



Reinventing Cook County: A Fiscal Roadmap Forward  
Richard R. Boykin, Cook County Commissioner

The crisis created in Cook County by the Sweetened Beverage Tax has also created an opportunity for the County to finally reckon with the long term fiscal challenges it faces and enact real reforms.

I oppose the sweetened beverage tax, because it is regressive, and because it threatens our small businesses. But those of us who oppose also have a corresponding obligation to propose solutions. We need a common-sense alternative fiscal blueprint for Cook County with alternate sources of revenue and savings.

In \$4.8 billion dollar budget, there is more than enough opportunity to locate savings and creative avenues for boosting revenue that involve neither deeply harmful across-the-board cuts, nor regressive taxes.

This Roadmap, once implemented, will ensure that Cook County remains both solvent and competitive.

Good government and support for local business and taxpayers- these two values do not need to be at odds with one another. We can have both. To suggest otherwise is a false choice.

The Fiscal Roadmap consists of the following:

1. Zero Based Budgeting

Cook should begin every budget season by starting at "Zero" for each of its departments and evaluating anew whether the programs, services and personnel allocated per Department are truly essential.

2. Closure and elimination of vacant positions

There are more than 1500 budgeted positions in Cook County that remain unfilled. The savings generated would be substantial.

3. Hiring Freeze

A true hiring freeze must be enacted at Cook County immediately.

#### 4. Act aggressively and immediately to curtail shootings in Cook County

The most conservative estimates place the cost of stabilizing a gunshot victim at \$50,000 per case. With more than 4600 people shot in Chicago alone last year, the cost of gun violence to Cook County is staggering. Stroger hospital, the Medical Examiner's office, our courts, our jails, our prosecutors, and our public defenders--all of these agencies of county are overwhelmed by the public safety crisis that is devastating our communities.

#### 5. Hold the line on collective bargaining agreements and fringe benefits

The reality of the tax burden in our county must be represented at the negotiating table during the collective bargaining process and the days of sweetheart deals and generous fringe benefits must come to an end if county government is to live within its means.

#### 6. Hold the line on salary increases

#### 7. Reform litigation, procurement and overtime

Every lawsuit that requires the county to pay a settlement has at its core an employee who made a mistake that could have been avoided. We must train county employees appropriately to avoid making costly errors. We must put an end to the procurement practices that result in the County Board of Commissioners approving multi-million dollar change orders as a matter of course.

#### 8. Right Size Each Department

There are 679 full-time employees at the Juvenile Temporary Detention Center, which houses about 220 juveniles today. In the late 1990s, the center housed about 600 individuals. It had 526 employees at that time. How can we justify roughly 150 more full-time employees when we're housing so many less individuals?

#### 9. Sell Cook County Health and Hospitals System's Accounts Receivable

By some estimates, CCHHS is owed \$90 million in accounts receivable.

#### 10. Adopt a pro-growth strategy to make Cook County truly business friendly.

At the end of the day, a healthy local economy will provide a truly stable tax base and source of revenue for County Government. We must remove barriers to business development throughout the County and make every conceivable effort to avoid taxing our businesses out of Cook County.

Cook County should be known for its rich and vibrant mix of businesses and economic opportunities. We have so many advantages, from transportation to location to population.

There is no reason why businesses should have to leave the County to avoid closure due to over-taxation and wrongheaded regulations.