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Mayor de Blasio Presents Executive Budget

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By Jessica Gould

The \$82.2 billion executive budget is 3.7 percent bigger than the one adopted last year, and \$100 million more than the preliminary plan the mayor released in January.

"After more than two years in office, we have a focus in our vision for the city, a focus on strategic investments in every neighborhood, and in continuing disciplined fiscal management," Mayor de Blasio said.

The mayor is proposing millions of dollars for additional ambulance service to reduce response times in Queens and the Bronx and for improvements at the Board of Elections.

He's calling for a new police precinct in Queens, more funds for homeless services and mental health care on Riker's Island.

He's seeking to increase investments in schools, including expanded access to Advanced Placement courses and funding to hire more physical education teachers.

And he's proposing new investments in infrastructure, including funding for the third water tunnel, new ferries at Brooklyn Navy Yard, bridge repairs, street repaving, and snow removal on smaller streets.

De Blasio is also seeking to shore up shaky finances at NYC Health + Hospitals, the city's public hospital system. His budget proposes a new infusion of cash, bringing the city's total proposed contribution to about half a billion dollars for the coming fiscal year. He also unveiled a plan to cut costs and raise revenues at the hospital system, which has faced budget gaps for years. Strategies include treating more people in clinics, increasing enrollment in MetroPlus, the hospital's Obamacare and Medicaid coverage plan, and converting under-used spaces into supportive housing for the homeless and mentally ill.

The mayor says agency savings will cover most of the new spending. The administration touts \$2.3 billion from voluntary savings at city agencies this year, which de Blasio called "the largest spending reduction program in the last five years," without layoffs or cuts to programming. The budget also maintains existing reserves, and adds funds to the Retiree Health Benefit Trust Fund.

De Blasio said those measures are crucial given the challenges in the global economy, and given declining support from the state. "We are carefully budgeting in an environment in which our relationship with other levels of government have become uncertain in many ways," he said.



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But budget watchdogs worry the current level of spending will be tough to sustain if the economy starts to suffer. The Citizens Budget Commission says the savings, which stem from debt refinancing as well as administrative costs, are "uncertain, putting future budget gaps at risk of mushrooming."

Meanwhile, Council Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito and Finance Chair Julissa Ferreras-Copeland said the proposal includes many council priorities, but fails to do enough for vulnerable youth and immigrant populations. The council members said they also worry that the plan to help the hospital system relies too heavily on support from the state and federal governments. The council must approve a new budget before the new fiscal year begins in July.