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# Erie County points toward surplus

**Business First - by James Fink**

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**Erie County** Executive **Chris Collins** says that the county's \$1.1 billion budget appears to be headed toward the black, perhaps running a surplus as large as \$13 million.

Collins released his midyear fiscal report on Monday. He gave some of the credit to the fact that sales-tax collections are up 5.3 percent from a year ago, an increase of approximately \$8 million.

"We're trending positive in almost every measure," Collins said.

Other reasons given by the county executive for the fiscal upswing:

- There are 183 positions on the county payroll that are currently empty. Collins said that he has no plans to fill those jobs.
- Overtime expenses have been reduced.
- Erie County picked up \$2.8 million from New York state from a settlement concerning social services reimbursements.
- The real estate property transfer tax is running about 10 percent ahead of last year.

In a four-year financial plan that Collins recently delivered to the Erie County Fiscal Stability Authority, and which the group subsequently approved, the county executive predicted that the property tax rate will remain flat and that 2013 and 2014 could see modest budget surpluses.

But Collins' opponent in November's county executive election, County Comptroller **Mark Poloncarz**, disputed most of what was presented Monday.

"Although it appears as though Erie County will see a nominal surplus for 2011, everything is not as bright and sunny as the county executive would leave you to believe," Poloncarz said.

Poloncarz said that Collins' bottom line was improved by nearly \$27 million in one-shot revenue additions.

"The \$13 million surplus the county executive is predicting, looks more like a \$14 million deficit," Poloncarz said.