

2027 Budget Message

Mayor Kate Wdowiasz

To the Members of the Common Council and the Residents of the City of Dunkirk:

Pursuant to the provisions of New York State law and the Charter of the City of Dunkirk, I respectfully submit the Proposed 2027 City Budget.

I send this budget with a fair amount of trepidation. I do not expect you to “like” or “cheer” for this budget. However, I would ask you to approach it with a mind of understanding of what the realities are in this State and the Country in which we live. Whilst State mandates and costs continue to go up, an ever-shrinking tax base is asked to absorb more for the basic serves for which our community relies on and needs.

Over the last several years, families throughout our community have faced a difficult reality: the cost of nearly everything has increased. Groceries cost more, utility bills are higher, insurance premiums continue to rise, and everyday necessities stretch household budgets.

The City of Dunkirk is not immune to the economic pressures affecting our residents. The cost of maintaining streets, operating public safety vehicles, purchasing equipment, paying utility bills, providing employee benefits, and delivering the essential services residents depend upon continues to rise at a pace that exceeds revenue growth. Inflation has increased the cost of nearly every aspect of municipal operations, making it more difficult each year to provide the same level of service with limited resources.

When the City pays more for fuel, asphalt, equipment, insurance, electricity, vehicle maintenance, and employee benefits, those are costs that cannot simply be absorbed indefinitely. Just as families and businesses have had to adjust to higher prices, local governments are facing many of those same challenges while continuing to provide the essential services residents expect every day. These increases affect every corner of municipal government. The trucks that plow our streets cost more to operate. The materials used to repair roads and sidewalks cost more to purchase. The equipment our police officers, firefighters, and public works employees rely upon costs more to maintain and replace. Simply put, providing the same level of service today costs significantly more than it did only a few years ago.

At the same time, the City must meet its contractual obligations to its workforce. Recent collective bargaining agreements and wage adjustments have resulted in increased salaries, wages, and associated benefit costs across multiple departments. These are important investments in the employees who serve our community, but they also represent recurring expenses that must be responsibly funded within the City's operating budget.

Preparing this budget required difficult decisions. Throughout the process, this Administration carefully examined departmental spending, identified opportunities for efficiencies, and sought to control costs wherever possible. Every dollar included in this budget was scrutinized with the understanding that it comes from hardworking taxpayers who are facing many of the same financial challenges in their own homes.

This proposed budget continues to support the core services that protect our quality of life and keep our city functioning every day. It maintains funding for police and fire protection, public works

operations, water and wastewater services, code enforcement, parks and recreation, and the administrative functions necessary to serve our residents.

The City also continues to address longstanding financial challenges that have accumulated over decades, including debt obligations, aging infrastructure, legacy costs, and deferred financial decisions from prior administrations. These obligations consume a significant portion of available resources and limit the City's ability to expand programs or make new investments without careful planning.

This is not a budget of growth or expansion. **It is a budget of responsibility.** It reflects the realities of today's economy while prioritizing the services residents depend on the most. It is designed to maintain stability, honor our commitments, and position the City to navigate continued financial uncertainty.

While this budget is balanced, our work does not end here. Financial stability is not achieved in a single budget cycle. It requires discipline, long-term planning, and a willingness to make responsible decisions year after year. Meeting the challenges ahead will require continued collaboration among the Administration, the Common Council, City employees, labor organizations, businesses, and residents. Regardless of political affiliation or perspective, we all share the same goal: a stronger, safer, and more financially stable Dunkirk.

I recognize many families in our community are carefully managing their own household budgets in the face of rising costs and economic uncertainty. As Mayor, I approach this budget with that same sense of responsibility. Every public dollar represents the hard work and sacrifice of our taxpayers, and we have an obligation to ensure those dollars are spent wisely, efficiently, and transparently. The challenges before us are significant, but the story of Dunkirk has always been one of resilience, perseverance, and community. Time and again, our residents, businesses, neighborhoods, and local institutions have demonstrated the ability to come together, overcome adversity, and move forward with determination. This budget reflects that same spirit. It provides a responsible path forward that preserves essential services, honors our commitments, and protects the fiscal health of our City. By working together and remaining focused on what unites us rather than what divides us, we can meet today's challenges while creating new opportunities for future generations. The decisions we make today will help shape the Dunkirk we leave to our children and grandchildren.

I remain confident in the strength, character, and resilience of our community. Dunkirk has faced challenges before, and each time we have moved forward by working together, supporting one another, and staying focused on the common good. With responsible leadership, sound financial management, and a shared commitment to fiscal responsibility, we can continue to provide the essential services our residents deserve while building a stronger foundation for future growth and opportunity.

Though the economic pressures we face are significant, they are not insurmountable. The future of Dunkirk will not be defined by the challenges before us, but by how we respond to them. I remain optimistic that through cooperation, accountability, innovation, and prudent stewardship of taxpayer resources, we will continue moving our City forward. Together, we can preserve the services our residents rely upon, strengthen our financial foundation, and create opportunities for future generations. I am honored to work alongside our residents, employees, and elected officials as we continue building a stronger future for our community.

I respectfully submit this Proposed 2027 Budget to the Common Council for its consideration and review.

Respectfully submitted,

Kate Wdowiasz
Mayor
City of Dunkirk