

CAPITAL STREETS

City of Albany: Mayor Sheehan's 2024 Proposed Budget

Mayor Sheehan recently released her proposed budget for the City of Albany's upcoming fiscal year. The following analysis assesses how the 2024 proposed budget will position the City to improve Albany's streets related to active transportation, safety, and quality of life.

Overall, the proposed budget addresses new challenges and builds upon existing progress relating to transportation infrastructure, but it also left us questioning how specific projects will be moved forward in 2024. The proposed investments in traffic calming infrastructure are admirable and Capital Streets encourages the City to continue shifting the focus towards implementation.

Some of the key highlights from the proposed budget include:

- **Creation of a Department of Engineering** - A dedicated Department of Engineering will allow the City of Albany to better manage public infrastructure and bring several existing positions now spread out across different departments under one roof. While the creation of the department does not guarantee better active transportation infrastructure, it is a critical step for the City to fix its fragmented management system. It is crucial that the City staffs this department with skilled professionals who understand the nuanced challenges and characteristics of urban transportation to create real progress.
- **\$1 Million for Speed Reduction Infrastructure** - The City added more speed humps to residential streets in 2023 and, to no surprise, they successfully reduced speeding! With a unit cost of approximately \$20k¹ per speed hump in early 2023, this will allow the City to expand the program significantly. While speed humps have been identified as the City's favorite way to reduce speeding, other types of traffic calming infrastructure, like raised intersections and curb extensions, provide additional benefits. Speed humps are relatively inexpensive, but don't reduce roadway width and are not a one-size-fits-all solution
 - By all means, the City should continue to expand the implementation of speed humps, but should also begin investing more in other forms of traffic calming identified in the City's [Complete Streets Design Manual](#)² and [Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan](#)³ alongside this program to impact roadway safety more holistically.
- **Brevator, Manning and Central** - \$6.5 Million (NYS funds) outlined for Brevator Street promises to bring exciting changes to the corridor in 2024. The budget also mentions similar aspirations for Manning Blvd (where the design process is currently ongoing) and Central Ave, which sorely needs to be redesigned to make the roadway safe. When asked by CS about Central Ave, Budget Director Gideon Grande confirmed it'll be redesigned in 2024 with funds outlined in the City's 2023 budget⁴ from the TIP (federally funded Transportation Improvement Program).

¹<https://www.timesunion.com/news/article/albany-spend-1-million-new-speed-humps-2023-17804387.php#:~:text=Bill%20Trudeau%2C%20chief%20supervisor%20of,t%20include%20traffic%20study%20costs.>

² https://www.capitalmpo.org/images/linkage_program/AlbCoFinal/albanyCSPolicyandDesignManual_Final.pdf

³ <https://www.albanyny.gov/DocumentCenter/View/5630/Bicycle-Master-Plan--May-2021-PDF>

⁴ <https://albanyny.gov/DocumentCenter/View/8105/2023-Adopted-City-Budget-PDF> pg 103

Some items needing clarification:

- **City-wide Traffic Study** - The budget references a study to combine various existing traffic studies with the goal of creating “a true Complete Streets plan and is a necessary step in the effort to reduce speed limits.”
 - **What we know:**
 - The 2024 budget includes \$250,000 for “Traffic Engineering: Studies” and mentions creating “a true Complete Streets plan and is a necessary step in the effort to reduce speed limits” as well as a “Vision Zero Action Plan with a focus on the reduction of traffic related fatalities to an eventual goal of zero”.
 - In August 2022, Governor Hochul signed A.1007-A/S.2021-A, allowing local governments to lower speed limits of local roads from 30 mph down to 25 mph, but municipalities are required to conduct a study before reducing the speed limit⁵. Some members of the common council have expressed a desire to leave a number of major arterial roads unchanged.
 - The Transportation Council (our region’s MPO), along with Albany and other municipalities, recently issued an RFP for a regional Vision Zero Action Plan
 - **What we don’t know:** It’s unclear how much of this funding will be dedicated to speed limit reduction, creating a “Complete Streets plan” or “Traffic Studies in area of downtown... to improve overall traffic flow for all modes of transportation.”
 - **What Albany needs:**
 - A clear plan to fund and implement the impactful improvements that have already been identified in previous studies by 2030
 - Albany should seek to move forward with reducing the speed limit to 25 mph on local roads as quickly and affordably as possible, within the very broad NYSDOT guidelines for a speed limit reduction study.
 - While it’s exciting to see changes coming to Brevator and Manning, the City should be, *at least*, matching safe streets investments in historically neglected neighborhoods, where more residents travel by foot and bike.

- **Washington Park**
 - **What we know:** The only reference to Washington Park in the 2024 budget is in the Engineering Department’s 2023 accomplishments, which describe the Washington Park Traffic Study as “successfully completed.” The last public update to the study was the April 2022 “draft report” which recommends a number of “relatively low cost short and mid-term improvements that could be implemented within approximately one and a half to two years,” but at the same time “are conceptual in nature and may vary significantly from final design.”⁶ No goals or capital spending plans provide any additional details on this key project.
 - **What we don’t know:** What are the next steps for Washington Park? Is the study complete and are there plans to secure funding?

⁵<https://www.governor.ny.gov/news/governor-hochul-signs-new-laws-enhance-street-safety-prevent-traffic-deaths-and-crack-down-hit>

⁶ <https://www.albanyny.gov/1931/Complete-Streets>

- **What Albany can do:** Implement the “low cost” improvements identified in the draft study! Close the length of road south of the lake. Modify the vehicle entrances at Sprague Street, Lancaster Street, and Henry Johnson Boulevard to as detailed in the draft completed study using low-cost, moveable barriers.
- **Speed Cameras in School Zones**
 - **What we know:** The Governor recently signed legislation (A7043A/S6802A) allowing the City to implement up to 20 school speed zone cameras operating only around the hours of school activities⁷. The City Budget only references this in the Engineering Department’s 2024 goals: “Complete construction for the Traffic Signal Improvements at 7 locations, complete roadway striping projects, work with APD to establish locations for School Zone Speed Enforcement and continue to expand Traffic Signal Communications project.” The new law stipulates drivers can only be fined if detected going at least 10 mph over the speed limit.
 - **What we don’t know:** The 2024 budget lists \$450,000 for “Traffic Engineering: Safety Cameras” but outlined for combating drag racing on Washington Ave. Ext. It’s not clear if that figure accounts for the cost of implementing School Zone Speed Cameras or what the cost is anticipated to be.
 - **What Albany needs:** The City needs a timeline and budget for rolling out the school zone speed cameras. With the potential positive safety impact, this program should be prioritized and rolled out with ample public engagement, so local residents are well aware of the enforcement changes



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⁷ <https://www.nysenate.gov/legislation/bills/2023/S6802/amendment/A>