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Honorable Jacqueline Izzo, Mayor  
Members of the Common Council  
City of Rome  
198 N. Washington Street  
Rome, NY 13440

Report Number: S9-21-3

Dear Mayor Izzo and Members of the Common Council:

The COVID-19 pandemic (pandemic) has had various levels of impact on the financial operations of local governments across New York State. Some local governments have seen little to no impact on their financial operations, while others have seen more significant impacts due to reductions and/or increases to their revenues and/or expenditures. This has led to some local governments having to reduce or eliminate some services and temporarily or permanently reduce staff positions. In addition, some local officials have decided to delay capital projects, which could result in future delays to other projects to maintain and improve local government infrastructures.

The pandemic has also created a difficult environment for officials to develop annual budgets given the unknowns of future financial impacts. The pandemic increases the need for local officials to more closely monitor their budgeted estimates for revenues and expenditures against actual results, and modify their budgetary estimates accordingly, when warranted, during the course of their fiscal year.

To assess whether local officials adequately considered the impact of the pandemic on their financial operations while developing their 2021 fiscal year budgets, our office conducted reviews of 20 adopted budgets of various counties, cities, towns and villages across the State. The City of Rome (City) is one of the local governments included in our review.

The objective of the review was to provide an independent evaluation of certain aspects of the adopted budget. Our review addressed the following question related to the City's adopted budget for the 2021 fiscal year:

- Did officials adequately assess the impact of the pandemic on financial operations while developing estimates for significant revenues and expenditures in the 2021 adopted budget?

## **Summary of Findings**

Our review found that officials adequately assessed the impact of the pandemic on financial operations while developing estimates for significant revenues and expenditures in the 2021 adopted budget.

However, in consideration of the continually new and evolving impacts caused by the pandemic, City officials should carefully monitor their budgeted to actual revenues and expenditures and make amendments to the budget as needed throughout the year.

## **Methodology**

To accomplish our objective in this review, we requested your adopted budget and other pertinent information. We interviewed officials and reviewed the adopted budget to gain an understanding of the budget development process and to determine whether any estimates in the adopted budget were adjusted by officials due to the potential impact the pandemic could have on financial operations. We identified and examined for reasonableness significant estimated revenues and expenditures<sup>1</sup> and estimated revenues and expenditures below our established threshold that could more likely be impacted by the pandemic. We also identified any significant new revenue or expenditure estimates, made appropriate inquiries and reviewed supporting documentation to assess whether the estimates were realistic and reasonable. In addition, we evaluated the amount of fund balance and/or reserves appropriated in the adopted budget to be used as a financing source and determined whether these amounts were available and sufficient for that purpose.

The scope of our review does not constitute an audit under generally accepted government auditing standards (GAGAS). We do not offer comments or make specific recommendations on public policy decisions, such as the type and level of services under consideration to be provided.

## **Background**

The City is located in Central New York State in Oneida County. The elected eight-member Common Council (Council), which is composed of a President and seven Council members, governs the City. The Mayor is the Chief Executive Officer. The appointed City Treasurer prepares the City's budget.

Estimates are requested from department heads to use in the preparation of the tentative budget. Once the tentative budget is prepared, it is presented to the Council. The Council then makes any necessary revisions to the tentative budget. The City holds a public hearing on the tentative budget and then makes any necessary final revisions prior to adopting the budget.

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<sup>1</sup> For this review, we established significant estimated revenues and expenditures to be those consisting of 5 percent or more of a fund's total budget estimates.

The City’s operating funds consist of general, water, sewer and refuse funds. In addition to the four operating funds, the City also maintains a separate fund for central maintenance. Significant services offered by the City include public safety, refuse collection, road maintenance and improvement, forestry maintenance, animal control, recreation, water, sewer, and general governmental support. Primary revenue sources for the City include real property taxes, sales and use tax, State Aid, State Revenue Sharing and Consolidated Highway Aid, and State and federal grant funds. The City charges user fees for water, sewer and refuse services.

Following are the 2021 adopted budget figures, broken down by funds, along with the 2020 adopted budget total for all funds for comparative purposes.

<b>Figure 1: 2021 Adopted Budget</b>					
<b>Funds</b>	<b>Appropriations and Provisions for Other Uses</b>	<b>Financing Sources</b>			
		<b>Estimated Revenues</b>	<b>Appropriated Fund Balance</b>	<b>Appropriated Reserves</b>	<b>Real Property Taxes</b>
General	\$44,914,430	\$28,364,022	\$832,003	\$360,000	\$15,358,405
Water	8,992,444	8,992,444	0	0	0
Sewer	5,185,035	5,185,035	0	0	0
Refuse	2,549,184	2,549,184	0	0	0
Central Maintenance	1,471,116	1,471,116	0	0	0
<b>Total for 2021</b>	<b>\$63,112,209</b>	<b>\$46,561,801</b>	<b>\$832,003</b>	<b>\$360,000</b>	<b>\$15,358,405</b>
<b>Total for 2020</b>	<b>\$62,229,011</b>	<b>\$44,797,043</b>	<b>\$1,880,654</b>	<b>\$225,000</b>	<b>\$15,326,314</b>

Our review found that while developing 2021 budgetary estimates for significant revenues and expenditures, City officials adequately considered the pandemic’s impact on financial operations. If you have any questions on the scope of our work, please feel free to contact Julie Landcastle, Chief Examiner of the Statewide and Regional Projects Unit, at (607) 721-8306.

Sincerely,

Elliott Auerbach  
Deputy Comptroller

cc: David Nolan, City Treasurer  
Jean Grande, City Clerk  
Rebecca Wilcox, Regional Chief Examiner