

**RULES, ENACTMENTS & INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS COMMITTEE  
HELD IN ROOM #318  
PUTNAM COUNTY OFFICE BUILDING  
CARMEL, NEW YORK 10512**

**Members: Chairman Birmingham and Legislators Ellner & Gouldman**

**Monday  6:30pm  March 17, 2025**

The meeting was called to order at 6:30pm by Chairman Birmingham who requested Legislator Gouldman lead in the Pledge of Allegiance. Upon roll call Legislators Ellner and Gouldman and Chairman Birmingham were present.

**Item #3 – Chairman’s Verbal Report**

Chairman Birmingham stated Personnel Officer Paul Eldridge will be speaking this evening about the Legislative Manual.

**Item#4 – Acceptance of Minutes – October 8, 2024 Rules Budget Meeting**

The minutes were accepted as submitted.

Chairman Birmingham made a motion to move agenda item #8 up; Seconded by Legislator Ellner. All in favor.

**Item #8 – Approval/ Budgetary Transfer 25T064/ Move Putnam Arts Council  
Community Grant Funding from Subcontingency**

Chairman Birmingham stated the Putnam Arts Council is one of the County’s outside agencies that has been funded for decades. He stated all outside agencies perform County service on behalf of the County. He invited Executive Director of the Putnam Arts Council Joyce Picone up and requested that she provide an overview of how the County funds are used.

Executive Director Picone stated there is an independent panel made up of primarily Putnam County residents that reviews the grant applications submitted to the Putnam Arts Council. She stated the panel assesses each application and then a determination is made how much funding will go to each applicant. She stated the County provides \$13,993 and she adds \$7 of her own money to make it an even \$14,000. She stated the State also provides funding for the grants; none of the County or State money is kept by the Putnam Arts Council. She stated the minimum grant award is \$1,000 so the most the County funding can provide is 14 grants. She stated they try to select awardees from all around the County and in various disciplines. She stated these are project oriented grants, meaning it has to be used for the project itself, which must take place in the County within the same year as the award and must be open to the public. She stated these projects are for the residents and support cultural enrichment. She

stated the Putnam Arts Council Grant program has been in place since 1968. She stated these grant awards help the awardees leverage other funds as well.

Chairman Birmingham stated the Putnam County Arts Council provides this service for Putnam County as arts and culture are one of the County purposes listed in County Law. He stated rather than this work being done in the County, the Putnam Arts Council has done it with their own employees and volunteers.

Executive Director Picone stated many of the projects are done by volunteers as well. She stated these are wonderful people who provide experiences for their community and deserve these County funds. She provided a brief overview of the organizations and projects funded last year.

Chairman Birmingham clarified that the \$13,993 in Subcontingency is earmarked for the Putnam Arts Council.

Legislator Ellner stated he initiated the funding going into subcontingency. He stated he has no issue with any organization on the list. He stated the issue he has is that previously, funding was provided to an organization's event and the same organization in their other functions held an event on the steps of the Historic Courthouse where Putnam County Sheriff's Deputies were spit on. He stated he does not believe that organization should be awarded a grant. He stated his full support of the arts. He stated his concern about tracking the awarded funds to ensure they are used only for the project or event.

Executive Director Picone stated the Putnam Arts Council has a contract with each awardee that specifies the details of the projects and mandates reporting back to Putnam Arts Council about the expenditure of the grant. She stated the Putnam Arts Council also audits each project and if it is not being used for the specific purpose, the money is to be returned.

Chairman Birmingham stated this is the first step in the process, once the Putnam Arts Council has the funds they can review the grant applications and make their recommendations to the Legislature.

Executive Director Picone stated the regrant recommendations are approved by the Legislature, therefore any Legislator can voice their opinion on any organization or project at that time and may choose not to fund them.

Chairman Birmingham questioned if it would be helpful to add language or clarity to the contract that speaks to the restrictions on the funding.

Putnam Arts Council Regrant Coordinator & Office Administrator Mary Beth Becker stated that wording is currently in their guidelines and contracts.

Executive Director Picone stated the Putnam Arts Council funds only the specific project, nothing else.

Legislator Ellner stated the money is difficult to trace because although this money is funding a specific project, it then frees up other funds to be spent elsewhere.

Regrant Coordinator Becker stated many of these organizations have had to front the money themselves while they wait on the County funds, which is distributed twice. She stated the average grant of \$1,000 pays \$500 in April or May and \$500 after July once their interim report is received. She stated a final report is also required and if it is not submitted the organization will not be eligible for funding in the following round. She stated they are very strict with the guidelines. She stated there are auditors that attend the programs to ensure they are doing everything required by the contract. She stated there are a lot of hoops for the awardees to jump through to get this money, and it is not a lot of money.

Executive Director Picone stated the grant funding they receive is never the full cost of the project.

Regrant Coordinator Becker stated to give an idea of how difficult it can be for arts organizations to get funding she provided an example of Hudson Valley Shakespeare which received a multimillion dollar grant to build a building, however that disqualifies them from getting State funding for public programming; the only resource they are eligible for is Putnam County funding. She stated they see the benefits these art programs bring to people's lives.

Executive Director Picone stated they do not view the arts as entertainment; it is enrichment.

Legislator Ellner questioned if all organizations that receive regrants funds are 501(c)(3), not-for-profit, organizations

Executive Director Picone stated yes, they must be a 501(c)(3) registered in Putnam County.

Legislator Ellner questioned if the organization then regrants the funds.

Executive Director Picone stated no, they utilize the funds for the specific project.

Chairman Birmingham stated the term "regrant" may be confusing and clarified that the County provides funding to the Putnam Arts Council, who then regrants it to organizations for specific projects based on their application. He stated once the County provides this funding, the regrant panel then meets to decide which organizations will receive how much funding and then the Putnam Arts Council will submit those recommendations to the Legislature for final approval.

Legislator Montgomery questioned when the panel meets to choose awardees.

Executive Director Picone stated they usually meet in December or January.

Legislator Montgomery stated this process is already four (4) months behind and these organizations are waiting for this funding. She stated this is only \$13,993; she has seen the County make bigger expenditures without difficulty. She stated the arts contribute greatly to the community and the financial return is far greater than the amount being given.

Executive Director Picone stated the financial return is usually 8x the amount invested.

Chairman Birmingham opened the floor to members of the public who wished to speak on this agenda item.

Steve Clorofilla, resident of Putnam County, stated his discomfort with this during a time when working families are having difficulty supporting their children and prices of everyday items are increasing drastically. He stated many people are leaving Putnam County because they cannot afford to live here. He stated to be flippantly giving funding to a non-essential service is an insult to taxpayers to this County. He stated these programs should be supported through private funding sources. He stated it was discussed that there was a demonstration in Putnam County where people were disrespecting police officers; if these funds are being funneled to organizations that are diametrically opposed to the values and people of this County, it is a further outrage.

Chairman Birmingham stated he would like to clear up the misconception Mr. Clorofilla spoke to. He stated no County tax dollars went to any organization involved in the actions described.

Bob Dumont, of the Brewster Theater Company, thanked the Putnam Arts Council for their support over the years. He stated their fundraising efforts are not solely based on County funding through the Putnam Arts Council regrant program; a great deal of their budget comes through private funding sources. He stated for example, they have been the recipient of \$1,000 grants through the Putnam Arts Council and it costs about \$20,000 to put on a show. He stated the County money is being reinvested into the community when they shop local for the shows or when people spend money at local restaurants before or after seeing a performance.

Christine Smith, resident of Putnam County, stated she runs the Doansburg Chamber Ensemble. She stated there are 150 musicians on the roster. She stated they have been active for 40 years and they have received a Putnam Arts Council grant every single year. She stated with that funding, they have held a concert on each side of the County. She stated they are now streaming their concerts at no cost to the viewer, which has been utilized by local nursing facilities and they have been viewed worldwide. She stated that this funding, along with grant funding, private donations, and ticket sales is vital to making up their budget. She stated she sees the financial benefit these

events have on the community as she is often directing concert goers to local shops and restaurants. She thanked the Legislature and Putnam Arts Council for their support.

James Sherwood, Founder of Arts on the Lake, stated the organization and building itself was mostly built on volunteer labor. He stated the grants received have enabled them to bring their projects to fruition, notably the play *Kent Stories* which was created with interviews of Kent residents. He stated the grants have allowed them to offer “pay what you wish” at performances, subsidized workshops, and mini concerts. He stated these programs trigger money being spent within the community. He stated productions beginning at Arts on the Lake have gone onto have productions off Broadway, on the BBC, and at sister theaters within the County. He stated the grant funding is well spent and generates additional revenue within the County. He stated the arts provides a framework for self-expression.

Alex Sewel, resident of Kent, stated he is a volunteer panel member for the Putnam Arts Council and about 40 hours of labor goes into reviewing each grant application. He stated this process allows them to see the various projects going on in the County as well as what those projects do for the County. He stated the cost of this regrant program is \$0.15 per person and with that money Putnam County residents get culture, social and community engagement which is paramount to people staying in the area.

Linda Harris, resident of Putnam County, stated she has been involved in the Martin Luther King Celebration for 10 years, the Black History Month Celebration for four (4) years, and the Juneteenth Celebration, which is in its third year. She stated she is hopeful this is the second time they receive a grant from the Putnam Arts Council. She stated the incident referenced earlier on the Courthouse steps became unruly and was bad on both sides. She stated there were thousands of dollars wasted on legal fees in an unsuccessful attempt to remove a member of a school board. She stated the volunteers sometimes contribute their own money to ensure these three (3) events happen. She stated she has heard feedback from people not feeling welcome at these events, however those individuals never attended any of them. She stated it is important to celebrate our differences with one another. She stated these celebrations are bringing culture and joy to Putnam County and will continue to be held.

Carmella Atria, resident of Carmel, stated her respect for and interest in Black History. She stated her concerns regarding this group funneling money to other organizations such as the one that gathered on the Courthouse steps and became unruly. She stated she cannot support local events attended by and involving these divisive individuals. She stated she would like to see the list of organizations being funded. She stated activism should not be funded.

Chairman Birmingham stated the Putnam Arts Council will provide their recommendations for regrant funds in the next month or so and that list will be available to the public.

Elizabeth Richvalve, resident of Carmel and member of Arts on the Lake, stated she has lived in this community since 1956 and when she was a child, there was no arts in the area. She stated arts have made a huge difference, the impact on the community is so important. She stated it would be terrible to punish the whole art community because of an isolated incident. She stated for the most part, those involved in the arts are good people and it is essential for children to have arts to enrich their lives.

Linda Thornton, resident of Garrison and Managing Director of Tompkins Corners Cultural Center, stated they are a very small organization run by seven (7) volunteers. She stated they seek funding in any way they can. She stated their mission is to preserve the historic church they purchased in Putnam Valley. She stated the Tompkins Corners Cultural Center provides enrichment to the community and their intermissions are just as popular as the shows themselves because everyone takes the opportunity to connect with one another. She stated there is never enough money to do what they would like to do and the small amount they receive from the Putnam Arts Council for their concert series is extremely helpful. She stated the guidelines attached to that funding are strict and she assured everyone that the funding received is utilized only for the project specified on their application.

Adrianna Weiss, resident of Putnam County, stated she would like to echo the comments made by Mr. Clorofilla and Ms. Atria. She stated the tax burden on the people of Putnam County is high as it is and there are different ways to fund events. She stated she has attended many events over the years with her family that have been funded with private donations and ticket sales. She stated she is aware of multiple instances when money has fallen into the wrong hands of people who stoke division in Putnam County.

Judith Sheridan, President of the Putnam Symphony Orchestra, stated they fundraise anywhere they can but still rely greatly on the grants they receive. She stated Putnam Symphony Orchestra holds two (2) concerts every year, one being a holiday themed family friendly show. She stated in the Spring, they showcase the more serious side of the Orchestra through a themed show. She stated last year the theme was the Olympics and the music, information, and even snacks sold were from each country. She stated they also strive to keep their ticket prices low so as many community members as possible can attend. She stated they offer \$10 tickets to seniors and students and family tickets for \$40 with no limit of the number of people. She stated even more, they do not charge tuition, which allows people of all ages to pursue their talents alongside other musicians.

Judy Brewster, resident of Brewster and Vice President of the Brewster Theater Company, thanked the Legislature and Putnam Arts Council for their work. She stated she would like to clarify that the incident being referred to this evening was not an event that received grant funding. She stated she believes that getting these funds to art organizations is essential as each organization does everything they can to get funding. She stated society is tracked over hundreds and thousands of years through the arts; if there are no arts there is no community. She stated she is saddened to hear that there

are fellow residents who do not feel the same way. She stated she is happy to be able to provide the opportunity for self-expression and entertainment to the performers and audience members. She stated no one should be punished for one incident that happened unrelated to this funding.

Legislator Ellner thanked everyone who came to speak this evening and stated his support for the arts. He stated no one present this evening has caused this situation and the purpose for this evening's discussion is to move forward with the process.

Marie Carstens and Erin Jennings, creators of the Putnam County Dance Project, stated they reside just over the border in Dutchess County; however their children attend the Carmel Central School District so they are invested in the Putnam County Community. Ms. Carstens stated they are delighted to have found a home at Arts on the Lake. She stated her appreciation for the support they have received from the Putnam Arts Council. She stated they held a free dance yesterday afternoon, which was thoughtfully planned so it could be a family activity for those attending as well as for the dancers who could bring their families to the show as well. She stated art events ignite discussion about what else is needed and how those needs can be met. Ms. Jennings stated they have also participated in the Global Water Dance movement. Ms. Carstens stated they used that opportunity to raise awareness throughout the community and beyond. She stated this is a free, family-oriented event. She stated they greatly value family, community, arts, and education.

Ellen Leerburger, founding member of Arts on the Lake and current Vice President, stated how thankful she is for the Putnam Arts Council. She stated her daughter began going to camp at Putnam Arts Council at 5 years old and continued to nurture her talents in ceramic art there until she went to college where she continued to be a talented ceramicist. She stated her son is a budding filmmaker who first nurtured his interest and talent at Arts on the Lake and is now in Los Angeles pursuing his dream. She stated Arts on the Lake never turns anyone away, even at a ticketed event, because the arts are so important for everyone. She stated the arts can be used to bring everyone together.

A resident of Mahopac stated this is taxpayer money being discussed. He stated money is fungible; if he receives \$50 to pay rent, he now has \$50 to spend elsewhere. He stated he understands the strict guidelines on these grant funds to ensure they are being utilized for the intended project, however it seems they are sometimes being spent on things that are not conducive to the general public. He stated any society that does not have art does not survive. He stated the comments made this evening by representatives of art organizations were about how their projects cannot fund themselves. He stated he noticed the gratitude has also been directed to the Putnam Arts Council when it should be directed to the Legislature for allocating this money and to the taxpayer as it is their money. He spoke to the process of allocating funds.

Olenna Truskett, with the Town of Southeast Cultural Arts Coalition, which is a not-for-profit and thus subject to regulations set forth by the State. She stated since 2010 they

have offered hundreds of activities and events at the Studio Around the Corner while spearheading the restoration of the building, the old town hall in Brewster. She stated they have raised \$99,000 to put toward that project and have received grants through the Putnam Arts Council for their programming. She read a quote by filmmaker Ken Burns.

Chairman Birmingham thanked the members of the public for their comments this evening. He explained the process of this money being budgeted. He stated a tentative budget is delivered to the Legislature by the County Executive. He stated this \$13,993 was included in the 2025 tentative budget. He stated during the budget process, the Legislature put that money into subcontingency. He stated the budgetary amendment being considered this evening will put the money back into the line to be able to go to the Putnam Arts Council. He stated this will be back before the Legislature once the regrant recommendations are ready to be considered for Legislative approval. He stated all background work on the organizations that submit an application is done by the Putnam Arts Council. He stated if this work were done by the County it would be funded by the taxpayers. He stated he has learned a lot this evening and he is glad to have had this discussion.

Legislator Montgomery reiterated that the incident being referred to was not funded by this grant money. She stated there are many art programs that are specifically for veterans and the therapeutic benefits are fantastic. She stated she does not understand how anyone can be against that. She stated restaurants and eating establishments are third on the list of highest sales tax revenue generators and many people going to an arts program then spend money on a meal. She stated also high on the list is building material and supplies, which is used all the time for the arts. She stated it would be great to give some of this money back to the arts.

Christine Smith, resident of Putnam County, stated she is also the conductor for the Putnam Symphony Orchestra. She stated it is important to highlight how much education goes on at Putnam Symphony Orchestra. She stated there are senior citizens who have not played in decades willing to play again and there are talented teenagers there to play. She stated she sees the younger musicians assisting the older musicians get back into their instrument. She stated the professionals there have extensive backgrounds and experience and are helping all students. She stated she attended Julliard and auditioned with a piece she learned and played with Putnam Symphony Orchestra and got the solo which she played at Lincoln Center. She stated she was able to have these experiences because she had a community orchestra, which many places do not have.

Steve Clorofilla, resident of Putnam County, stated the money generated at restaurants from people attending an arts event is not quantifiable. He stated people are having trouble feeding their families and leaving the County because they cannot afford to live here. He stated the programs and events described this evening sound nice, but they should take a back seat to people affording their lives.



Adrianna Weiss, resident of Putnam County, stated there is a false dichotomy between art and no art. She stated she would support the County providing funding to new, fresh talent, but at the same time art is a personal choice. She stated most recipients of the these grants remain largely unknown to the public and she believes the art community operates in more of an insular group disconnected from the values most residents of Putnam County share. She stated there should be a clear evaluation of success for each project.

Cally Kordaris, Artistic Director of Cold Spring Dance Company, stated how grateful she is for the grants received in the past as they have lead to other grants, people matching the amount to put toward making their performance possible. She stated nobody goes into the arts to make money. She stated in each of their productions, they make a connection to history and bringing it to life through dance. She stated this room is filled with people who are pouring their time and energy into things they believe it. She stated life without that kind of passion is nothing. She stated she has a teenage son and she sees the impact the COVID pandemic has had on their anxiety and social skills and art is something that can really benefit this population. She stated we all care about our community and \$13,000 is a very small amount to have to come here and beg for. She stated the stamp of approval from the Putnam Arts Council matters.

Alex Sewel, resident of Kent, stated the work done by the Putnam Arts Council is done by volunteers to save the taxpayers money. He stated when decisions are being made about how to allocate the grant funds, the cost of living is taken into consideration. He stated he knows first hand how difficult it can be to live here.

Chairman Birmingham made a motion to pre-file the necessary resolution; Seconded by Legislator Ellner. By Roll Call Vote: 3 Ayes, Legislator Ellner, Legislator Gouldman, and Chairman Birmingham. All in favor.

#### **Item #7 – Discussion/ Rule #33 of Legislative Manual (Tabled from 2/19/25 Rules Mtg.)**

Chairman Birmingham stated agenda item #7 would be addressed at this time.

Chairman Birmingham stated he met with Personnel Officer Paul Eldridge in January about Rule #33 in the Legislative Manual – Confirmation of Appointments of the County Executive. He requested Personnel Officer Eldridge to speak to some of the items included in Rule #33.

Personnel Officer Eldridge stated Rule #33c. pertained to the Chair of a committee requesting a Certificate of Search for judgements or liens in Putnam County and the five (5) surrounding counties. He stated there is nothing wrong with requesting this, although he does not know how it would be helpful when approving an appointment. He stated in speaking with the County Clerk, he learned this information is public record and to obtain it from the other counties there would be a cost involved. He stated Rule #33b. pertained to requesting a criminal background check on the candidate. He stated

there are many rules and regulations to follow when conducting a background check. He stated there are certain agencies able to access statewide and national records to conduct the check. He stated a chair of a committee may be not successful in conducting a background check. He stated there are four (4) agencies within the County that meet the requirements and have a contract with New York State to obtain these records; the Sheriff's Department, Probation Department, Bureau of Emergency Services, and Personnel. He stated conducting a background check has to be done for specific purposes. He stated it took these departments about a year and a half to complete the process of meeting the requirements to be able to conduct background checks. He stated this is primarily used for employees in law enforcement, a safety sensitive position, and public officers.

Deputy Personnel Officer Adriene Iasoni stated any position that has contact with children is also subject to a criminal background check.

Personnel Officer Eldridge stated as part of the background check the state and national sex offender database is searched as well. He stated drug testing is done for all positions; there are different levels of testing done for different types of positions. He stated the drug tests results are kept in a secure location. He stated with a criminal background check, there is a lot of information received and there could be inadvertent violations of the law if it is not handled carefully. He stated the information also needs to be carefully considered while accounting for the age of the individual at the time of the offense, how long it has been since the offense occurred, and any real connection between the offense and the position being applied for. He stated there is a system for this and it would be difficult for a chair of a committee to obtain this information.

Chairman Birmingham thanked Personnel Officer Eldridge for this information. He stated the items pertaining to judgements and liens and the criminal background check have been stricken from the proposed resolution pertaining to Rule #33 of the Legislative Manual, as can be seen in the redlined document on this evening's agenda. He stated there is also an addition he would like to propose in Rule #33. He stated he would like to confirm there is no conflict of interest with any candidate before confirming their appointment. He stated the addition states that the candidate shall provide "a signed document stating that such appointee has no interest\* in any contract\* with the County. (\*as defined in Article 18 of the New York State General Municipal Law)." He stated that this would make sure that any connection a County Department Head may have in a County contract is disclosed. He stated it would not necessarily be a disqualifier, but it could be vetted at that time.

Personnel Officer Eldridge stated he does not see an issue with this. He stated if a candidate was once involved with a County contractor, the County would just need proof that they had divested themselves from that contractor.

Legislator Gouldman stated the annual financial disclosure form requests information related to any contracts.

Personnel Officer Eldridge stated that is correct, however this is requesting such disclosure at the time of appointment. He stated the financial disclosure form is required to be filed by officers and employees.

Legislator Gouldman questioned if the County would be at risk of legal action from a potential candidate who did not get the position solely because of their connection to a County contractor.

Senior Deputy County Attorney Pasquale stated as long as the County is up front about the timeline about what is being considered, what must be disclosed, what actions must be taken, and when they are officially hired, we should be protected.

Legislator Ellner stated he would like to strengthen this and change "appointee" to "potential appointee or potential appointee's spouse". He stated he would like this to be as broad as possible and suggested that it say "business" rather than "contracts".

Legislator Crowley stated although Legislators are elected officials they are still employees of the County. She stated there have been past legislators who have had undisclosed contracts with the County. She stated she believes elected and appointed positions should be held to the same standard.

Personnel Officer Eldridge stated he is unaware if this might be part of the process of vetting an individual to run for public office.

Senior Deputy County Attorney Pasquale stated that specific concern might be more appropriately addressed in the County Code or Charter.

Legislator Sayegh stated this is specifically referring to appointments by the County Executive; not all employees. She questioned how many positions the County Executive appoints to.

Personnel Officer Eldridge stated there are between 16 and 20 positions.

Legislator Sayegh stated some of those positions have terms and vetting these candidates is important, especially if they are appointed for multiple year terms.

Personnel Officer Eldridge stated once an individual is appointed to the position they are required to file an annual financial disclosure report which is reviewed. He stated vetting up front coupled with the annual review of their financial disclosure report is beneficial.

Legislator Montgomery questioned how much of these guidelines are covered under State regulations.

Personnel Officer Eldridge stated there is a lot covered under State laws.

Legislator Montgomery questioned if a time period should be included in the section pertaining to the individual proving they have divested themselves from a specific company before employment.

Senior Deputy County Attorney Pasquale stated more general verbiage can be added such as ensuring there is no conflict of interest.

Chairman Birmingham stated this process pertains only to the confirmation of appointments by the County Executive. He stated some of these suggestions may be more appropriate in the County Code or Charter, as stated by Senior Deputy County Attorney Pasquale earlier.

Legislator Montgomery stated she believes this could be redundant when compared to the General Municipal Law.

Legislator Ellner questioned if there are any provisions for an employee who may have interest in a public corporation that the County is doing business with; for example, if someone owns 5% of IBM and they have a contract with the County.

Personnel Officer Eldridge stated the financial disclosure law asks that exact question; if the individual has 5% or more interest in any company.

Legislator Crowley questioned what the cost of a background check would be and when it would be done.

Deputy Personnel Officer Iasoni stated it would typically be done post-offer and it is about \$100.

Legislator Montgomery questioned if fingerprinting is necessary.

Legislator Addonizio stated she has been fingerprinted for other positions in the past and had to pay for it herself.

Deputy Personnel Officer Iasoni stated the candidate pays for the fingerprinting.

Personnel Officer Eldridge stated under Rule #33a where it speaks to written references being provided he would like to add wording about those references being personal and confidential and shall be kept under confidential cover pursuant to the Public Officer's Law.

Chairman Birmingham stated the release of that information would then be a misdemeanor.

Linda Harris, resident of Putnam County, questioned if lie detector tests could be done first to weed people out rather than full background checks.

Personnel Officer Eldridge stated it is required for police officers; polygraphs have been conducted since 2006. He stated it is a tool that can be reliable; it is an option.

Chairman Birmingham thanked Personnel Officer Eldridge and Deputy Personnel Officer Iasoni.

#### **Item #5 – Discussion/ Amendment of Legislative Manual/ Livestreaming Legislative Meetings**

Chairman Birmingham stated the elevator in the County Office Building will be repaired; therefore the Legislature's Committee Meetings will be held elsewhere during that time. He stated this may temporarily affect our ability to livestream.

Legislator Jonke stated it took a long time to get the livestream running. He stated during COVID, the IT Department worked to get our meetings online so the Legislature could continue conducting its business with public access. He stated livestreaming was then budgeted for so it could be a permanent practice of the Legislature. He stated it took over a year to get all the equipment in, installed, and running. He stated meetings have been livestreamed since April 2024. He stated there is still a long way to go; new microphones were just installed to improve the sound quality of the recording.

Legislator Crowley stated she is thankful that all Legislative Meetings are being livestreamed. She stated it is so important to stream these meetings, it allows those who cannot attend to watch the meeting either live or afterwards. She stated she uses the videos of the meetings to prepare for the following meeting. She requested that Legislator Jonke explain what he meant by having a long way to go.

Legislator Jonke stated the sound quality could be improved and the video itself could be better.

Legislator Crowley stated putting this in the Legislative Manual would be codifying what is already in practice. She stated codifying it increases transparency and public trust, provides wider public access, improves government accountability, and provides an excellent resource for students learning how government works. She stated although there may be improvements to be made, the Legislature provided residents with remote access meetings in the most fiscally responsible way possible.

Chairman Birmingham agreed with Legislator Crowley; don't make the perfect the enemy of the good.

Legislator Crowley stated she would like to see the Committee take action on this item this evening.

Legislator Gouldman stated it seems the Legislature has been micromanaging everything since January, citing a section of the Legislative Manual that speaks to seating arrangements at a meeting.

Legislator Gouldman made a motion to pre-file a necessary resolution. There was no second.

Chairman Birmingham stated he drafted that amendment to the Legislative Manual Legislator Gouldman referenced. He stated he believes this deserves more discussion before action is taken on it. He stated livestreaming our meetings is already in practice, therefore there is no harm in not moving on this right now.

Legislator Gouldman questioned why it would not be done this evening.

Chairman Birmingham stated there was no second on the motion.

Legislator Ellner suggested putting the livestream on a slight delay because the discussion sometimes gets heated. He stated he believes in public accessibility and has continued to advocate for improvements to the Legislature's audio and video equipment.

Legislator Sayegh suggested including this in the Putnam County Code as well, along with Legislative Meeting locations.

Legislator Montgomery questioned if this passed through Committee last month.

Chairman Birmingham stated yes, a resolution was passed out of Committee last month and was then removed from the Full Legislative Meeting agenda for further discussion, which is why it is on the agenda this evening.

Legislator Montgomery stated in the past she proposed livestreaming equipment for less than \$20,000. She stated town and village boards livestream their sessions. She stated this does not need to be complicated, she believes the complications are stemming from resistance to implement livestreaming.

Chairman Birmingham stated the Legislature is currently livestreaming meetings and no one is suggesting stopping.

Legislator Crowley questioned how the Committee meetings will be livestreamed while the elevator is being repaired and the Legislative Meeting room is not being utilized.

Chairman Birmingham stated it is being looked into.

Legislator Crowley stated item #7 on this evening's agenda included backup and a redline copy of the resolution. She questioned why items #5 and #6 did not have any accompanying backup.

Chairman Birmingham stated the items are on for discussion and there were Legislators who expressed intent to submit amendments apart from Legislator Crowley's and he wanted to provide that opportunity to do so.

Legislator Crowley stated there are many ways to continue livestreaming these meetings even when not in the regular room.

Legislator Jonke stated he is not opposed to codifying this. He stated he was instrumental in getting this equipment installed and he recognized Chairwoman Sayegh who ensured the Full Legislative Meetings in the Courthouse were being livestreamed.

Legislator Gouldman stated topics such as livestreaming and the Legislative Manual have been discussed for months with no action being taken. He stated kicking the can down the road will be problematic.

Chairman Birmingham stated it is good that this is being discussed in open session where the public has access to it and can participate.

Legislator Gouldman stated this is a living document; it can be changed and further amended if necessary.

Chairman Birmingham stated livestreaming is already in practice.

Legislator Russo stated she does not understand why this is a big issue. She stated she represents the Town of Patterson and they have been livestreaming their sessions for over 5 years and they also allow public recognition via livestream. She stated she is disappointed that the County would not be able to implement something similar.

Brett Yarris, resident of Carmel, stated livestreaming technology is very mobile and has become simple. He stated as a member of the public, it is frustrating to see the same discussions happening month after month. He stated anyone who has owned a business or has been part of a large company will tell you the worst thing you can do is have meetings about meetings, which is what is happening now. He stated he is hearing that everyone is in agreement; continuing this discussion is unnecessary.

Linda Harris, resident of Putnam County, agreed that this should move forward. She thanked Legislator Russo for her statement as she would find it very helpful to be able to participate in meetings remotely.

Cassandra Roth, resident of Pawling, questioned what more needs to be discussed. She stated earlier it was stated that the sound and video quality of the Legislative Meetings could be improved however she wanted to mention the quality of the Town of Patterson meetings is not great. She stated despite the room for improvement she appreciates that she can watch and participate in the meetings.

Chairman Birmingham stated the discussion this evening has been informative for him; he was unaware that the Town of Patterson had interaction remotely. He stated he believes that is a great service to provide.

Arielle Honovich, resident of Patterson, stated she has watched the videos, even if she attends the meeting in person and the quality of the livestream is fine. She stated she taught special education first grade during COVID and there were no problems, they were able to have two-way communication remotely. She stated this discussion seems drawn out; action is more meaningful.

Legislator Montgomery stated, to that point, the job of the Legislature is to consider and approve legislation and codify rules. She read from a 2021 Legislative memorandum regarding the possibility of livestreaming. She stated it is currently 2025 and it is still being discussed.

Legislator Ellner stated the Legislators seem to be in agreement, it is also important to get the input of the IT Department.

Legislator Sayegh stated during COVID there were many issues with remote meetings everywhere. She stated the ease and accessibility of technology to livestream is only one part of this, as a government we need to ensure it is secure. She stated the meetings are currently being livestreamed and improvements are being worked on.

Legislator Crowley stated she is assuming that prior to the implementation of livestreaming, the IT Department would have put the proper security measures in place. She stated Director Lannon is very careful about security.

Legislator Gouldman stated he believes the amendments to the Legislative Manual this year are micromanaging the County, for instance the provision about the County Executive remaining seated while addressing the Legislature. He stated he does not understand why this is being made more complicated than it needs to be.

Legislator Ellner stated Legislator Crowley is correct, the protections have been established in order for the Legislature to livestream. He stated moving forward, if there is to be two-way communication with viewers, that would require different security.

Legislator Crowley stated the mention of remote public participation was included in the proposal as an option in the future. She stated she has experience in managing remote public participation with a larger audience and it is simple.

Cassandra Roth, resident of Pawling, questioned why this is not moving forward this evening. She stated if this is to be discussed further, she would like confirmation that it will be the last discussion and it will then move forward.

Chairman Birmingham requested that Legislator Russo get more information on how the Town of Patterson maintains security in their meetings.



Brett Yarris, resident of Carmel, stated remote public participation is a great idea and would be a great thing to see in the future, but it is not what is on the table at the moment. He stated codifying this is the key because although livestreaming meetings is currently in practice, it is not protected.

Legislator Montgomery stated many of the security issues livestreaming platforms were dealing with when they were first being widely used have been addressed and are now much better. She questioned if the IT Department expressed concern over the security.

Legislator Ellner stated yes, with remote public participation.

Legislator Montgomery stated that is not part of the proposed resolution at this time. She stated the resolution should be passed through Committee for consideration by the Full Legislature in April.

#### **Item #6 – Discussion/ Amendment of Legislative Manual/ Public Comment During Meetings**

Chairman Birmingham stated he was first elected to the Legislature in 2003 and at the time, the Legislative minutes were not made readily available to the public. He stated he had a website where he published the minutes, and the Legislature has come a long way since then. He stated public comment is important and this evening's meeting is a great example of that. He stated he believes it should be codified for Committee Meetings. He stated he would like to discuss if it would be practical to have public comment at a voting meeting. He stated he believes it would be better to hear public comment in Committee because it is where the work is done. He stated he would be against having a comment period at a Full Legislative Meeting.

Legislator Gouldman stated not every item goes through Committee, therefore if public comment were not permitted at a Full Legislative Meeting prior to a vote there would be no opportunity for it on some items. He stated the changes to the Legislative Manual did not go through Committee in the beginning of the year.

Legislator Gouldman made a motion to move Legislator Crowley's original proposal and add public comment during a Full Legislative Meeting. There was no second.

Chairman Birmingham stated those are all fair points.

Legislator Ellner stated public comment is always necessary and since he has been on the Legislature it has never been limited. He agreed with Chairman Birmingham on not having public comment at the Full Legislative Meetings prior to a vote. He stated the work is done during Committee.

Legislator Sayegh agreed that Committee is the appropriate place for public comment. She stated during a Committee Meeting the respective department head or legal

counsel is present as well and they respond directly to comments made or questions posed. She stated the format of the Full Legislative Meeting does not call for the attendance of department heads or discussion on each item; it is not practical to have public comment on each item at that point. She stated members of the public always have access to the Legislature via email and phone calls up until the Full Legislative Meeting as well.

Legislator Crowley stated if public comment is not allowed on an agenda item at the Full Legislative Meetings, then perhaps there should not be any new business allowed on those agendas because otherwise that is contradictory to the comments made earlier about the importance of public input. She stated she believes the Legislature should codify this resolution she brought forth for enhanced efficiency and organization, increased transparency, and improved accountability. She stated the public will see how valuable their input is to the Legislative process. She hoped this would be moved forward this evening.

Legislator Montgomery stated she is disappointed that this resolution was pulled from the March 4, 2025 Full Legislative Meeting. She stated the precedent has been set by this Legislature that we cannot be trusted to allow public comment on the policies put forward. She stated there have been resolutions pushed through at the Full Legislative Meeting without public comment. She stated the public does not always have the opportunity to speak on issues that affect them directly. She stated she is in favor of allowing public comment at the Full Legislative Meetings.

Legislator Addonizio stated she has never seen the Legislature stifle anyone wishing to speak in all her time on the Legislature. She stated the business takes place in the Committee meetings, the Full Legislative Meeting is not the time to discuss or debate the item at hand.

Legislator Jonke stated the changes to the Legislative Manual that went right to the Organizational Meeting in January pertain to the Legislature's manual, which is not an item that the public would have specific interest in. He stated this evening is a great example of public participation in a meeting and the work that is done in Committee. He stated there are seven (7) Legislative Committee Meetings, therefore if the opportunity for public comment was provided on each agenda item at a Full Legislative Meeting, the meeting would need to begin in the afternoon to allow enough time. He stated logistically, the department heads would have to be requested to attend the Full Legislative Meeting as well as the committee meeting. He stated no member of the public was given a time limit this evening. He stated it is a matter of fact that at each Committee Meeting, the Chair opens discussion on each item to the committee, Legislature, and members of the public. He stated last year in October the Legislature reviewed the 2025 \$206 million County Budget in multiple Committee Meetings and two (2) public hearings and no members of the public spoke. He stated the Full Legislative Meeting is the voting meeting.

Legislator Gouldman stated if everything went through Committee first he would agree.

Legislator Gouldman made a motion to move Legislator Crowley's original proposal which was pulled from the March Full Legislative Meeting. There was no second.

Chairman Birmingham stated his recollection is that the resolution pulled from the March Full Legislative Meeting pertained to public comment prior to taking a vote at both the Committee Meetings and Full Legislative Meetings.

Senior Deputy County Attorney Pasquale stated after last month's Committee Meeting he was asked to revise the resolution to include the Full Legislative Meetings.

Cassandra Roth, resident of Pawling, thanked Chairman Birmingham for allowing public input this evening. She stated the back and forth discussion between the public and the Legislature and Committee is over and above anything she has experienced at a Legislative meeting. She stated this is the most public participation on agenda items she has seen. She stated codifying this just for Committee Meetings right now is enough, it can always be expanded upon in the future.

Brett Yarris, resident of Carmel, questioned what the problem is if livestreaming is already in practice. He stated codifying this protects the public's ability to speak on legislative items. He stated if an item goes directly to the Full Legislative Meeting, there is no opportunity for public comment however if an item does first go to Committee and then to the Full, it can be removed from the agenda as was done with this proposal this month. He stated codifying this is so important because it protects the public's ability to have a voice in the process. He stated emails and phone calls are available, but nothing guarantees that they are returned or read. He thanked Legislator Gouldman for keeping the public aware of the Legislative agenda items via his Facebook page and he thanked Chairman Birmingham for allowing public comment this evening. He stated codifying the opportunity for public comment ensures that future Legislators do not remove that ability. He stated it also closes loopholes that could potentially be exploited.

Legislator Montgomery stated at the December Physical Services Committee there were no members of the public and the only legislators present were herself and the Committee. She stated a proposal without a written resolution that would have affected farmers in Putnam County that was passed through to the Full Legislative Meeting. She stated this is an example of how things sometimes move through the process without much comment and not in its final form.

Legislator Crowley stated the term limits were another item that were pushed through.

Chairman Birmingham disagreed and stated that was discussed over multiple committee meetings, which he attended as a citizen.

**Item #9 – FYI/ Litigation Settlement/ Gleason et. al. v. County of Putnam, Town of Carmel, et. al.**

Chairman Birmingham stated this settlement does not require legislative approval because it is less than \$5,000.

**Item #10 – FYI/ Litigation Report – Duly Noted**

**Item #11 – Other Business – None**

**Item #12 – Adjournment**

There being no further business at 10:18pm, Chairman Birmingham made a motion to adjourn; Seconded by Legislator Gouldman. All in favor.

Respectfully submitted by Administrative Assistant Beth Robinson.