

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

Chairwoman Montgomery, Legislators Addonizio & Russo

Wednesday

6:00PM

April 8, 2026

The meeting was called to order at 6:00pm by Chairwoman Montgomery who requested that Legislator Regan sit in on the committee in Legislator Addonizio's absence, and that Legislator Russo lead in the Pledge of Allegiance. Upon roll call, Legislator Russo and Chairwoman Montgomery were present. Legislator Addonizio was absent.

Item #3 - Discussion - Update - Putnam Hospital - Hospital President Dr. Mark Hirko

Chairwoman Montgomery welcomed Dr. Mark Hirko, President of Putnam Hospital Center, and requested that he provide an update.

Dr. Hirko stated it's important to get the word out as things continue to move forward, and one year into the merger with Northwell there are many changes being implemented. He stated that the Nuvance name will be sun downed and external signage will be changing to Northwell Health Putnam Hospital. He stated that there is still work being done with security services and uniform changes and that the hospital went from a seven-hospital system to a twenty-eight-hospital system with 105,000 employees. He stated the hospital is having one of its best years, financially and in volume, and that quality, safety and throughput has improved, which is a tribute to the hospital team's efforts. He stated the downward trend when the obstetrics group left in 2022 turned around and the hospital is on track for 100 births this year. He stated other accomplishments, including a flourishing gynecology practice, partnership with Somers Orthopedic, completion of renovations for most operating rooms, electrical improvements, a new triage relationship with Dutchess County hospitals, and that growth areas include cancer care. He stated that areas of concern include lack of adolescent and pediatric beds, Medicaid reimbursements for patients using emergency room care only and hiring and retention, as changes at Optum forced at least 30% of their doctors to leave the region. He stated that the hospital has gone from the Leapfrog Hospital Safety Grade of C to now maintaining an A rating, which shows that the changes implemented are working. He stated that resources will be managed going forward so as not to be redundant with other Northwell Hospitals in the local system, and to focus on patient flow and care quality.

Chairwoman Montgomery questioned if keeping up with growth demand means hiring more physicians or building infrastructure.

Dr. Hirko stated there is a lot of infrastructure that can be converted to other things, but he just needs to know what it will be. He stated that the facility was running at 30-35% when he came on board, was built with 300 beds, and about 80 are used although they are licensed for 164. He

stated that the demand is for staffing and knowing what community expectations are for this local hospital.

Chairwoman Montgomery questioned if there was a future plan to address the lack of pediatric beds and the Medicaid issue.

Dr. Hirko stated that regarding pediatric in-patient beds, there needs to be a certificate of need approved by the state, and that he is working with Northwell to see where this location fits in with other Northwell facilities in Central Connecticut and Albany.

Legislator Russo questioned if there was a plan for re-educating Putnam County residents that maternity is available at the hospital, as many believe they have to go to Danbury or elsewhere.

Dr. Hirko stated with Danbury, Northern Westchester and Vassar Hospitals all being tertiary and educational centers within 30 miles, they will always be the ones doing the high-end cardiac and cancer procedures and major trauma care, as Putnam doesn't have the resources. He stated there is community education being done, by going out to explain the hospital's direction. He stated regarding women's health, Putnam Hospital is a low-risk neo-natal center, which limits who can deliver there, and that he is also working on patient transport services.

Legislator Regan questioned how many beds are available in the mental health unit and are there any upgrades planned for that floor.

Dr. Hirko stated there are 20 beds running up to 90% occupancy, as they are receiving transfers from other hospitals.

Legislator Regan questioned if there has been any progress with redoing and upgrading the morgue.

Dr. Hirko stated that per his conversations with the Coroner, all the changes asked for were implemented and that there was discussion back in January regarding reimbursement of the dieners brought in to assist on autopsies.

Legislator Regan questioned how often Putnam Hospital is on diversion and is Dr. Hirko notified.

Dr. Hirko confirmed and stated it is extremely rare, but he is the one who approves it. He stated two instances when this happened, including a lightning strike that caused a generator malfunction for eight hours and a shorter diversion incident where a patient set a fire in a psychiatric evaluation room. He stated that in his opinion, communication could have been better and that the call for diversion has to come through himself or the senior leadership team above him.

Legislator Birmingham questioned what a diversion is.

Dr. Hirko stated that when an emergency room is full or overwhelmed, due to things like power loss or bad weather preventing ambulances from getting in, that the state is notified that the hospital can't accept any more patients, and ambulances are diverted.

Legislator Gouldman questioned if there are any plans for the west-side of the County.

Dr. Hirko stated they would love to do more and that surveys have been done by Northwell showing that patients west of the mountain go to Peekskill, and it's rare that they go to Putnam Hospital. He anticipates more growth for primary care in Somers and Mahopac and believes there are plans to build eastward.

Legislator Gouldman stated that the western side of Mahopac borders Putnam Valley anyway and if there were practices in that area, more people from Putnam Valley would go there.

Dr. Hirko stated that there are resources to look at travel patterns and long-term data with Northwell and that this could be one of the alternatives.

Chairwoman Montgomery thanked Dr. Hirko and stated that he could come back in the next few months to provide another update.

Item #4 - Discussion - Update - Department of Health - PFAS Pilot Program Quarterly Update from Public Health Director Rian Rodriguez and Associate Public Health Sanitarian Brian Stevens

Chairwoman Montgomery stated that PFAS are per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances that are man-made chemicals and used for decades in products like cookware and water-proof fabrics. She questioned how the PFAS Pilot Program is doing.

Rian Rodriguez, Public Health Director stated that Public Health Week is a great time to discuss this and that Putnam County was the first of six counties selected to participate in the program, which launched March 9th. There is a cap of about 600 tests, and Putnam County stands at 360, though Dutchess and Ulster have reached the cap already and are paused. He stated that \$1.5 million in total was allocated for this program, and with this demand, the equitable distribution he estimated of \$300,000 across five years will be exhausted before then. He stated that this pilot will inform broader mitigation programs and the learnings will be used as a tool to test and monitor residents' private wells and put in mitigation rebates.

Chairwoman Montgomery questioned if there is enough staffing capacity to handle this volume of requests and oversight.

Brian Stevens, Public Health Sanitarian stated they haven't gone through the process fully and this week will be the first week that the state contractor is sampling wells. He stated that results are expected in one to two months after that and then there is another month to put on treatment, so rebate applications should start coming in two to three months.

Chairwoman Montgomery questioned if Sanitarian Stevens administers the program.

Sanitarian Stevens stated their part is making people more aware of the program and processing the rebates. He stated that questions about the program periodically come in and also people call in looking for help signing up.

Chairwoman Montgomery questioned Sanitarian Stevens as to if he has the staffing capacity to do all of that.

Director Rodriguez stated this is a new program for the department, so they are trying to understand the staffing bandwidth. He stated that the initial work is front office work, such as initiating applications and answering questions, and that there will be training in April on the platform and dashboard used in the program. He stated that his staff may also need to be out assisting in the field and he foresees coming to the Personnel Committee of the Legislature in the future regarding staffing needs.

Chairwoman Montgomery questioned if the tracking has shown PFAS clusters in certain areas.

Sanitarian Stevens stated there is already a separate program to regulate office buildings, businesses, restaurants and plazas, and that there could be additional information on neighborhoods from the state in the future to share.

Legislator Sayegh questioned that as Mahopac Business District was identified as a Superfund Site by the state, whether single family homes around the district would be affected and qualify for testing.

Director Rodriguez stated they would qualify for testing and should participate.

Legislator Sayegh questioned how homeowners with wells find out about the program.

Sanitarian Stevens stated there was a news brief picked up and amplified by other media outlets as well as social media posts and information on the Putnam County website.

Director Rodriguez stated there has been good traction on social media, and many views and shares on Facebook, Instagram and X.

Legislator Regan questioned if people would have any reason to be hesitant to participate in the program, such as having their well shut down.

Sanitarian Stevens stated no, at least not in the initial testing, as after testing they are not required to do the treatment.

Legislator Gouldman questioned if there are any programs planned for group wells or subdivisions where multiple homes use one well.

Director Rodriguez stated the state will be using this pilot program as proof of concept, and as the program generated a lot of interest immediately, scale and cost could become a concern.

He stated that in his opinion, there is probably additional value to addressing this on a larger scale, but he isn't aware of this being discussed at the state level.

Legislator Goldman stated that he understands why the public would be concerned, as chemicals are used on lawns too and most residents have private wells, and so many people drink bottled water for that reason.

Chairwoman Montgomery thanked Director Rodriguez and Sanitarian Stevens for the update, stated the program is impactful for residents and requested that they return to the Health Committee in a few months to provide another update.

Item #5 - Approval – Fund Transfer 26T067 - Department of Health - Move Allocated Funds from Early Learning Center (ELC) Itinerant Services Line to ELC Care at Private Institutions Line

Health Department Fiscal Manager William Orr stated that this is for special education, itinerant services under the institution budget line and only involves moving money to pay the right expense, with no fiscal impact.

Chairwoman Montgomery made a motion to pre-file the necessary resolution; Seconded by Legislator Russo. All in favor.

Item #6 - Approval - Budgetary Amendment 26A023 – Department of Health - Adjust DOH Budget To Account for the Performance Incentive Award

Chairwoman Montgomery stated this budgetary amendment of \$23,084 will adjust the budget to account for a state performance incentive award and allocate funds toward equipment, training and public health program support.

Fiscal Manager William Orr confirmed that is correct.

Director Rodriguez stated that the funding will be used for education and staff training, addressing the issue of colorectal cancer, and making screening kits available for individuals who don't meet traditional screening guidelines.

Chairwoman Montgomery questioned if there is a plan for public outreach regarding colorectal cancer education.

Director Rodriguez confirmed that there is a plan and now that Northwell is a partner and has set up an early onset cancer center at Phelps, that system is available to our residents. He stated that his team will help initiate screening, and he wants to ensure access to diagnostic confirmation, treatment and post survivorship services through the Northwell partnership. He stated that he would like Putnam County to be the most screened county in NY State.

Chairwoman Montgomery questioned what age is recommended for screening.

Director Rodriguez stated the current recommendation is for ages 45 and above, but this particular program will look at individuals between ages 35 and 45.

Chairwoman Montgomery made a motion to pre-file the necessary resolution; Seconded by Legislator Regan. All in favor.

Item #7 - Approval - Resolution Proposed by Legislator Montgomery - Urging NYS Legislature To Pass S4744A /A8396 to Increase the Personal Needs Allowance for Nursing Home Residents

Chairwoman Montgomery stated this resolution will urge NYS Legislature to pass legislation to increase the personal needs allowance for nursing home residents, which is currently \$50 and has not increased since 1988.

Legislator Birmingham stated the \$50 amount has been around for almost 40 years and is really behind the times, as it isn't enough to even buy a month's worth of razors.

Legislator Sayegh stated she is greatly in favor of this, as she witnessed firsthand the hardship of her aunt, who was on Medicaid, living in a nursing home and receiving only an additional \$50 month allowance for personal needs, which really covered nothing. She stated that our senior citizens deserve better, and some worked all of their lives and have nothing to show for it.

Chairwoman Montgomery made a motion to pre-file the necessary resolution; Seconded by Legislator Russo. All in favor.

Chairwoman Montgomery made a motion to waive the rules and accept additional; Seconded by Legislator Russo.

Chairwoman Montgomery stated that she drafted a letter to send to the NY State Legislature, which is in session now, that was distributed to all Legislators and can be edited for signature by the full Legislature, to show support for the passage of the Senate bills S4744A / A8396 to Increase the Personal Needs Allowance for Nursing Home Residents.

Legislator Sayegh stated she would be happy to add her name to the letter.

Legislator Birmingham stated he would be happy to add his support and recommended how the letter could be edited based on how many Legislators agree to sign.

Item #8 – Other Business (None)

Item #9 – Adjournment

There being no further business at 6:55 p.m. Chairwoman Montgomery made a motion to adjourn; Seconded by Legislator Russo. All in favor.

Respectfully submitted by Mary Dechiaro, Administrative Assistant.