. The Legislature may then overturn any veto by a two-thirds majority vote.

Once the final budget is established the County Executive has the ability to make small changes. If a department has unexpected expenditures during the year, the County Executive may transfer no more than \$10,000 from another department within the same administrative unit.<sup>xxxiii</sup>

**What is the 2009 adopted budget for the County Executive's office?**

The total budget for the County Executive's Office for 2009 is \$1,072,799.<sup>xxxiv</sup>

**What is the annual salary for the County Executive?**

In 2008, the County Executive was paid \$103,428. In the 2009 proposed budget, the County Executive did not request a raise, and the County Legislature approved the same amount for 2009.<sup>xxxv</sup> The salary of the Erie County Executive, like all county salaries, is ultimately fixed by the county legislature.<sup>xxxvi</sup>

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- <sup>i</sup> Erie County home page, *available at*: <http://www.erie.gov/exec/index.asp>
- <sup>ii</sup> <http://www.erie.gov/exec/>
- <sup>iii</sup> Erie County Charter, Article 3, *available at* <http://www.erie.gov/laws/eccode/charter3.asp>.
- <sup>iv</sup> Erie County Charter, *available at* <http://www.erie.gov/laws/eccode/charter3.asp>.
- <sup>v</sup> Names and titles are taken from the Erie County Taxpayer Newsletter, Issue 1, Vol. 1 and the State of the County Address. Both are available through the County Executive's website at <http://www.erie.gov/exec/index.asp>.
- <sup>vi</sup> [http://www.erie.gov/exec/boards/board\\_listings.asp](http://www.erie.gov/exec/boards/board_listings.asp).
- <sup>vii</sup> *Id.*
- <sup>viii</sup> <http://www.erie.gov/exec/committees>.
- <sup>ix</sup> Erie County Charter, section 301, *available at* <http://www.erie.gov/laws/eccode/charter3.asp>.
- <sup>x</sup> Erie County Charter, section 2803, Terms of certain elected county officers, *available at* <http://www.erie.gov/laws/eccode/charter28.asp>.
- <sup>xi</sup> *Id.*
- <sup>xii</sup> *Id.*
- <sup>xiii</sup> Erie County Charter, section 303, Removal of the County Executive, *available at* <http://www.erie.gov/laws/eccode/charter3.asp>.
- <sup>xiv</sup> <http://www.erie.gov/municipalities.asp>
- <sup>xv</sup> Erie County Charter, section 105, Legislative Districts, *available at* <http://www.erie.gov/laws/eccode/charter1.asp>.
- <sup>xvi</sup> <http://www.erie.gov/overview>.
- <sup>xvii</sup> <http://www.erie.gov/exec/soc.asp>.
- <sup>xviii</sup> <http://www.erie.gov/exec/news.asp>.
- <sup>xix</sup> Erie County Taxpayer Newsletter, vol. 1, Issue 1, *available at* [http://www.erie.gov/exec/pdfs/newsletter\\_feb08.pdf](http://www.erie.gov/exec/pdfs/newsletter_feb08.pdf).
- <sup>xx</sup> <http://www.erie.gov/exec/news.asp>.
- <sup>xxi</sup> <http://www.erie.gov/exec/soc.asp>.
- <sup>xxii</sup> Press Release, March 23, 2009, *available at* <http://www.erie.gov/exec/pr032309.asp>.
- <sup>xxiii</sup> WNED News, *Elected Officials React to Bills Speculation; Opener Slated for MNF*, [http://publicbroadcasting.net/wned/news.newsmain?action=article&ARTICLE\\_ID=1484366&sectionID=1](http://publicbroadcasting.net/wned/news.newsmain?action=article&ARTICLE_ID=1484366&sectionID=1).
- <sup>xxiv</sup> Press Release, Nov. 25, 2008, *available at* <http://www.erie.gov/exec/pr112508.asp>.
- <sup>xxv</sup> *Collins Suspends Erie County's Apprenticeship Law*, The Buffalo Bean, *available at* <http://thebuffalobean.com/tag/chris-collins/>.
- <sup>xxvi</sup> State of the County Address, *available at* <http://www.erie.gov/exec/soc.asp>.
- <sup>xxvii</sup> [http://www.erie.gov/exec/pdfs/budget2009\\_msg\\_summary\\_proposed.pdf](http://www.erie.gov/exec/pdfs/budget2009_msg_summary_proposed.pdf).
- <sup>xxviii</sup> 2009 Erie County Proposed Budget, *available at* [http://www.erie.gov/exec/pdfs/budget2009\\_msg\\_summary\\_proposed.pdf](http://www.erie.gov/exec/pdfs/budget2009_msg_summary_proposed.pdf).
- <sup>xxix</sup> 2009 Erie County Proposed Budget, Page 76, *available at* [http://www.erie.gov/exec/pdfs/budget2009\\_msg\\_summary\\_proposed.pdf](http://www.erie.gov/exec/pdfs/budget2009_msg_summary_proposed.pdf).
- <sup>xxx</sup> *Id.*
- <sup>xxxi</sup> *Id.*
- <sup>xxxii</sup> *Id.* at page 77.
- <sup>xxxiii</sup> *Id.*
- <sup>xxxiv</sup> 2009 Erie County Adopted Budget, page 8, *available at*: [http://www.erie.gov/exec/pdfs/budget09\\_bookA\\_adopted.pdf](http://www.erie.gov/exec/pdfs/budget09_bookA_adopted.pdf)
- <sup>xxxv</sup> 2009 Erie County Adopted Budget, page 13, *available at*: [http://www.erie.gov/exec/pdfs/budget09\\_bookA\\_adopted.pdf](http://www.erie.gov/exec/pdfs/budget09_bookA_adopted.pdf)
- <sup>xxxvi</sup> Erie County Administrative Code, section 3.01, *available at*: <http://www.erie.gov/laws/eccode/code3.asp>.



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