

WARREN COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

COMMITTEE: BUDGET

DATE: NOVEMBER 24, 2009

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

SUPERVISORS GERAGHTY  
O'CONNOR  
CHAMPAGNE  
KENNY  
SHEEHAN  
MERLINO  
TAYLOR  
STEC

COMMITTEE MEMBER ABSENT:

SUPERVISOR BELDEN

OTHERS PRESENT:

FREDERICK MONROE, CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD  
PAUL DUSEK, COUNTY ATTORNEY  
JOAN SADY, CLERK OF THE BOARD  
JOANN MCKINSTRY, DEPUTY COMMISSIONER OF ADMINISTRATIVE &  
FISCAL SERVICES  
RICK MURPHY, DEPUTY COMMISSIONER OF FISCAL SERVICES  
SUPERVISORS GIRARD  
GOODSPEED  
PITKIN  
STRAINER  
TESSIER  
THOMAS  
VANNESS  
ASHLEY BENJAMIN, TV8  
DON LEHMAN, THE POST STAR  
THOM RANDALL, THE ADIRONDACK JOURNAL  
AMANDA ALLEN, SR. LEGISLATIVE OFFICE SPECIALIST  
*Please see sign-in sheet for additional meeting attendees.*

Mr. Geraghty called the meeting of the Budget Committee to order at 1:00 p.m.

Although no meeting agenda was presented, JoAnn McKinstry, Deputy Commissioner of Administrative & Fiscal Services, distributed copies of a document entitled "2009 Budget - Appropriation Changes - Budget Officer Recommendation" to the Committee members, a copy of which is also on file with the minutes.

Mr. Geraghty reminded the Committee members that at the November 20<sup>th</sup> Board meeting it had been determined that the projected budget increase was unacceptable and that the Budget Committee should reconvene to further discuss the means available for additional reductions. He noted that the changes suggested in the document distributed by Mrs. McKinstry would yield savings of \$281,728 and would reduce the 2010 Budget increase to 10.1%. Mr. Geraghty then proceeded to poll the individual Committee members to determine whether there were any suggestions for further budget reduction means.

Messrs. Merlino and Sheehan cited that they had no suggestions to present. Mr. Champagne proposed the elimination of a Senior Account Clerk position within the Treasurer's Office, which was slated to be vacated due to retirement, as well as the elimination of the Deputy Director position within Planning & Community Development and an attorney position in the Public Defender's Office. As for ideas to increase estimated appropriations, Mr. Champagne suggested that the Committee revisit the possibility of instituting a vehicle use fee through the DMV (Department of Motor Vehicles) as this tax had the potential to raise significant revenues for the County. Mr. Stec said it was his understanding that a number of Counties had already instituted this fee and if that was the case, he felt it might be appropriate for Warren County to do so also.

As she was in attendance, the Committee members requested that Pam Vogel, County Clerk, provide further information on the matter. Mrs. Vogel apprised that the vehicle use fee would assess a charge of \$5 per private passenger vehicle and \$10 per commercial vehicle for both initial registrations and renewal transactions. She noted

that the fee would be charged to all Warren County residents, regardless of the County in which the registration or renewal transactions took place and would also apply to on-line transactions. When questioned as to the potential revenues, Mrs. Vogel replied that approximately \$300,000 could be raised annually by instituting the vehicle use tax; however, she noted, the maximum amount could not be generated for 2010 due to the steps necessary to adopt a Local Law to implement the fee, the charge could not be assessed for the first quarter of the year. She advised that she had received detailed information from NYS DMV (New York State Department of Motor Vehicles) with respect to the rules and regulations surrounding the fee, which she had forwarded directly to the County Attorney's Office for their review. In conclusion, Mrs. Vogel clarified that she was not necessarily in support of the additional fee and had provided the update for informational purposes only.

Mr. O'Connor stated that although he was in favor of finding new ways to increase revenues, it seemed that the vehicle use fee would significantly increase costs to business owners that incorporated a fleet of vehicles and would be required to pay an additional \$10 per vehicle for all new registrations and renewals. He then questioned whether it was possible to change the manner in which the fee was assessed to implement a flat fee for all registrants, rather than using the per vehicle charge. Mrs. Vogel replied that she did not think the fee could be altered; however, she noted, the documentation could be reviewed closely to determine if this was a possibility.

Continuing, Mr. Stec presented his suggestions for further budget reductions which included combining two of the zones in the Town of Queensbury patrolled by the Sheriff's Road Patrol, allowing for the elimination of four Road Patrol Officer positions. He noted that due to the presence of the New York State Trooper barracks located in the Town of Queensbury, they were able to sacrifice a portion of the Sheriff's Road Patrol coverage. Mr. Stec reminded the Committee members that reduction of the non-mandated Sheriff's Road Patrol had been widely discussed and he felt that it was more appropriate to cut the Patrol in areas that had the potential for alternate police coverage, rather than in the northerly sections of the County that had no alternatives for law enforcement. Secondly, Mr. Stec suggested that the contract with the City of Glens Falls which allotted funds to support recreational facilities should also be reviewed for further reduction in light of the fact that the City benefitted greatly from a three-way sewer contract held between the City of Glens Falls, Town of Queensbury and Warren County. He said that the City yielded revenues in the range of \$300,000 to \$400,000 annually through the sewer contract; therefore, he added, he did not feel that it was unreasonable to request a decrease in funding for the recreations contract and he suggested that the amount be reduced from \$99,000 to \$50,000. Finally, Mr. Stec proposed additional reductions in the amount of \$250,000 from the Public Works regular salaries codes, including fringe benefits, which would equate to the elimination of approximately six additional positions.

Mr. Pitkin questioned whether the reduction in salaries should be expanded to include unemployment costs and Mr. Stec replied affirmatively, meaning that the actual reduction in salary codes would be approximately \$500,000. William Lamy, Superintendent of Public Works, replied that if reductions of this magnitude were expected, he would likely be eliminating divisions, rather than positions, within his Department. He then requested that he be given the opportunity to discuss the matter with the Public Works Committee before identifying any areas of the budget for reduction. After pondering the matter further, Mr. Stec said that although he had initially suggested a reduction from Public Works salary codes, he would amend his recommendation to allow for a \$250,000 reduction from any portion of the Public Works budget.

As for a means to increase revenues, Mr. Stec apprised that there had been some renewed interest in the purchase of the County-owned property located across the street from the Municipal Center Campus and if a figure could be agreed upon for the purchase in the near future, the revenues could be included in the 2010 Budget. He added that they should also reconsider selling the Countryside Adult Home, although he acknowledged that it was not likely the income for the sale or decreases in expenditures would be helpful for the 2010 Budget year. Mr. Stec noted that a recent newspaper article had announced that the County had \$500,000 in uncollected DWI related fines

outstanding and he said his third suggestion for increased revenues to the County would be to determine who was responsible for allowing the fines to go uncollected and to implement more aggressive guidelines for timely collections, as there was a considerable amount of money outstanding.

Mr. O'Connor stated that he had no suggestions to add.

Mr. Taylor pointed out that the Warren/Washington Counties Community Services Board employed a Director, Deputy Director and an Assistant Director, and he questioned whether a position reduction was appropriate. Mr. O'Connor replied that because the Board was shared by Warren and Washington Counties, any decision to reduce staffing would have to be made jointly by the two Counties. He noted that the Deputy Director position had been reduced to part-time some time ago. Mr. Geraghty asked how the operations of the Community Services Board were funded and Mr. O'Connor replied that they received all of their funding from various State and Federal programs.

Mr. Kenny suggested that as a long term solution for budget difficulties, they should begin reviewing monthly reports reflecting the status of the total budget to identify areas of potential shortages throughout the year. Additionally, he stated that once adopted, the final budget should be set in stone and there should be no allowances made for Departments exceeding the totals, except in very rare instances; he added that the Department Heads should be advised to cut staffing as necessary to maintain their adopted budgets as necessary.

Mr. Kenny reminded Mr. Geraghty that in a prior meeting the Committee had suggested a reduction in funding to Cornell Cooperative Extension(CCE), as well as the removal of the proposed salary increase for a position within the Office of Emergency Services (OES) and he questioned the status of these items in the budget. Mr. Geraghty replied that the Committee had recommended that the CCE funding be reduced to \$246,000; however, he said, he had added \$50,000 to that amount to total \$296,000 in funding for 2010. He further advised that the salary increase proposed for the OES position had been removed from the budget. Mr. Kenny then noted that the Committee had previously recommended the elimination of the Deputy Director position within Planning & Community Development and he asked if any decision had been made on this matter. Mr. Geraghty responded that the position had not been eliminated as Patricia Tatich, Director of Planning & Community Development, had determined other ways in which to generate revenues and reduce expenditures to offset the cost of the Deputy Director position.

Mr. Kenny commented that if a position reduction was deemed necessary, he did not feel that the person filling the Deputy Director position was the appropriate person to be eliminated due to the volume of work done by this person in attaining grant funding on behalf of the County and he asked whether Civil Service Law would require that this person be laid off with the elimination of the position or if a lower level employee would be lost instead. Ms. Tatich advised that she did not know what the proper procedure would be and assumed that the issue could be addressed at the Committee's discretion. She noted that the greatest potential for gaining grant funding within her Department was held by herself and the Deputy Director, who held the highest salaries; she added that there was a third position within the Planning Department which worked at a lower level and was unable to attain the same volume of grant funding as the higher positions.

Mr. Geraghty questioned whether the additional revenues indicated in place of the position reduction had been included in the 2010 Budget and Mrs. McKinstry replied affirmatively.

Paul Dusek, County Attorney, entered the meeting at 1:29 p.m.

Referring to a recent memo forwarded by the Treasurer's Office, Mr. Kenny pointed out that there were some Departments that had exceeded their overtime allotments as of the end of October, such as the Sheriff's Office

which had expended 130% of their overtime budget, and he questioned whether there had been special conditions that had allowed for this. Mr. Geraghty explained that this had occurred subsequent to a request by the Board of Supervisors to delay in filling vacant Correction Officer positions. He further explained that although overtime had been paid to other employees who were working extra hours to cover the vacant positions, the salaries for the vacant positions remained in the regular salaries code and would offset the additional overtime costs. Respective to the number of State mandated Correction Officer positions, Mr. Kenny apprised that he had recently read an article in the NYSAC (New York State Association of Counties) newsletter which indicated that Broome County officials were negotiating the actual number of Correction Officers necessary within their Correctional Facility with the State Department of Corrections and in the same article the Broome County Chairman of the Board had stated he was confident that the required number would be reduced; therefore, he said, it did not appear that the mandatory staffing numbers were unchangeable.

Mr. Kenny noted that the Treasurer's report had also reflected certain Departments had already exhausted their budgets for employee health insurance and he questioned why this had happened. Sheila Weaver, Commissioner of the Department of Social Services, advised that her Department was one of those that had exceeded their insurance budget and she said this was primarily due to changes in employee status. For example, she cited that new employees within the DSS were typically single young women who began their employment with individual coverage which they later changed to family coverage as they married. Additionally, Ms. Weaver cited that the retirees were living longer now than in the past, thereby increasing the County's expense. Mr. Kenny stated that there were considerable over-expenditures within the Westmount Health Facility for salaries and Mr. Geraghty apprised that this was due to a budgeting error in that they had not previously budgeted for part-time and per diem help; however, he said, this had been corrected for the 2010 Budget.

Mr. Kenny stated his opinion that discussion should be held respective to the possibility of a 1% sales tax increase as there was a portion of the Board of Supervisors who strongly believed in the increase, and another that was against the movement. He added that although he strongly opposed the sales tax increase, he felt the discussion should be held in order to determine which direction the budget process would proceed in. Chairman Monroe said he agreed that discussion relative to the sales tax increase should be entertained, especially in light of the State budget deficit which could potentially lead to increased expenditures and decreased revenues to the Counties of New York State.

Subsequent to extensive discussion on the matter, motion was made by Mr. Kenny and seconded by Mr. Stec to retain the current 7% sales tax rate and the motion failed due to a lack of majority vote, with Messrs. Geraghty, Merlino, O'Connor and Sheehan voting in opposition.

It was the consensus of the Committee that a Special Board meeting should be scheduled to allow each member of the Board of Supervisors to state their opinion on the proposed sales tax increase, as well as to vote on the budget reduction measures suggested earlier in the meeting. Following further discussion, Joan Sady, Clerk of the Board, announced that the Special Board meeting would be held on Monday, November 30<sup>th</sup> at 11:00 a.m. (*Note: the time for the Special Board meeting was subsequently changed to 1:00 p.m. on November 30<sup>th</sup>.*)

As there was no further business to come before the Budget Committee, on motion made by Mr. Kenny and seconded by Mr. Champagne, Mr. Geraghty adjourned the meeting at 2:53 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,  
Amanda Allen, Sr. Legislative Office Specialist