

26 Topics for Nassau County Candidates - Page 1 of 9

2017 Campaign for Nassau County Executive, Comptroller and Clerk

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In past elections, we have circulated a sheet of 20 Questions that we believe the candidates should address during the campaign. We have received some proposals for topic areas that are particular to the present campaigns for County Executive, Comptroller and County Clerk. Here they are. The topics covered are only a partial list of what will confront the new County Executive Team. If you have some additional topics or variations on these, please submit them to us via email, [here](#).

Some of these questions are not possible to fully answer. In a number of instances, only those in control of government are in a position to collect and assess the information necessary to the formulation of sound plans, and that simply has not been done. We have annotated some of the questions with references to County records and newspaper articles and editorial. Each annotation is a link which will bring you to the referenced document. A list of the documents is at the end of this pdf. Please note that the annotations are not intended to be anywhere near complete, but are simply introductory sources.

The budget is how much the County will spend in the coming fiscal year, and how much income it expects to collect to meet those expenses. When expenses are greater than income, the result is a deficit, the County will either borrow money or cut back on its planned expenditures, or both. Borrowed money or a failure to meet current expenditures gets added to years of accumulated deficits, and that accumulation is a major part of [the County's debt \(1\)](#). See [here\(2\)](#) and [here\(3\)](#) for figures as to Nassau County debt. The present County debt, through to 2043, has a total of principle and interest of \$4,331,440,917. That figure will grow with every new deficit.

See generally: Review of the Fiscal Year 2017 Budget & Multi-Year Plan (Office of Legislative Budget Review). [Link \(4\)](#)

1. Finance Generally

- A. How do we balance the budget without borrowing? [Link\(5\)](#) [Link\(6\)](#)
[Link\(7\)](#)
- B. What programs would be cut back or eliminated?
- C. What programs are so vital that they cannot be cut back or eliminated?
[Link\(8\)](#)

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- D. What taxes or fees would we raise, if any?
 - E. Who will feel the burden of those taxes?
 - F. How will proposed changes in the Federal Tax Code impact Nassau County Residents”? [Link\(9\)](#) [Link\(10\)](#) [Link\(11\)](#)
 - G. What positions will we eliminate?
 - H. What changes should there be in employee salary and benefits?
[Link\(12\)](#) [Link\(13\)](#)
 - I. How much deficit is reasonably tolerable for Nassau County?
[Link\(14\)](#)
 - J. How do we pay down the more than \$4-billion dollar Nassau County presently committed debt, and decrease the very high cost of servicing that debt? See [here\(15\)](#)
 - K. Is it possible to fully discuss these issues without sacrificing the ability to win the election?
2. The Nassau County Interim Finance Authority (NIFA) is a seven member, non-partisan Board that was created by New York State in 2000. It was a period when Nassau County suffered a financial crisis toward the end of the administration of Republican Nassau County Executive Thomas Gulotta. NIFA was created by the State of New York which provided a \$100-million dollar bailout for Nassau County. As a condition of the bailout NIFA was granted the right to monitor and oversee the County's finances, with the power of declaring a “[control period](#)”(16) (that permits NIFA to over-ride financial planning and decisions made by the County Executive and County Legislature. Such a control period was declared and implemented [during the Gulotta administration\(17\)](#), and [was again declared in 2011\(18\)](#) during the administration of Republican County Executive Edward Mangano. [link\(19\)](#).
- A. Has NIFA been a help or a hindrance in the management of Nassau County’s Finances?
 - B. Is it advantageous for Nassau County to get out from under NIFA Control? If so, how can we do that, and how long will it take?
3. Are there bloated levels of unnecessary employees in County Departments? If so, what departments, and what can be done about it? How much could reasonably be saved by cutbacks and how would the community be impacted? What obligation does the County have to persons whose positions are eliminated?

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4. Are there bloated overtime expenditures in County Departments? If so, what departments and what can be done about it? How much could reasonably be saved? [Link\(20\)](#) [Link\(21\)](#). [Link\(22\)](#) [Link\(23\)](#)

5. Are there county departments that are not adequately staffed, either in number of employees or expertise of employees? If so, what can be done to upgrade those departments and create efficiencies? How much will it cost?

6. Are there county departments that do not have adequate equipment or space? If so, what should be done about it? How much will it cost?

7. Is there unnecessary overlapping of county departments? What departments could reasonably share certain human and material resources? How much could reasonably be saved?

8. The pension burden grows annually (approximately 10% per year) and is now costs approximately \$180 million per year. What if anything can be done about it? [Link \(23A\)](#) For Fiscal Year 2017, the total cost of fringe benefits in the Nassau County budget has been estimated to be \$537 million. [Link\(24\)](#)

9. A number of states that consider themselves to be “conservative” and self-reliant get far more back from the federal government (in the form of grants, government facilities and the like) than they contribute to the federal government. What can be done to bring back more money to Nassau County from New York State and from Washington, since we pay far more to them more than we receive back? [Link\(25\)](#) [Link\(26\)](#) [Link\(27\)](#) [Link\(28\)](#) [Link\(29\)](#)

10. The Nassau County Legislature meets regularly and receives the testimony of government employees, contractors and the public. Shouldn't such testimony be given under oath, so there is accountability, as provided by the [Rules of the Nassau County Legislature\(30\)](#) (sections 19 and 20)?

11. At the end of these questions is the text of the section of the Nassau County Charter that describes the duties and powers of The Office of Legislative Budget Review. Relatively few of those duties are fully performed because the legislature has not appropriated the necessary funding for staff and resources. What if anything should be done about that? Which of those functions would fulfill the oversight needs of county government that have been widely discussed for some time? [See here\(31\)](#) for the various reports that are produced by the Office of Legislative Budget Review.

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12. Nassau County has a number of legislative districts that have been severely gerrymandered for partisan political gain. How do we prevent partisan gerrymandering of legislative districts that favor one party or another and divides communities? When and how should that effort start? [See here\(32\)](#) for the various reports produced by the Nassau County United Redistricting Coalition. Also see Newsday report [here\(33\)](#) and League of Women Voters [here\(34\)](#) and Long Island Civic Engagement Table [here\(35\)](#) and Long Island Press [here\(36\)](#). See [here\(37\)](#) for case pending in United States Supreme Court.

13. What should be the long-term and short-term transportation improvement objectives of Nassau County? How will we pay for them? [Link\(38\)](#) and [Link\(39\)](#) and [Link\(40\)](#) [Link\(41\)](#) [Link\(42\)](#)

14. What should the long term and short-term infrastructure goals of Nassau County? How will we pay for them? [Link\(43\)](#) [Link\(44\)](#) [Link\(45\)](#)

15. What should be the long term and short term environmental goals of Nassau County? How will we pay for them? [Link46\)](#) [Link\(47\)](#)

16. It is widely said that Nassau County must attract and expand new business ventures to provide more jobs, lower property taxes and retain and attract young people. Is there a constructive plan in place for that purpose? If not, what should our plan be? What should be the basic principles of such a plan? [Link\(48\)](#)

17. Within Nassau County there are many different taxing and regulatory authorities, many of which are not controlled by county or town governments. Should that be changed? If so, how? What can be done to avoid duplication of costs and resources. [Link\(49\)](#) [Link\(50\)](#)

18. Each taxing authority, including the county, looks at its own needs. There is no agency of government that is devoted to assessing the overall tax burden upon the residents of the county, from all local fees and taxes. Should we have a taxpayer ombudsman that reports as to that burden, as it rests upon the various geographic, economic and social groups of Nassau County?

19. Should county government be more transparent. If so, how?

21. Conditions at the Nassau County Jail have been described as deplorable. See: [here\(51\)](#) [here\(52\)](#) and [here\(53\)](#). What would you do about the problem? How much will it cost or save?

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22. The System of Assessment and Assessment Appeal has been described as broken, unfair and a boon to law firms who appeal assessments. What would you do to fix those systems? How much will it cost or save? See [here\(54\)](#) and [here\(55\)](#) [here\(56\)](#) [here\(57\)](#). [here\(58\)](#) and [here\(59\)](#)

23. The bail system has been criticized as being defective because it jails people, before trial, simply because they cannot afford to pay bail, and the result is they lose jobs, families suffer, and the system and jails are unnecessarily clogged. See [here\(60\)](#) and [here\(61\)](#) and [here\(62\)](#). What would you do about it. How much will it cost or save?

24. What is your view on the privatization of government functions? [Link\(63\)](#)
[Link\(64\)](#) [Link\(65\)](#) [Link\(66\)](#) [Link\(67\)](#)

25. Are there any new specific ideas that you have about county finances and management that haven't been discussed?

26. Taking all of the issues into account, what are your priorities to make Nassau County at least economically and socially sustainable over the next twenty years?

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This extract, from the Nassau County Charter, relates to Question 11.

ARTICLE I

B THE OFFICE OF LEGISLATIVE BUDGET REVIEW.

Section 180. The Office of Legislative Budget Review.

181. Director of Office of Legislative Budget Review.

182. Legislative committee for Office of Legislative Budget Review.

183. Scope of authority, duties, powers and responsibilities. 184. County departments and cooperation. § 180. Office of Legislative Budget Review. There is hereby created an Office of Legislative Budget Review within the County Legislature. (Added by Local Law No. 11 - 1994, in effect January 1, 1996.)

§ 181. Director of Office of Legislative Budget Review.

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1. There is hereby created the position of Director of the Office of Legislative Budget Review. Such director shall serve for a four - year term of service, commencing on the first day of January of an even - numbered year and expiring on the thirty - first day of December of the second consecutive odd - numbered year following the appointment, irrespective of the date of appointment. The Initial appointment made pursuant to this section shall expire on the thirty - first day of December 1999. Such director shall be solely responsible for the administration of the Office of Legislative Budget Review, hiring its staff and controlling its budget, subject to review of the County Legislature. The County Legislature, by the enactment of a procedural resolution, shall appoint the director. The Director of the Office of Legislative Budget Review and his secretary shall not be members of the classified service.

2. The Director of the Office of Legislative Budget Review shall not be an officer of any political party.

§ 182. Legislative committee for Office of Legislative Budget Review.

1. The County Legislature shall create a legislative committee within the County Legislature for the purpose of maintaining general supervision of and liaison with the Office of Legislative Budget Review. Such committee shall meet monthly with the director or at such other times as may be agreed upon, maintain minutes and disperse those minutes to all county legislators. The membership of such committee shall be as follows: the presiding officer of the County Legislature, the minority leader, the chairman of the finance committee, one member appointed by the presiding officer and one member appointed by the minority leader. Before the Director of the Office of Legislative Budget Review, is appointed pursuant to the provisions of section 181, the committee shall set the qualifications for such office and shall publish a notice that a vacancy exists in such office and shall interview potential candidates for appointment to such office. I - B: Legislative Budget Review April 30, 2017 22

2. No one may be interviewed for the position of Director of the Office of Legislative Budget Review until an advertisement has been placed in a newspaper designated as the official newspaper of the county.

3. In the event that the County Legislature seeks to reappoint the same individual who occupies the position of Director of the Office of Legislative Budget Review, the requirements as to the setting forth of qualifications, public

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notice and interviewing that are described in subsections 1 and 2 of this section shall not apply and such reappointment may occur at any time after November 1 of the last year of the director's term. (Subd. 3 added by Local Law No. 22 - 1999, in effect December 15, 2003).

§ 183. Scope of authority, duties, powers and responsibilities. The Director of the Office of Legislative Budget Review shall perform the following staff and oversight functions and be charged with the following responsibilities for the County Legislature within the appropriations provided to the Office of Legislative Budget Review:

1. To determine the extent to which legislative policies are being faithfully, efficiently and effectively implemented by administrative officials.
2. To determine whether county programs are achieving their legal and desired objectives by a review of the performance and management efficiency of county departments and agencies. However, a review shall be coordinated with the County Comptroller when a review includes or requires accounting audits.
3. To determine and analyze the soundness of departmental budget estimates and requests for appropriations, revenues, borrowings and such other fiscal modifications throughout the year.
4. To determine and analyze annually the soundness of the proposed county budget and community college budget, including borrowings and taxes.
5. To determine whether the county has adequate plans, facilities, organizational arrangements and management control systems to adequately and effectively accomplish program and legislative policies.
6. Such other duties and responsibilities as the County Legislature may assign.

§ 184. County departments and cooperation. County departments and agencies are required to provide timely access to the legislative staff to their personnel and records, assisting the legislative staff in collecting and analyzing factual objective data. Such access shall be construed to include direct access to the county's mainframe and departmental computer systems insofar as the information sought is not otherwise precluded by federal, state or local laws or a collective bargaining arrangement between the county and any of its employees.

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Reference Notes for the 26 Questions

1	Nassau County, https://www.nassaucountyny.gov/3991/Debt
2	Nassau County, " General Obligation Bonds of the County and Nassau County Interim Finance Authority Bonds as of April 30, 2016 "
3	Nassau County, " Total County and NIFA Debt Service (as of April 30, 2016) "
4	Nassau County Office of Budget Review, Review of the Fiscal Year 2017 Budget & Multi-Year Plan
5	Washington State Budget and Policy Center, " Borrowing to Balance the Budget Can Make Sense, But Not by Itself "
6	Newsday, " Panel seeks new ways to finance local governments "
7	Newsday, " State control board should demand a balanced County budget "
8	Newsday, " Dodge ball in Nassau "
9	There is no 9
10	Newsday, " Empire state of alarm: NY officials say Trump tax plan hits home "
11	Newsday, " NY lawmakers decry Trump's proposed loss of tax deductions "
12	Newsday, " Nassau County attorney questions union pay, layoff deals "
13	Newsday, " Suffolk panel balks at requiring appointees to pay for health care "
14	Newsday, " Comptroller: 5 LI municipalities under 'fiscal stress' "
15	Nassau County, Total County and NIFA Debt Service (as of April 30, 2016)
16	NIFA Website " NIFA's Mission "
17	NY Times, " Nassau Looks To Its Leader For a Route Out Of Fiscal Maze "
18	New York Times, " New York State Seizes Finances of Nassau County "
19	Newsday, " Letter: Overtime inflates public pensions "
20	Newsday, " Nassau County police overtime drops after record high in 2016 "
21	Newsday, " Nassau police overtime soars to \$70M, report eyes reasons "
22	Newsday, " Nassau County improperly calculated CSEA overtime, suit contends "
23	Nassau County Office of Budget Review, Review of the Fiscal Year 2017 Budget & Multi-Year Plan
23A	New York Post, " Dozens of bills aim to benefit public employees at taxpayers' expense "
24	Nassau County Office of Budget Review, Review of the Fiscal Year 2017 Budget & Multi-Year Plan
25	NY Daily News, " New York State pays big in federal taxes, but doesn't get as much in return, says Controller Thomas DiNapoli "
26	The Atlantic, " Which States Are Givers and Which Are Takers? And is that even the correct way to frame the question? "
27	Wallet Hub, " 2017's Most & Least Federally Dependent States "
28	How Stuff Works, " Which States Give the Most to the Federal Government and Which Get the Most? "
29	Slate.com - The Reckoning, " Blue State, Red Face: Guess Who Benefits More From Your Taxes? "
30	Nassau County Legislature, Rules of Procedure .

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31	Nassau County Office of Budget Rev.– Links to Office of Budget Rev. Reports.
32	Nassau County United Redistricting Coalition, “ Voters First Report ”
33	Newsday, “ Report: Overhaul Nassau redistricting ”
34	Nassau County League of Women Voters, “ Redistricting Nassau ”
35	Civic Engagement Table, “ New Report: Fair Redistricting for Nassau County ”
36	Long Island Press, “ Nassau County Oks New District Maps Despite Outcry ”
37	NY Times, “ How a Wisconsin Case Before Justices Could Reshape Redistricting ”
38	Newsday, “ Candidates for Nassau exec spar — gently — over transportation ”
39	Newsday, “ Put tolls to work against traffic ”
40	Newsday, “ Clear the rails for the LIRR third track ”
41	Newsday, “ Biden: ‘Sound the alarm’ on need for transportation upgrades ”
42	CNBC – “ On the Money: Traffic in US cities is costing commuters ”
43	US News & World Report – “ New York Invests \$69M in Upgrades for Local Water Systems ”
44	Newsday, “ Put tolls to work against traffic ”
45	CNBC – “ On the Money: Traffic in US cities is costing commuters ”
46	Nassau County, “ Environmental Review ”
47	Nassau County, “ 2030 Comprehensive Plan Economic Development Element Goals, Objectives and Policies ”
48	Newsday, “ Why popular chains have avoided Long Island ”
49	Newsday, “ Don’t hold your breath waiting for shared government services ”
50	NY Times, “ As Problems Grow, So Does The Push For Regional Government ”
51	Newsday, “ Nassau County jail conditions ‘inhumane,’ activists say ”
52	Newsday, “ Ex-medical vendor faulted in 3 Nassau jail deaths ”
53	Newsday, “ Problems mount at Nassau County jail ”
54	Newsday, “ Record number challenge Nassau tax assessments for first time ”
55	Newsday, “ Find the will to fix broken tax system ”
56	Newsday, “ Nassau assessment: The fog starts to lift ”
57	Newsday, “ Is there a fix for Nassau’s \$6B property tax system? ”
58	Newsday, “ Nassau County admits acting tax assessor is not qualified for job ”
59	Newsday, “ Mangano's overhaul created \$1.7B property tax shift ”
60	NY Times, “ Kamala Harris and Rand Paul: To Shrink Jails, Let’s Reform Bail ”
61	NY Times, “ Defendants Can’t Be Jailed Solely Because of Inability to Post Bail, Judge Says ”
62	NY Times, “ New Jersey Is Front Line in a National Battle Over Bail ”
63	Wikipedia, “ Privatization ”
64	The Atlantic, “ Privatization Is Changing America's Relationship With Its Physical Stuff ”
65	TalkingPointsMemo.com, “ The History of Privatization. How an Ideological and Political Attack on Government Became a Corporate Grab for Gold ”
66	Newsday, “ Private prisons don’t save money, don’t make us safer ”
67	Newsday, “ Nassau privatized services’ performance results in disagreements ”

This list of questions was collected and edited by the Rockville Centre Democratic Club