

**WARREN COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS**

**COMMITTEE:           EXTENSION SERVICES**

**DATE:                   JUNE 3, 2009**

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**COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:**

SUPERVISORS   GIRARD  
                  THOMAS  
                  SIMMES  
                  STRAINER  
                  GOODSPEED

**OTHERS PRESENT:**

REPRESENTING CORNELL COOPERATIVE EXTENSION:

JAMES SEELEY, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR  
IRV WEST, BOARD MEMBER  
ANN KOKOSA, FAMILY & CONSUMER SCIENCE ISSUE  
                  LEADER  
LAUREL GAILOR, AGRICULTURE & NATURAL  
                  RESOURCES ISSUE LEADER  
JOHN BOWE, 4-H TEAM COORDINATOR  
AMY SABATTIS, PUBLIC RELATIONS & PUBLICATIONS  
                  MANAGER  
JOAN SADY, CLERK OF THE BOARD  
KEVIN GERAGHTY, BUDGET OFFICER  
SUPERVISOR CHAMPAGNE  
SUPERVISOR TAYLOR  
THOM RANDALL, *ADIRONDACK JOURNAL*  
ALISON MARTIN, *THE POST STAR*  
JOANNE COLLINS, LEGISLATIVE OFFICE SPECIALIST

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Mr. Girard called the meeting of the Extension Services Committee to order at 10:32 a.m.

Mr. Girard announced that Dr. James Seeley, Executive Director of the Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE), had requested the opportunity to make an impact statement before this Committee that might effect the June 10, 2009 meeting of the Budget Committee, regarding the proposed 50% funding reduction, in an effort to restore all or part of the funding.

Privilege of the floor was extended to Dr. Seeley who introduced the following staff members; Irv West, Board member; Ann Kokosa, Family & Consumer Sciences Issue Leader; Laurel Gailor, Agriculture and Natural Resources Issue Leader; and John Bowe, 4H Team Coordinator. Dr. Seeley thanked the Committee for the opportunity to share information which evidenced the importance and effectiveness of the CCE.

Commencing the presentation, Dr. Seeley stated that since 1916, funding for Cornell Cooperative Extension had enabled the improvement of the quality of life

for Warren County residents through educational programs. He read the mission statement as follows: *Extension's educational system enables people to improve their lives and communities through partnerships that put experience and research knowledge to work.* He stated that every County in New York State had an Extension Office and the educational programming therein varied widely based on the needs of the local residents.

Dr. Seeley stated that the three core curriculum areas offered by the Warren County CCE were 4H Youth Development, Family & Consumer Science, and Agriculture and Natural Resources.

He apprised that Family & Consumer Science included educational programs which included parenting, family focus, energy conservation and personal finance management. He said that program enrollment in parenting classes doubled last year. He noted that the CCE offered the only New York State certified program for families undergoing separation and divorce; the "Parenting Apart" program which was mandated by the Warren County Family and Supreme Courts.

Dr. Seeley stated that some other educational offerings addressed budgeting, energy/cost saving strategies, and income tax preparation. He apprised that the Eat Smart nutrition program, a tax free grant approximating \$100,000 which operated with a staff of two, required local matching funds and covered training topics related to judgement and self sufficiency. He noted that 94% of the recipients demonstrated improved knowledge and skills related to nutrition.

Continuing, Dr. Seeley conveyed that the Agricultural and Natural Resources programs promoted understanding of the interdependent relationship between quality of life and the environment. He asserted that natural resources were a major economic resource in Warren County, as 94% of the County was devoted to forestry. He noted the CCE was widely recognized as an unbiased community resource in forestry education and over 300 foresters and loggers attended the CCE workshops last year. He said that Master Gardener volunteers conducted soil testing and facilitated the revitalization of growing environments to over 300 residents throughout the County. New this year, he stated, were volunteers that maintained the ACC Arboretum.

Dr. Seeley stated that the CCE educational programs collaborated with many community groups such as public works, municipal offices, lake associations, maple producers, the forestry industry, school districts, and conservation students from the Warren-Saratoga-Washington-Hamilton-Essex Board of Cooperative Educational Services (WSWHE BOCES), garden clubs and many

more.

Regarding the 4H Youth Development programs, he expressed the importance of the hands-on learning opportunities that they provided. It was accomplished, he said, through clubs, school enrichment and special interest programs. He noted that 4H was the only youth organization in Warren County that offered a juried public speaking program. He noted the success of the bicycle safety program which reached 2,000 students, and the environmental field day, presently taking place at the Fairgrounds.

To elaborate on the school enrichment programs, Dr. Seeley reported that over 1,800 youth from every school in Warren County were given access to the program content such as embryology, geo-spacial science, team building, and earth and arbor day activities. Further, he stated, the annual Warren County Youth Fair promoted positive youth development with almost 500 exhibits which displayed the talents of youngsters. He noted that 4H members attended field trips to Cornell University, the New York State Fair, and New York City.

Continuing, Dr. Seeley outlined the CCE campership program, initiated at the request of the County, which had run for over 25 years. Program eligibility, he said, was based on need and family/home situation and was designed to build self esteem, independence, and foster positive relationships through the use of positive role models. These children, he said, were given a look at the world at-large in a safe, stress-free environment. He noted that the 2009 program could enroll a maximum of 96 campers from a total of 178 applications.

Dr. Seeley asserted that CCE partnered with many organizations and agencies to maximize dollars and avoid the duplication of efforts and programs. He stated that CCE was the cog in the wheel that transferred motion thereby creating the collaborative educational process. He named some of the agencies that the CCE collaborated with which included the Department of Social Services, Office for the Aging, the Internal Revenue Service (IRS), Warren County schools, and Town recreation departments, to name a few. He noted that schools lacked both funding and time, and the CCE enrichment program, he stated, provided the programming that schools could not deliver.

Pertaining to the free tax preparation services made available this year, Dr. Seeley stated that the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) had approached the CCE, and identified many residents that had not filed for the tax credits for which they qualified. As a result, he stated, free tax preparation was available to over 200 residents that met income based qualification criteria.

Regarding the 2008 Impact; Dr. Seeley stated that Cornell University required that all Extension Offices maintain accurate records which documented the numbers of recipients served. For 2008, he reported that 17,512 and 61,324 were the figures which reflected the number of Warren County residents educated by all core program areas, and total multiple contacts (lessons taught), respectively. He apprised that the Warren County Budget comprised over 40% of the CCE annual budget including camperships.

He noted that State and Federal revenues were based on the County's allocation; therefore, he said, when County funding decreased, the State and the Federal funding levels followed accordingly and he noted that up to \$100,000 in Federal funds could be lost. He stated that there were currently 12 staff members in the Office and a 10% budget reduction would necessitate a staff reduction. Referencing funding streams for 2008, Dr. Seeley stated that resources and fringe benefits provided by Cornell University equaled \$419,416.

Dr. Seeley referenced the letters of support included in the packets and he cautioned that a funding reduction of this magnitude would be devastating to the programs and therefore to the residents. He said that given the potential impact of closing the Offices, he requested that the Warren County Board of Supervisors give full consideration to a resolution advocating an amount less than the 50% proposed reduction.

Mr. Bowe stated that he had been with the CCE for twelve years and acknowledged the current need to reduce the budget. He asked the Committee to consider the fact that the services delivered by the CCE were essential, desperation services for which the need escalated during difficult financial times. Further, he explained, the children were often the target of increased stress from parents who faced challenging economic conditions.

Mr. Girard apprised that Kevin Geraghty, Budget Officer, had worked hard in a challenging situation, which resulted in the arbitrary figure by which to reduce the CCE budget in the amount of \$235,000. He stated that additional information was an essential tool in determining a workable figure. Mr. Girard stated that on behalf of the Committee, obtaining greater knowledge of CCE programming results was necessary in order to present an appropriate request, which reflected the needs of the County. The request, he said, would be brought before the Budget Committee on June 10, 2009.

Mr. Strainer inquired about the varying level of need throughout the County. Ann Kokosa, Family and Consumer Science Issue leader, stated that the figures were higher in Glens Falls and Queensbury due to the higher overall populations. She reiterated that a budget reduction at the County level would have a negative impact on State and Federal funding.

Mr. Strainer noted the total budget figure of \$700,000 and he urged that research for other funding sources be carried out. He conveyed that often the fiscal disposition of one County entity had a direct impact on another and cited the Fish Hatchery's impact on tourism. He praised the CCE staff on their programs and dedication and he reiterated the need to seek alternative funding sources. He stated that the County was in a difficult position and reductions were inevitable.

Dr. Seeley stated that he had spoken with Senator Little, who strongly supported Extension Services, and that she had made a concerted effort to obtain grant funding for same. He asserted that the CCE, as a not-for-profit agency, had explored every possible funding source and would continue to do so. He noted that most CCE program offerings were currently free or low cost, and the idea to charge minimal fees was being considered. He stated that he attended grant workshops in an effort to find additional funding sources. He reported that Mrs. Kokosa had just received notification of approximately \$10,000 in grant funding awarded as a result of a joint effort with the Office for the Aging. He noted that the funding would assist grandparents and other guardians with pertinent issues therein.

Dr. Seeley apprised of a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning Grant opportunity for the Hadley-Luzerne School District, which the school would coordinate with the CCE and ultimately realize up to \$40,000 in funding.

Mr. Goodspeed acknowledged the value of the CCE programs and their positive effect on the population. He stated that it was a fiscal reality that significant reductions be made and he cautioned that the projected Budget shortfall could be higher than estimated. He recounted the recent Public Health Committee meeting where clerical staff had been reduced first, followed by Nursing staff, which evidenced measurable consequences. He apprised that almost half of the County Budget was government mandated which, unfortunately, narrowed the choices in terms of reductions. He expounded the absolute necessity of County services, such as snow removal to keep the roads navigable, and public safety for which Sheriff York was limited in terms of reducing staff for criminal response. He

asserted that the County must now identify the essential services of government. Mr. Goodspeed reiterated the positive impact of the CCE programs, and he stated that it was not yet certain whether such programming could continue and he underscored the serious and inevitable nature of the budget reductions. He cited the rural elderly populations who were forced to leave their homes. He asserted that the County must now identify the essential services of government, and those essential services must remain the focus of the future of Warren County budgetary decisions, while all non essential functions must be eliminated. Mr. Goodspeed suggested the consideration of a State wide merger of extension services, whereby a new financial plan could be presented to the State in order to maintain services available to citizens.

Dr. Seeley stated that there had been discussions regarding regionalization of extension services which required additional planning and time. He said that the management team was vigilant about reductions and the primary focus was to preserve the program. Further, he stated, hiring and raises ceased, and spending was contained. He noted that the Financial Administrator of the CCE had resigned and he had considered changing the position to part-time. Dr. Seeley stated that if the annual budget of \$462,000 was reduced by 10%, a loss of 1.5 clerical staff members would result.

Mr. Girard stated that if the CCE budget was reduced by 50% to \$235,000, it would result in the loss of ten of the twelve staff members, and he questioned if the elimination of the program would be a more appropriate choice. Mr. Goodspeed confirmed that there had been discussion with regard to the elimination of the program. Mr. Girard summarized that the Committee must consider all possible options which included the reduction to a \$235,000 budget versus total elimination.

Mr. Champagne apprised that the budget reduction decision process was in the early stages at present and he raised the issue of using technology to enhance efficiency and effectiveness. He suggested that viability of the \$235,000 budget option be discussed further. Mr. Girard reiterated that the purpose of today's meeting was to prepare a request for the June 10, 2009 meeting of the Budget Committee. Mr. Goodspeed assessed that Extension Services must be reviewed with a broad perspective alongside all other County services and agencies, and not as a lone entity.

Mr. Thomas stated that he had Chaired the Extension Services Committee for

several years and noted that \$235,000 may not be sufficient funding. He recognized the enormity of the \$6 million budget deficit and stated that property taxes could not continue to rise, and he asserted that a 30% reduction was a reality.

Mr. Taylor stated that a point had been reached in the State budget process whereby reductions such as these must be made. He said that if the CCE were not reduced to \$235,000, dire consequences for the County would result which would include County-wide layoffs and he stated that additional layoffs were under discussion. He asserted that every service provided by the County must be carefully studied.

Mrs. Simmes asked if the Extension Services Office in any other Counties had faced the same issue. Dr. Seeley stated that he has met with other County Extension Services Directors and some faced level funding while another faced a 10% reduction. Mrs. Simmes apprised that even with the elimination of programs and staff the County would not reach the \$6 million goal, and she noted the cost for unemployment benefits. Mr. Strainer stated that severe reductions would not be necessary if salaries were flat, and if the increase in healthcare costs was shared by the employees. Additionally, he said, it would be appropriate if higher percentages could be contributed at the Federal and State levels, where the budget mandates began.

Mrs. Simmes stated that program reductions were significant, and therefore, she said, Supervisors should be expected to sacrifice their salaries. Mr. Girard pointed out that programs such as these take years to build, and he expounded that Warren County supported Adirondack Community College, where graduates often moved on to four year colleges and deployed their skills and education to other communities. Alternatively, he asserted, the CCE equally promoted education and the resultant population lived, worked, and served in the communities of Warren County.

Mr. Taylor stated that it was highly likely that the \$6 million deficit would increase; therefore, he said, it was imperative to reduce the budget in this manner.

Mrs. Kokosa explained that the CCE was a partnership and could not function in isolation and she said, the program must work with Federal and State agencies in order to succeed. She noted that the Eat Smart New York Program was a

matching program and CCE paid for the fringe benefits. She further stated that one change effects many areas and she cited the DSS clients that were assisted with food education. She said that some programs were fee programs and she pointed out that the staff were taxpayers and spent their money in Warren County. Mr. West stated that he was a salaried employee who often worked 60 or 80 hours per week with no overtime pay because he truly enjoyed his work with children. Mr. West asked who would assume the youth services programs should the CCE be significantly reduced. Mrs. Kokosa added that the preventative work done with youth yielded future results by creating a responsible citizen.

Laurel Gailor, Agricultural & Natural Resources Issues Leader, reported that more services were rendered in rural areas versus urban settings and the \$2,500 in private funding received from Cornell University for forestry might also be lost due to stock market changes.

In closing, Dr. Seeley gave special recognition to his staff and he stated that he had been in the field of education for 35 years, and had joined the CCE due to his shared interest in the mission of helping people by improving the quality of life.

Following discussions, motion was made by Mr. Thomas, seconded by Mr. Strainer and carried by a majority vote, with Mr. Goodspeed voting in opposition, to recommend a 25% reduction in funding for Cornell Cooperative Extension Services for consideration before the Budget Committee on June 10, 2009.

As there was no further business to come before the Extension Services Committee, on motion made by Mr. Goodspeed and seconded by Mr. Strainer, Mr. Girard adjourned the meeting at 12:30 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,  
Joanne Collins, Legislative Office Specialist