OFFICE OF THE NEW YORK STATE COMPTROLLER

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Pandemic Impacts on NYC Fiscal Year 2024 Budget Priorities

Highlights

- New York City's total projected spending for FY 2024 grew slightly from the January 2020 plan to the January 2023 plan (\$104.5 billion to \$104.8 billion, respectively, adjusted for prepayments).
- The City's current projection for FY 2024 tax revenue is \$2.4 billion lower than the January 2020 plan, incorporating the various impacts of the pandemic.
- New York City received more than \$27 billion in federal pandemic aid for the period FY 2020 to FY 2026, of which \$2.4 billion is scheduled to be used in FY 2024.
- Since January 2020, the City has implemented savings programs that totaled \$5.6 billion for FY 2024. Nearly two-thirds of the savings came from agency spending, with the largest component achieved through elimination of funded vacant positions and a citywide hiring freeze.
- During the same period, the City also added new needs, increasing spending by \$3.24 billion for FY 2024. Significant contributors include new or expanded funding for street homelessness and shelters, educational programming, the Fair Fares transit program, and summer youth initiatives.
- The Department of Education received additional City funding for new needs of \$442 million for FY 2024, predominantly to fund known costs for charter schools and student transportation which OSC had previously identified as risks to the finanical plan.

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed priorities for governments across the country, including New York City's. This report examines how the City's spending priorities shifted during the pandemic. OSC compares the projected fiscal year (FY) 2024 plan from January 2020, which did not yet consider the effects of COVID-19, to the FY 2024 Preliminary Budget.

To address the social, fiscal and economic impacts of the pandemic, the federal government has appropriated an unprecedented amount of federal assistance since March 2020. New York City used these funds to offset costs associated with the immediate response to the public health emergency and subsequent economic recovery and was able to increase total spending even as city-funded revenues were projected downward from pre-pandemic estimates. Notably, total spending in FY 2024 is expected to grow from pre-pandemic projections (adjusted for surplus transfers), driven largely by education, which received substantial earmarked federal relief aid.

While a budget is a statement of priorities, there are several large expenses expected to rise where the City has little control over their trajectory, including fringe benefits, Medicaid and public assistance. The City therefore implemented cost-saving measures for the expenditures it could control, including a strict hiring freeze which resulted in a significant reduction in headcount. Through these measures, combined with the use of federal aid and City tax revenues that beat projections due to short-term favorable economic conditions, the City was able to preserve or increase spending in many of its discretionary programs. In a number of instances, spending choices reflect efforts to facilitate recovery through the delivery of basic services.

Overview

In January 2020, the City released its preliminary FY 2021 budget and a five-year financial plan ending in FY 2024. The gap projected for FY 2024 at that time was less than \$2.7 billion, very manageable compared to gaps in prior years. Since then, however, the City has faced a number of challenges due to the onset and eventual implications of the COVID-19 pandemic in New York City. The pandemic has led to a period of elevated fiscal volatility stemming from the public health, economic, and social impacts created by the virus and subsequent response.

Initially, the City took substantial steps to reduce costs amid projections of steep revenue declines. However, federal relief aid to businesses and individuals led to better than anticipated revenues, fueled by personal and business income taxes. In addition, federal relief aid to governments provided further support, particularly for managing the public health risks and impacts of COVID-19 on education. These actions have in turn allowed the City to restore some planned spending cuts and boost other areas to aid its recovery (see Figure 1).

FIGURE 1
FY 2024 Financial Plan Comparison by Major Component January 2020 Plan vs. January 2023 Plan
(in millions)

(III TIIIIIOTIS)	FY 2024	FY 2024	Change - Better/ (Worse)		
	Jan 2020	Jan 2023	Total	City	Non-City
	Plan	Plan	Funds	Funds	Funds
Revenue Reestimates					
Taxes	\$ 71,315	\$ 68,888	\$ (2,427)	\$ (2,427)	\$
Federal Aid	6,971	9,485	2,514		2,514
State Aid & All Other	23,546	24,282	736	359	377
Total Revenue	\$101,832	\$102,655	\$ 823	\$ (2,068)	\$ 2,891
Discretionary Spending					
Personal Services	32,291	31,492	799	1,619	(820)
Other than Personal Services	29,780	32,607	(2,827)	(477)	(2,349)
Subtotal	\$ 62,071	\$ 64,099	\$ (2,028)	\$ 1,141	\$ (3,169)
Debt Service	9,366	7,901	1,465	1,417	48
Nondiscretionary Spending					
Pensions	10,112	9,563	548	548	
Other Fringe Benefits	14,227	13,500	727	552	175
Medicaid	5,915	6,385	(470)	(470)	
Public Assistance	1,650	1,650		(36)	36
Judgments and Claims	775	1,165	(390)	(390)	
Other Legal & Contractual Obligations Subtotal	967	1,010	(43) \$ 372	(3) \$ 202	(40) \$ 171
	\$ 33,646	\$ 33,273	\$ 372	\$ 202	3 171
Contingencies					
General Reserve	1,000	1,200	(200)	(200)	
Capital Stabilization Reserve	250	250			
Subtotal	\$ 1,250	\$ 1,450	\$ (200)	\$ (200)	\$
Less: Intra-City Expenses	(1,842)	(1,902)	60		60
Total Expenditures	\$104,491	\$104,821	\$ (330)	\$ 2,560	\$ (2,890)
Prepayment of FY 2024 Expenses		(2,166)	2,166	2,166	
Adjusted Total Spending	\$104,491	\$102,655	\$ 1,836	\$ 4,727	\$ (2,890)

Note: Columns may not add due to rounding. OSC estimates of the changes to City Fund expenditures are preliminary. Sources: NYC Office of Management and Budget; OSC analysis

FIGURE 2

Financial Plan Reconciliation - City Tax Revenue Projections January 2020 Plan vs. January 2023 Plan

(in millions)

	FY 2024		
	FY 2020 Plan	FY 2023 Plan	Difference
Tax Revenue			
Property Taxes	\$ 33,958	\$ 31,871	\$ (2,087)
Personal Income Taxes	15,327	14,844	(483)
Sales Tax	9,521	9,266	(255)
Hotel Tax	669	644	(25)
Other Real Estate Related	3,345	3,010	(335)
Business Taxes	6,343	7,154	811
All Other	2,152	2,099	(53)
City Tax Revenue	\$ 71,315	\$ 68,888	\$ (2,428)

Note: Columns may not add due to rounding.

Sources: NYC Office of Management and Budget; OSC analysis

As of the January 2023 Plan, the City's tax forecast is still \$2.4 billion lower than was forecasted prior to the pandemic (3.4 percent), driven mainly by lower than anticipated property tax collections; however, tax forecasts have generally been conservative during the pandemic. Drags on tax revenue include commercial property values and a protracted recovery in the tourism and hotel industries (see Figure 2).

The City is also incurring ongoing costs attributed to the response to the pandemic as well as an economic rebuilding. These revenue shortfalls and increased operating costs could have significantly widened the City's gap for FY 2024, absent other alternatives. However, two major cost and revenue changes during the pandemic have allowed the City to continue to invest in key services for its recovery.

First, the City implemented several rounds of agency cost-reduction initiatives to help maintain its budget balance and narrow out-year gaps, generating more than \$5 billion in savings for FY 2024 (net of restorations and cost avoidance offsets). A significant portion of these savings will come from reductions in planned staffing. Overall,

municipal staffing targets in FY 2024 are 300,712 full-time employees, or 10,760 positions (3.5 percent) below planned FY 2024 levels prior to the pandemic. In a recent update on the City's municipal workforce, OSC found that the City has experienced an uneven decline in its full-time workforce since the pandemic took hold. The City has taken steps to reduce the size of the workforce based on what it views as current demand for municipal services, although the number of vacancies remain substantial and the City may elect to generate additional financial plan savings by further eliminating positions. OSC has recommended that services impacted by savings initiatives be measured to ensure these services continue to meet demand.

Second, the City has benefited greatly from the receipt of extraordinary federal aid and modest upward revisions to other federal programs (raising the City's forecast in FY 2024 by \$2.5 billion). Federal aid has also helped boost income-based taxes throughout the pandemic. Tax collections in FY 2023 are exceeding projections, allowing for a projected FY 2023 surplus of nearly \$2.2 billion, which will be used to help balance FY 2024.

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Accommodative fiscal and monetary policy supported favorable short-term economic conditions allowing debt refinancings which have contributed to reduced debt service (\$1.4 billion) and strong investment returns in FY 2021 lowering the City's pension contributions (\$548 million) for FY 2024. Debt service savings are also related to a slowdown in planned bond issuance. However, savings of this type rely on factors that are typically outside the City's direct control.

These unanticipated resources more than offset the impact of the projected tax revenue shortfall, and costs associated with the pandemic. The City was also able to fund a number of new local priorities and offset mandated costs. In sum, the City now anticipates it will generate a surplus of \$2.17 billion in FY 2023, which will be used to help balance its budget for FY 2024.

Changes by Program Area

OSC prepared an estimate of programmatic spending to help understand the changes in planned FY 2024 spending, representing groups of agencies with similar purpose and operations. OSC classified the spending in a manner consistent with past reporting by the City that was used to identify certain non-discretionary costs and exclude them from the program area analysis (e.g., pensions and fringe benefits).

As shown in Figure 3, estimated discretionary spending rose by \$2 billion, driven mostly by

FIGURE 3
FY 2024 Financial Plan Comparison by Program Area
January 2020 Plan vs. January 2023 Plan

(in millions)

(in millions)					
	FY 2024	FY 2024	Change – Better / (Worse)		
	Jan 2020	Jan 2023	Total	City	Non-City
	Plan	Plan	Funds	Funds	Funds
Discretionary Spending					
Education	\$ 24,828	\$25,877	\$(1,049)	\$ 855	\$ (1,904)
Uniformed Agencies & Judicial	11,361	11,614	(252)	172	(425)
Social Services	8,468	9,081	(614)	(473)	(141)
Centrally Administered Costs	4,518	3,611	907	910	(3)
General Government	3,449	3,615	(166)	20	(186)
Health	2,795	2,939	(144)	107	(251)
Environmental Protection	1,371	1,540	(169)	(180)	11
Transportation Services	1,128	1,398	(270)	(134)	(136)
Housing	1,191	1,383	(192)	(59)	(133)
City University of New York	1,064	1,038	26	25	2
Elected Officials	789	862	(73)	(71)	(2)
Parks & Cultural Activities	698	729	(31)	(29)	(2)
Operating Subsidy to Public Libraries	411	411			
Subtotal	\$ 62,071	\$ 64,099	\$(2,028)	\$ 1,141	\$(3,169)
Nondiscretionary Spending & Reserves	44,262	42,624	1,638	1,419	219
Less: Intra-City Expenses	(1,842)	(1,902)	60		60
Total Expenditures	\$104,491	\$104,821	\$ (330)	\$ 2,560	\$ (2,890)
Prepayment of FY 2024 Expenses		(2,166)	2,166	2,166	
Adjusted Total Spending	\$104,491	\$102,655	\$ 1,836	\$ 4,727	\$ (2,890)

Note: Columns may not add due to rounding. Uniformed agencies & judicial includes spending administered by the Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice. Social services excludes Medicaid and public assistance. Centrally-administered accounts include the reserve for collective bargaining and certain other accounts reported to the miscellaneous agency, as well as adjustments for lease agreements, energy and other-than-personal-service inflation. City funds estimates are preliminary.

Sources: NYC Office of Management and Budget; OSC analysis

additional funding for education, public health and social services. The City has also dedicated funding for public safety and to address other quality of life issues (e.g., cleanliness of public spaces and abatement of pests, as well as additional speed cameras and the implementation of a five-year NYC Streets Plan). The City has also increased financial support for public housing and increased operating subsidies to the New York City Housing Authority.

Local sources of planned FY 2024 spending ("City Funds") were scaled back over the past three years, largely reflecting the impact of agency cost-reduction initiatives, which generated some spending reestimates and operating efficiencies while also averting the need for service reductions.

The City more than offset the decline in planned city-funded discretionary spending with non-city sources. More than two-thirds of the increased spending of non-City funds in FY 2024 is for education (\$1.9 billion), fueled by pandemic relief aid. The federal pandemic relief also enabled the City to fund economic rebuilding initiatives. Absent this support from the federal government, it is possible these initiatives (which include funding for 3-K and to address learning loss at the City's schools as well as for mental health services) would not have been available given the City's many other local priorities and limited resources to fund them. Programs that do not have identified funding sources in the out-years of the City's financial plan represent "fiscal cliffs," which create new risks to the City's budget when non-city funding is exhausted.

City-Funded Priorities

To prepare for the anticipated reduction in tax revenues, the City implemented savings programs that totaled \$5.6 billion in reductions to planned expenditures for FY 2024, adjusted to exclude \$347 million in restorations as well as

The City also expects to generate \$154 million in FY 2024 of additional City Fund revenue, for a total of nearly \$5.8

\$92 million in savings from cost avoidance initiatives (see Figure 4). Nearly two-thirds of the adjusted savings came from agency spending, with the largest component achieved through eliminating funded vacant positions and a citywide hiring freeze. While the City prioritized some positions by exempting them from these actions, including education, uniformed, health care and revenue-generating titles, the City largely took advantage of natural attrition at many agencies in an untargeted manner. In addition, about a quarter of projected savings came from refinancing existing debt or pushing out issuance of new debt to reduce planned debt servicing costs.

To avoid any distortion of programmatic spending that was created by general attrition, OSC examined city-funded new needs during this period as a measure of priorities that emerged during the pandemic.

In total, the City added city-funded new needs of \$3.24 billion for FY 2024. More than half of this amount will come from 16 initiatives and cost mandates (see Appendix A). The largest share was for the social service agencies (\$817 million, see Figure 4), which reflected additional funding for street homeless programs and shelters (\$303 million), education enrichment programs (Summer Rising, \$101 million), more Fair Fares public transportation discounts for low income New Yorkers (\$75 million), and expanded slots for the Summer Youth Employment Program (\$57 million).

Uniformed agencies and judicial programs received the second largest share of city-funded new needs for FY 2024 (\$524 million), largely for the expansion of criminal justice programs such as the Crisis Management System, the Precision Employment Initiative, and re-entry and Alternative to Incarceration programs that were included in the Borough-Based Jail Plan Points of

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billion in additional resources from PEGs implemented over the past three years.

FIGURE 4

Changes in Planned City-Funded FY 2024 Spending January 2020 Plan vs. January 2023 Plan

(in millions)

				Change - Bett	er/(Worse)
	New Needs	Savings Programs	Other	City Funds	Non-City Funds
Agency Spending					
Social Services	\$ (817)	\$ 447	\$ (104)	\$ (473)	\$ (140)
Health	(113)	82	138	107	(251)
Environmental Protection	(142)	2	(41)	(180)	11
Transportation Services	(194)	62	(2)	(134)	(136)
General Government	(198)	181	36	20	(186)
Elected Officials	(83)	22	(11)	(71)	(2)
Housing	(57)	52	(54)	(59)	(133)
Parks & Cultural Activities	(61)	49	(17)	(29)	(2)
Libraries	(12)	21	(8)		
City University of New York	(10)	44	(9)	25	2
Uniformed Agencies & Judicial	(524)	947	(250)	172	(425)
Centrally-Administered Costs	(197)	314	792	910	(3)
Education	(442)	1,394	(97)	855	(1,904)
Subtotal	\$(2,849)	\$ 3,617	\$ 378	\$ 1,141	\$ (3,169)
Debt Service		1,417		1,417	48
Pensions			548	548	
Other Fringe Benefits	(112)	588	77	552	175
Medicaid	(1)		(470)	(470)	
Judgments & Claims	(240)		(150)	(390)	
All Other Spending & Reserves	(35)		(203)	(239)	(5)
Less: Intra-City Expenses					60
Total Expenditures	\$(3,237)	\$ 5,622	\$ 176	\$ 2,560	\$ (2,890)
Prepayment of FY 2024			2,166	2,166	
Adjusted Total Spending ote: Columns may not add due to rounding. Savings	\$(3,237)	\$ 5,622	\$ 2,342	\$ 4,727	\$ (2,890)

Note: Columns may not add due to rounding. Savings programs are adjusted for restorations of savings initiatives identified after January 2020 and for cost avoidance offsets. Uniformed agencies & judicial include expenditures administered by the Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice, which are included in the miscellaneous budget.

Sources: NYC Office of Management and Budget; OSC analysis

Agreement. The majority of these programs are housed in the City's miscellaneous expense budget. The Department of Sanitation also received an additional \$94 million for quality-of-life initiatives such as waste export and recycling, an organics program, public space cleaning, and snow removal.

Education received \$442 million for FY 2024, excluding other fringe benefits. However, the

largest of these additions were not new priorities, but were instead measures to update the budget for known costs for charter schools (\$216 million) and student transportation (\$184 million). While these costs continue to grow, the new needs added during this period helped mitigate risks to the financial plan that OSC had previously identified. These costs were also more than offset by savings from eliminating funded vacant positions at the Department of Education.

The City also added funding for non-discretionary needs during this period. A number of new needs also reflect the City's lack of control over certain obligations, including an increase to judgment and claims and a cost shift related to New York State formulas over the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program. Education spending risks cited consistently by OSC, including for Charter Schools and Transportation costs, have also required additional funding. While it is also a new need, the City's 3-K expansion program is fully funded by federal relief aid until FY 2024; the City plans to fund 3-K with local resources beginning in FY 2025. For this reason, it is not included in this analysis of FY 2024 City-funded programs. Additional spending was also added for quality of life initiatives and youth programming expansions.

While these items reduced the amount available for its priority programs, the City's savings initiatives more than offset its total new needs for both discretionary and non-discretionary items in this period. However, it is also impotant to note that the City's FY 2024 budget does not include a number of substantial spending risks raised by OSC in recent analyses, including unbudgeted costs for ongoing educational programming, uniformed agency overtime, and greater demand driving up costs for social services and MTA operating subsidies. The City also faces substantial cost uncertainty from its response to managing an influx of asylum seekers, which OSC projected to reach \$810 million in FY 2024 in the November Plan review.

Key Takeaways

Prior to the pandemic taking hold, the City had been experiencing the longest period of economic expansion on record, following the Great Recession. The January 2020 Plan anticipated a modest continuation of that trend, with City fund revenues rising by 9.6 percent to \$76.6 billion from FY 2020 to FY 2024. The pandemic led the City to substantially revise city-funded revenues, which are now expected to total \$74.5 billion in

FY 2024, more than \$2 billion less than anticipated prior to the pandemic.

The pandemic has also led to a shift in spending priorities, both for discretionary expenses as well as those not in the City's direct control. Spending choices highlighed in this comparison show the City has continued to make investments in basic services, and has continued to fund mandated costs and local priorities based on current demand for municipal services. Some of these choices include new funding for shelter and managing unhoused populations.

Despite the many challenges stemming from the pandemic, the City now presents a financial plan with a balanced budget for FY 2024. Prudently, the City responded to the potential revenue shortfall and estimated ongoing pandemic costs by continuing its annual process of identifying agency cost-reduction actions. A significant portion of the City's \$5.6 billion in savings (net of restorations and cost avoidance initiatives) came from reductions in planned staffing. While there may be additional opportunities to reduce vacancies where the positions are no longer needed due to efficiencies or a reduction in service demand, these opportunities may be fewer. Recent reports indicate there are segments of the City's operations experiencing difficulties delivering services at pre-pandemic levels, suggesting staffing shortages as the City. like other public employers, faces a period of unsually high employee turnover. The January Plan assumes the remaining vacancies will be filled by the end of FY 2024, and the City may need to rely less on reductions in planned staffing for additional financial plan savings in future years.

The City also benefited from an unprecedented level of federal aid, which provided short-term budgetary relief and includes a number of economic rebuilding initiatives over the balance of the financial plan period, concentrated mainly at the Department of Education. Without the

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additional federal aid, the City may not have been able to provide the additional services given its many needs and limited resources. Some of these initiatives may remain popular and could continue to be in demand after the pandemic aid is depleted by FY 2026, creating possible fiscal cliffs. The City still has time to identify alternative sources of funding should support for such programs be extended.

OSC notes that a significant portion of the City's FY 2024 budget is nondiscretionary (estimated at 41 percent, including debt service and contingencies), as factors driving the annual change in spending on these components (such as debt service, pensions and fringe benefits) are not completely in the City's control. While the City has experienced favorable developments in the short term, generating savings in FY 2024, the City's fortune could turn if a recession takes hold. For example, planned pension contributions can change significantly based on annual pension fund investment performance, which is uncertain.

The City also continues to face uncertainty over the outcome of collective bargaining, which may result in personal service costs significantly higher than assumed in the January Plan if the City and the municipal unions agree to base wage increases at a level consistent with local inflation. The City is also experiencing an increase in demand for public health and social services due to the expiration of pandemic benefits and the recent influx of asylum seekers. As such, spending on public assistance and other social supports could continue to rise in the near term.

These demands are in addition to common risks highlighted by OSC in recent years, including overtime, various education expenses, and operating subsidies for the Metropolitan Transportation Authority. However, the City may be conservatively projecting revenue, which could provide offsets for these risks. Continued efforts to build up reserves if revenues exceed

projections and identify cost savings without hurting City services remains a prudent approach to managing the continued implications of the pandemic and its economic impact in the coming years.

Appendix A

Major City-Funded New Needs for Fiscal Year 2024 Changes since January 2020 Plan

(in millions)

New Need (Initiatives and Local Cost Mandates)	Agency	Cost	Share of Total	
Judgments and Claims	Miscellaneous	\$ 240	7.4%	
Charter Schools	Department of Education	216	6.7%	
Subway Safety Plan	Multiple Agencies	206	6.4%	
School Transportation	Department of Education	184	5.7%	
Juneteenth Cost	Miscellaneous	148	4.6%	
Homeless Shelters	Department of Homeless Services	132	4.1%	
Fringe Benefits (Headcount for New Initiatives)	Miscellaneous	106	3.3%	
Summer Rising	Youth & Community Development	101	3.1%	
State Budget TANF Funds Cost Shift	Multiple Social Services Agencies	83	2.6%	
POA Borough-Based Jail Plan	Miscellaneous	77	2.4%	
Fair Fares	Department of Social Services	75	2.3%	
Speed Camera Expansion	Department of Transportation	70	2.2%	
New York City Streets Plan	Department of Transportation	69	2.1%	
Summer Youth Employment Program	Youth & Community Development	57	1.8%	
Precision Employment Initiative	Miscellaneous	54	1.7%	
Fleet Electrification	Multiple Agencies	50	1.5%	
Subtotal – Major New Needs		\$ 1,869	57.8%	
All Other		1,368	42.2%	
Total		\$ 3,237	100.0%	

Note: Columns may not add due to rounding.

Sources: NYC Office of Management and Budget; OSC analysis

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