

**HEALTH, SOCIAL, EDUCATIONAL & ENVIRONMENTAL COMMITTEE MEETING
HELD IN ROOM 318
PUTNAM COUNTY OFFICE BUILDING
CARMEL, NEW YORK 10512**

(Chairman Oliverio, Legislators Othmer & Tamagna)

Tuesday March 13, 2012 6:30 P.M.

The meeting was called to order at 6:30 P.M. by Chairman Oliverio who requested that Chairwoman Conklin lead in the Pledge of Allegiance. Upon roll call, Chairman Oliverio was present. Legislative Chairwoman Conklin sat on the Committee until Legislators Othmer and Tamagna arrived at 6:35 P.M.

Item #3 – Approval of Minutes – February 16, 2012. The minutes were approved as submitted.

Item #5 – Update/WIC Program/Acting Director of Health/Rebecca Wittenberg was next. Acting Director of Health Wittenberg stated that they are downsizing the WIC office at 121 Main Street in the Village of Brewster. That office will be open three days a week. The back half of that space will be utilized by CAP. However, they are expanding their WIC facilities at the Kern Building. They will be utilizing the former space occupied by the Board of Elections. There will also be a shared education room as well. Transportation arrangements from the Southeast train station will be provided for those requiring it to get to the WIC program. The new facility will fill the Program's space needs.

County Executive Odell stated that downsizing the WIC space at 121 Main Street will also help solve the space issues raised by the County Clerk for the storage of records.

Legislator Tamagna stated that the proposal for offering Health services on the western side of the County at the Butterfield site would also fill the need for these types of services rather than have residents travel forty minutes to the eastern side of the County.

Item #4- Update/Commissioner of Social Services/Mental Health/Michael Piazza was next. Commissioner Piazza stated that they are awaiting a decision on funding from the State for the expansion of Rose House. There will be a Case Manager to bridge the clients who have been at the Rockland Psychiatric Center. Putnam County's monthly average of patients in State hospitals has been only two patients. Putnam residents are usually taken care of in Putnam County.

Commissioner Piazza further stated that there is still confusion on how the final State budget will provide funding and how much funding there will be for certain Mental Health programs. Funding for Medicaid also remains unclear on how it will be handled in the State budget. It is also still unclear how the Targeted Case Management program will be run.

Commissioner Piazza concluded by stating that there are many problems with securing housing for child sex offenders.

Item #6 – Discussion/Public Health Director vs. Commissioner of Health was next. Chairman Oliverio stated that he personally supports having a Director due to the cost savings even when you consider the cost of the Medical Consultant.

Legislator Tamagna stated that he originally concurred with Chairman Oliverio. However he now feels that there is no substitute for having a doctor in this position. It is an added value. Public health and public safety are priorities. A medical doctor has authority. In his opinion, there is minimal cost for having this advantage. The County has not yet been confronted with a real health crisis.

Legislator Albano stated that he personally has no strong opinion one way or the other. He questioned the cost difference.

Director of Personnel Eldridge stated that the salary for the Director is \$125,000 plus \$6,000 a month for the Medical Consultant. The salary of a Commissioner of Health would be about \$150,000. He strongly supports a Commissioner of Health. This in no way reflects on the excellent job that the Acting Director has done. This is a philosophical issue. After having served as the Interim County Executive, he has a better understanding of the need to have a medical doctor in this position. While he served as County Executive, three serious situations came up which required the expertise of a physician. There is one serious case now. A physician has access to the CDC for advice and expertise. He supported the position of Commissioner in 2004 when Dr. Amler was selected. All the surrounding counties have Commissioners of Health. It is important with our proximity to New York City, the threat of bio-terrorism, proximity to Indian Point and emerging diseases.

Chairman Oliverio questioned if there had been any eligible candidates apply.

Personnel Director Eldridge stated that there had been no suitable candidates when they advertised a salary of \$135,000. When they advertised with a \$150,000 salary, they had more candidates. When you consider all the programs initiated by Dr. Amler, such as securing grants, the reduction of costs in the Preschool transportation program, the PODs and Putnam County being recognized as #1 in New York State with health outcomes, it is money well spent. He has discussed this with the Board of Health and they support the County having a Commissioner.

County Executive Odell stated that they looked at many possibilities including co-opting this position with neighboring counties' Commissioners. The size of our County was an issue since we are so small. New York State Department of Health also favors a Commissioner as they do not want the County to go backward.

Legislator Othmer stated that he supports having a Commissioner of Health.

Chairwoman Conklin stated that she favors having a Commissioner. It is important for the residents of the County.

Legislator Tamagna stated that Putnam County started the search last year. It has been ongoing since August of 2011.

Item #7 – Use of Office for Aging Van/Discussion was next. Chairman Oliverio stated that the former Director of the Office for Aging had requested a van last year at the Capital Projects meeting to transport disabled veterans. When the van would not be in use for the disabled veterans, it would be used for the disabled community. He requested clarification from the Administration regarding the exact usage planned for this van.

County Executive Odell stated that Karl Rohde, the Director of Veterans Affairs and the caretaker of the County's Veterans Home, wanted to be sure that veterans had transportation and access to the VA Hospitals at Montrose and Castle Point. The van will not be used every day for veterans. It will also be available for the disabled community.

Chairman Oliverio stated that there are many returning disabled young veterans who will need access to health care at the VA facilities.

County Executive Odell stated that the County's Veterans Home has a new Board. They are pursuing new visions and fund raising opportunities.

Commissioner of Finance William Carlin stated that with interdepartmental programs, such as this one that will serve the Office for Aging, veterans and the disabled community, they spec out a van that will fit the needs of all the programs.

Item #8 – Support of School Tax Reform/Discussion was next. Chairman Oliverio stated that he has concerns over tax relief for the funding of schools. The Legislature had previously passed a memorializing resolution supporting an income tax versus a property tax for funding schools. Property taxes are forcing seniors to leave their homes and move elsewhere.

Legislator DiCarlo stated that in his opinion, with the 2% tax cap passed by the State, he doubted that the State would consider any other alternatives.

Chairman Oliverio stated that is the reason we need to bring this up again.

Legislator DiCarlo stated that AMT is hurting our residents. The HARP 2 Program has just been instituted to assist people who have remained current on their mortgages to be able to refinance at the lower interest rates. This is an election year. We should push our State representatives.

County Executive Odell stated that the Governor has stated that he will not pass the State's budget unless there are reform packages included. NYSAC is urging every county to contact their State representatives for support of these needed reforms.

Chairman Oliverio stated that the State imposes so many mandates on school districts. The new teacher evaluation is another mandate.

Legislator Tamagna stated that the Governor made sense when he spoke at the NYSAC Conference. He is looking for accountability in the school districts for the quality of the teaching staff. There will be no funding without the evaluations. The Early Intervention and PreSchool programs have no incentive to be efficient. The County is funding the entire bill for the programs. The Governor proposed that the costs of these programs would be shared one third each by the school district, the county and the state.

Legislator Othmer stated that mandate relief has to come from Albany.

Chairman Oliverio stated that special education mandates come from the federal government. There is a need for these programs. Most school districts do an excellent job of identifying those students who really need special services.

Legislator DiCarlo stated that the reality of the matter is that those who need the help should get the help. The biggest problem in New York State is the \$4 billion in fraud that takes place annually. The State should hire people to investigate the fraud and most of the budget issues would be resolved.

Legislator Albano stated the problem is that there is no unity in taxation.

Legislator Tamagna stated that there should be County-wide assessment. The Towns of Carmel and Philipstown do not have 100% assessment. However, they are now willing to do the necessary reassessment.

Item #9 – Correspondence/NYSAC/Urgent Mandate Relief Budget Letter was next. Chairman Oliverio moved to memorialize mandated budget relief; seconded by Legislator Tamagna. All in favor.

County Executive Odell stated that she would be willing to sign a letter with Legislator Oliverio to forward to our elected state representatives urging their support of mandate relief.

Chairman Oliverio stated that he would have a letter prepared for both signatures.

Item #10- Correspondence/NYS Department of Health/NYEIS/FYI was next. It was duly noted.

There being no further business, at 7:35 P.M. Legislator Tamagna made a motion to adjourn; seconded by Legislator Othmer. All in favor.

Respectfully submitted, Chris Marrone, Clerk.