

EDUCATION & INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY COMMITTEE
OF THE
SUFFOLK COUNTY LEGISLATURE

A meeting of the Education & Information Technology Committee of the Suffolk County Legislature was held in the Rose Y. Caracappa Legislative Auditorium of the William H. Rogers Legislature Building, 725 Veterans Memorial Highway, Smithtown, New York on April 17, 2012.

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Legislator Sarah S. Anker, Chairwoman
Legislator Wayne R. Horsley, Vice Chair
Legislator Thomas Cilmi
Legislator Thomas Muratore
Legislator Jay H. Schneiderman

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

George Nolan, Counsel to the Legislature
Sarah Simpson, Assistant Counsel
Barbara LoMoriello, Deputy Clerk of the Legislature
William Shilling, Aide to Legislator Anker
Chris DeLuca, Aide to Legislator Cilmi
Kevin LaValle, Aide to Legislator Muratore
Benny Pernice, Budget Review Office
Ben Zwirn, County Executive's Office
Edward Moltzen, County Executive's Office
Mary Lou Araneo, Suffolk County Community College
Richard Meyer, Legislative Director, AME
John Lombardo
Donald Rodgers
Other Interested Parties

TAKEN AND TRANSCRIBED BY:

Lucia Braaten, Court Stenographer

(*THE MEETING WAS CALLED TO ORDER AT 1:05 P.M. *)

CHAIRPERSON ANKER:

Okay. We're still waiting for one member, but we're going to go ahead and start. Would you, please, rise for the Pledge of Allegiance, led by Legislator Schneiderman.

(*Salutation*)

Please remain standing for a moment of silent meditation as we contemplate all the issues that we're having to deal with, and hope that education and awareness will help us get through some of these difficulties.

(*Moment of Silence*)

Thank you. Okay. We have no cards today. Would anybody in the audience like to address the committee? Okay. We're going to proceed with the presentation. We have Donald Rodgers, who is our new Information Technology Commissioner. Would you like to come forward, please? Okay. And you are our nominee. You haven't been confirmed yet.

MR. RODGERS:

No.

CHAIRPERSON ANKER:

So you're here today. Could you just give us a little bit of information about your background, please?

MR. RODGERS:

Is that on now?

CHAIRPERSON ANKER:

Yes.

MR. RODGERS:

Okay. Thank you for having me here today. My background, I have spent about the last 30 years in Information Technology in both the private and public sector. I have significant experience working in Nassau County, where I was both a contractor and an employee. My most recent position was working with New York State on an interoperability project as the -- excuse me -- as the Business Architect for interoperability. Prior to that, I was the C.I.O. for Health and Human Services in Nassau County. Prior to entering the field of I.T., I spent seven years teaching in the Levittown Schools.

CHAIRPERSON ANKER:

Okay. Just for the Legislators here at the roundtable, his resume is in your paperwork here, if you have any questions for him.

LEG. CILMI:

I --

CHAIRPERSON ANKER:

Okay. Legislator Cilmi

LEG. CILMI:

Good afternoon. Thanks for -- thanks for coming. Obviously, the County is facing tremendous financial difficulties at the moment. I believe there's a role, a significant role for I.T. to play in terms of helping the County run more efficiently, effectively, which potentially generates additional revenue from a variety of sources, and certainly mitigates cost. So I'm not sure exactly when you actually sort of took the chair, but can you talk to us a little bit about how you see I.T.'s role in dealing with the -- some of these issues, how you see I.T. being impacted by these issues from a, you know, staffing point of view, and where you see some of the biggest opportunities in the County are?

MR. RODGERS:

With regard to your first question, how I see I.T. playing a role in this, as I reviewed the current environment in Suffolk County, there are no less than six distinct I.T. areas, of which Central I.T. should play a leading role.

In my previous incarnation, or one of them in Nassau County, I was really on the other side of the fence. I was dealing with the Health and Human Services aspect of things and was looking at how do we work with Central I.T. in that role. So I think from that perspective I have a good view of what the individual I.T. areas need to do to support their program areas, and the evolution of them as such, because they do have very specific needs. And those very specific needs are usually understood best by the people who are in those program areas, whether it's the Police, whether it's Social Services, whether it's Department of Health.

You need the program people to understand what needs to be served. That being said, there is enormous room for collaboration, so that we can look at cost initiatives and cost savings. Where can we leverage dollars, whether it's in consolidated purchasing, whether it's in going to New York State, going to the Federal Government to look at grants or Federal -- or monies that may be available that we can utilize across program areas, whether it's in utilizing talents that are found in the different departments, and developing applications, which is something that I'm proud that we did when I was with Health and Human Services, developing applications that have functionality across program areas, across departments, that can service multiple -- multiple users.

LEG. CILMI:

So, do you see your role as -- or your department's role as more based on oversight of -- my understanding of the County's I.T. situation right now is that we have many silos, all of the departments, or many of the departments at least, have their own sort of I.T., you know, piece of the -- of a pie, but those pieces are segregated, so there's no cohesive, or there's little cohesive -- cohesiveness in the whole I.T. picture in the County. So do you see yourself as overseeing that and managing that reality, or do you see the department changing that reality in some way?

MR. RODGERS:

I think that reality has to change. That doesn't mean that I want to run Police I.T. or DSS I.T. The County I.T. has significant responsibility already for the County infrastructure, for major County applications such as payroll, such as the fiscal applications. However, that being said, you're correct in that the development of these silos results in a lot of duplication of effort, and that effort frequently can be observed in costs that are out there where we can find savings. So with regard to my role, I think it's essential that I build bridges to these other agencies, and develop a collaborative relationship with these agencies where we can work together on establishing these things.

LEG. CILMI:

Do you see -- do you see the need for some sort of a committee, not in a Legislative respect, but at

the administrative level possibly, that would put all of the different departments in a room, people who understand information technology and the opportunities that it presents, put them in a room together to have regular conversations about what opportunities exist, not only internally, but in the marketplace, what's being taken advantage of in the private sector in terms of the use of I.T., and how the departments could better interface or utilize technologies collaboratively, rather than independently; do you see the use of some committee such as that?

MR. RODGERS:

I've been here seven days. What I can say to you is this: It's my intention to reach out to every individual who heads a different I.T. area within the County and meet with them individually, and then discuss the benefits of us meeting in group en masse. Certainly, these groups, these I.T. program areas exist because they serve the needs of their departments. Certainly, some of those needs overlap, some of those needs are unique to their departments. And as I said, where we can leverage those particular developments that they've done, I will absolutely pursue that. And where we can see funding from outside of the County, whether it's from grants, whether it's from the State, whether it's in the private sector, whatever we can do to solicit funding that's going to allow us to operate Countywide, we will do it. My intention is to make sure that everybody has the big picture in mind. And that's not a criticism of the other program areas. Their function is their function. My function is to look at the County as a whole, or at least that's how I see my function.

LEG. CILMI:

I've prepared a resolution, which I have not yet filed, which I think I've e-mailed to Mr. Zwirn, who's in the audience, as well as a couple of others in the Administration, for feedback, which would do just that, it would create a committee. And I didn't file it specifically yet because I wanted the Administration's feedback on it before I went ahead and did that. And I'll speak to Mr. Zwirn, I guess, about that after, after you're done. But I certainly appreciate you coming to the Committee. I look forward to working with you. I think I.T. is an incredibly important function within the County. And, as I said at the outset, I think it can go a long way towards improving the way we do business here, not only from a service delivery point of view, but from an efficiency and effectiveness point of view internally. So I look forward to working with you going forward. Thanks for coming.

MR. DAWSON:

Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON ANKER:

Okay. Would anybody else like to ask questions? Okay. Legislator Horsley.

LEG. HORSLEY:

Hey, Donald. It's good to see you again. I just had a quick question, maybe it's a question, and maybe it goes to what Legislator Cilmi was just talking about, working collaboratively with the -- all the different disparate ends of the I.T. world in Suffolk County.

A couple of years ago I passed a law called Text-a-Tip, and it was passed by the Legislature and it was -- most people felt pretty good about it, and it was unanimously passed by the Legislature, at least that's my recollection. And it went to the Police Department, they accepted it, and the genesis of it was that young people today are texting more than they're phoning. And in many ways it might be a safer thing to deal with, that, you know, when they see something happen, to text the issue rather than phone the issue. And it passed, and I brought that forward, and it just never seemed to get off the ground. It was never publicized.

And I don't know if it's necessarily a Police issue, or that they didn't like it, or whatever it was, but I almost got the feeling that they just couldn't handle it, that they didn't know how to deal with it and

it's -- I know other police departments are using it across the country, and it seems to be a success almost everywhere you go, and it seemed so much more inclusive of the public. And I'm wondering if you can -- I'm not sure what my question is, except in asking you can you help with me with this, Buddy? I mean, I got a law on the books that no one uses, and I thought it was a good one.

MR. RODGERS:

Well, obviously, I can't speak to why it's not where it is.

LEG. HORSLEY:

Right, I know that.

MR. RODGERS:

But I also can't say that I don't think it has merit, because I certainly do. But I do think it speaks to the issue of why there's an absolute need for us to make sure that we're maximizing what the talents are that we have in the County across the board, so that if this was a particular issue that could not be handled by one program area with the communication and interaction between agencies, it possibly could be handled by another one. And I'll be happy to have a conversation with you about this.

LEG. HORSLEY:

I'd appreciate that. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON ANKER:

Okay. Anybody else? I just want to also mention, I also have a similar resolution that was just passed, it's called the "Scam Alert", and it's working with the Public Safety personnel to create awareness about scams that are out there. And it just went online less than a week ago. But again, I'm looking forward to additional coordination and collaboration with all the departments, so -- and I appreciate you being here today. Is there anybody else with questions?

LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:

Yes.

CHAIRPERSON ANKER:

Oh, okay. Legislator Schneiderman.

LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:

Well, yeah. I also think I.T. is a very important function. And, certainly, if we're looking at considerable staff reductions, you know, oftentimes we hear how Information Technology ends up reducing staff, you know, because it's more efficient. But we kind of have the reverse situation. We may find ourselves having to be more efficient because we have less staff, because the County is in a situation where it has to lay people off, unfortunately. So I think you're going to play a critical role in trying to keep the service levels, and I don't know if it can be achieved through Information Technology, but certainly some efficiencies can be generated.

I just wanted to ask you, because you appear to be present and I assume it's your own company, this Red Dog Design, Inc. It looks like you have some proprietary software that you developed that is in use by certain counties, a Single Point Entry Client Management System. Suffolk County doesn't use that software, right?

MR. RODGERS:

That software is not proprietary, it's public domain.

LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:

Oh.

MR. RODGERS:

It's effectively owned by New York State, and part of that application has been implemented in the Social Services Department in Suffolk County.

LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:

In Suffolk County. I just want to make sure, as the Department Head, there aren't products that you might own that, you know, you would be offering to the County; there'd be no conflicts of any kind.

MR. RODGERS:

I have no products that would result in a conflict of interest.

LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:

Okay. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON ANKER:

Okay. Anybody else? Last call. Well, Don, thank you so much for coming here today. We're going to continue with our agenda. Do you have any questions for the Legislature?

MR. RODGERS:

I don't, other than to say thank you for your time. I appreciate it. And I'm available for you guys, so, certainly, I look forward to working with you. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON ANKER:

Okay. All right. Thank you very much. Okay. We're going to continue on our agenda with the resolutions. Looks like there's no tabled resolutions. There is one Introductory Resolution. Okay. This is ***J.R. 1352 - Confirming appointment of the County Commissioner of Information Technology (Donald C. Rodgers) (Co. Exec.)***. I make a motion.

LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:

Second.

LEG. MURATORE:

Second.

CHAIRPERSON ANKER:

Second by Legislator Schneiderman. All in favor? All opposed? Okay. Resolution passes (***Vote: Approved 5-0-0-0***). Okay. Is there -- we have --

MR. ZWIRN:

Excuse me. Do you want -- do you want Mr. Rodgers here on Tuesday before the full Leg?

CHAIRPERSON ANKER:

Oh, yes, absolutely.

MR. ZWIRN:

Okay. Okeydoke.

LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:

But we don't know when.

CHAIRPERSON ANKER:

Okay. It looks like --

LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:

Perhaps for coordination, Ben --

LEG. CILMI:

I have some other business, too.

LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:

Just on that issue, because this, obviously, is going to be a long meeting Tuesday. If we have his cell phone number where somebody can contact him and tell him approximately when to show up, I think it might help, rather than sitting there for hours.

CHAIRPERSON ANKER:

Riverhead.

LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:

It's going to be in Riverhead, yeah.

CHAIRPERSON ANKER:

Legislator Cilmi has additional questions.

LEG. CILMI:

Yes, on two separate topics, if you don't mind, Madam Chair. Thank you. First, to Mr. Melito or Mr. Zwirn. I think both of them received that e-mail from me, if I'm not mistaken, with respect to that I.T. Committee idea. I just wanted to get your feedback on it, if you care to.

MR. MELITO:

Absolutely. As a consultant for the last 20-plus years, we've often called for technology committees. I mean, in concept, it's a great idea. There's a time and a place. My comment on -- my initial reaction is there's absolutely no way we wouldn't be working here and call for a Technology Committee. I'm not sure we would do it at this moment, because we are trying to get our arms around what the operation is. But some time in the next several months or so we would do so. I think it's a good idea.

My only other comment would be the makeup of the committee. Twenty-four people I think is probably a little unwieldy for a regular basis. Maybe we'd break it into a working group versus a larger administrative committee, or something like that. But it's something we definitely would look to use at some point. We're just not quite at that point yet.

LEG. CILMI:

Okay. Well, in deference to the Administration, then, I'll hold off on filing the resolution. And if -- when the Administration feels it appropriate and timely, let me know and we'll move forward that way.

MR. MELITO:

That's wonderful.

LEG. CILMI:

If that's okay.

MR. MELITO:

Great. Absolutely.

LEG. CILMI:

And I'll be happy to amend it in terms of the composition of the committee --

MR. MELITO:

Perfect.

LEG. CILMI:

-- in any way you suggest.

MR. MELITO:

Okay. It sounds great.

LEG. CILMI:

Okay? Thank you very much.

MR. MELITO:

All right. Thank you. No problem.

LEG. CILMI:

Yep. If I could just address one other issue, not with Mr. Melito or Mr. Zwirn. Is there anyone here representing the College, the Community College?

LEG. HORSLEY:

Yes.

LEG. CILMI:

No?

LEG. HORSLEY:

Not a representative?

MS. ARANEO:

We could take a message back.

LEG. CILMI:

Okay. Well, that being the case, back in the beginning of March, I had had some communication with Dr. McKay and Mr. Petrizzo with regard to the number of students that -- the number of students that reside in Suffolk County that attend Nassau Community College as compared with the number of students that reside in Nassau County and New York City who attend Suffolk Community College. And I'm not sure if any of you have seen those numbers, but they're disturbing and very -- the difference is very significant. In fact, the number of students from Suffolk County who attend Nassau Community College is roughly twenty-five hundred. The number of students from Nassau County and New York City combined is less than 270. So what that means is, from a -- purely from a financial point of view, is that we have this out-of-county tuition mandate. It means that Nassau -- Suffolk County taxpayers are funding our students who attend community colleges outside of Suffolk County multiple millions of dollars annually. And our College, because the funding goes from the County to the College, our College is only receiving a very small amount of money, less than a million dollars, I think, last year, for students from outside of our County who attend Suffolk Community College.

Now, I would put our Community College up against Nassau Community College any day of the week, not only in terms of its facilities, but in terms of its course offerings, in terms of the level of stature of our teachers. And so my question, and I think the Board of Directors, if I'm not mistaken, questioned this as well at some point, is why is that? And there was -- there was -- I think I saw something that the Board had asked the Administration of the College to undertake a study to come to that conclusion. Why is that? Has the study been done? And what can we do to -- in addition to what we already do, which I think is significant, what can we do to sort of balance out that -- you know, those numbers? If -- through the Chair, if we could ask somebody from the College to come to our committee meeting, our next committee, and discuss that with us, I'd appreciate it.

CHAIRPERSON ANKER:

I think that would be a great idea. So I know you're taking notes out there. If we could address those questions, that would be great. Are there anymore questions pertaining to this committee? I see none. We'll adjourn this meeting. Thank you.

(*THE MEETING WAS ADJOURNED AT 1:28 P.M. *)