

**EDUCATION & INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY COMMITTEE**  
**OF THE**  
**SUFFOLK COUNTY LEGISLATURE**  
**MINUTES**

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 June 12, 2012.

**MEMBERS PRESENT:**

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

**ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:**

George Nolan, Counsel to the Legislature  
Barbara LoMoriello, Chief Deputy Clerk  
Gail Vizzini, Director/Budget Review Office  
Jill Moss, Budget Review Office  
Benny Pernice, Budget Review Office  
Ben Zwirn, County Executive's Office  
Richard Meyer, AME  
Donald Rogers, Commissioner, IT  
Terrence G. Pearsall, Chief of Staff  
Mike Pitcher, Aide to Presiding Officer  
Ali Nazir, Aide to Leg. Kennedy  
Paul Perillie, Aide to Leg. Gregory  
Kevin LaValle, Aide to Leg. Muratore  
Rick Brand, Newsday

**MINUTES TAKEN BY:**

Diana Flesher, Court Stenographer

## THE COMMITTEE WAS CALLED TO ORDER AT 12:59 PM

### CHAIRWOMAN ANKER:

Will the members of the Education and Information Technology Committee, please come to the horseshoe.

Okay, we're going to start our Education/Information Technology Committee. Please rise for the Pledge of Allegiance led by Legislator Schneiderman.

### SALUTATION

Would you please remain standing as we think about those in need, especially our military men and women.

### MOMENT OF SILENCE OBSERVED

Okay. Thank you. We have a very short agenda here today. We have no cards today for public comment.

### PRESENTATION

We're going to go right into the presentation. We have -- Donald Rogers, Commissioner of Information Technology will be giving us an update. Don, you want to go ahead and come on up? Good. You can have a seat at the table.

### COMMISSIONER ROGERS:

Good afternoon. My understanding is you guys just wanted an update on where we are, what we're doing, where we're hoping to be going. It's been approximately 60 days since I got here. And what I can tell you is that we are still in the process of assessing the current environment. The current environment, however, would be one of significant diversity throughout the County.

What I mean by that is we have 15 distinct IT operating areas within the County outside of the Department of Information Technology. And those functional areas each represent their own particular challenges in that what we can see is that there is an enormous degree of silos in the County where each area is operating fairly independently. So, consequently there is not the degree of collaboration that needs to take place in order to ensure that the appropriate purchases are being made or that they're being used most effectively. And this is one area that I am focusing on right now to try and get a handle on the capital funds that have been approved, the budget dollars that have been approved, and the particular equipment purchases that are either in line or have been approved.

Suffolk County has an extremely formidable infrastructure in place. An excellent job was done putting that in place. And it can be utilized to real benefit of everybody in the County. And we want to make sure that that is taking place. We have a Disaster Recovery Site in Riverhead. So that should there be a natural disaster, we can still be operational. Situations that occurred in the past, such as Tropical Storm Irene where we had some outages, have been rectified. So, I have some real confidence in that foundation.

My big concern, as I said, is the actual silo structure that exists today. Because I don't feel that we're necessarily getting the effective usefulness that we want to out of our staff and out of our funding. The Department can't be expected to have the level of expertise that they need in order to carry things out. So we are assessing what tools are available and what we think they need to use. In line with that, we're also reviewing the software licensing that's in place right now and making sure we're in compliance on everything we need to be on that.

In addition to that, the availability of data throughout the County is of a concern to me in that we have data repositories that may or may not be storing data in the most effective or useful manner. And we may not be maximizing the distribution or utilization of that data. So we are certainly reviewing that.

I'm also in the process of reviewing the current data base environment that exists at the Department of Information Technology. We have a significant issue staring us in the face in that the current mainframes are coming to end of life. And we will have to address those and whether or not we want to stay in that environment is an issue. And, of course, overall we're looking at the staffing within the DOIT environment as well as the IT staffing throughout the County.

That is a very quick look at the topics that we've been addressing. I'm certainly open to any questions that you guys may have with regard to this. I would expect -- excuse me -- I would expect that going forward, I'd like to have a much more complete picture. But the number of items has not been small. There are significant issues for us to address.

**CHAIRWOMAN ANKER:**

Okay, thank you, again, for being here and giving us an overview. Now you haven't been in your position very long. About how long have you been the Commissioner?

**COMMISSIONER ROGERS:**

About 60 days.

**CHAIRWOMAN ANKER:**

About 60 days. So, again, it's understandable of you -- wrapping your arms around the situation and we do appreciate the input that you're giving us today. Legislator Cilmi.

**LEG. CILMI:**

Thank you, Madam Chair. Thanks for being here. I'm sorry if I missed, you know, the earlier portion of your presentation. But did you or could you speak to the County Executive's plan to utilize data-driven decision-making as -- you know, as part of our Performance Management Program in the County and how your role will facilitate that, how your Department will facilitate that. And also if you could just elaborate a little more on the coordination between your staff specifically and DOIT and the IT staff that exists in each of the Departments -- the other departments separately.

**COMMISSIONER ROGERS:**

With regard to data-driven decision-making, this is absolutely essential for performance management. It's absolutely essential for us going forward. And this goes back, again, to our scenario of 15 distinct IT areas outside of DOIT, each of which has their own repository of data, each of which has a firm hold on it so that the availability of this data is not always readily accessible. This is an issue.

The technology that is utilized by the various departments runs the gamut. So, consequently we are in a process of determining what the best technology is for us to put into place. Right now we've got a significant amount of access databases and a significant amount of Excel Spread sheets out there. These are end product tools. These are not tools that we would necessarily look at as a starting point for us. These are tools that should be the recipient of data after we're able to do the analysis of that data. And the -- receive the products of the analysis that we can do to help us to have data-driven decisions.

We are not right now in a position to make those determinations. Because we do not have the accumulated data in place or the tools that we want to do the analysis on it. I am currently in the process of looking at some tools and that would be the first step. It would certainly not be the last

or close to the last step in us identifying the tools that we need to use. I'm having conversations with the various departments as to what tools they currently use and I am having conversations with the Performance Management Team as to what tools to use.

**LEG. CILMI:**

So it seems what you're saying is that there is currently a lack of connectivity from a data point of view with all of these different departments and you're -- one of your objectives would be to change that?

**COMMISSIONER ROGERS:**

That's correct.

**LEG. CILMI:**

Because to the extent that, you know, the data in one department may be applicable in some way to another department and -- obviously will help make things run more efficiently.

**COMMISSIONER ROGERS:**

I think if you -- a very simple example, the current staff reductions throughout the County, significant amount of that data resides with the Department of Labor in a Department of Labor Repository. This does not make it readily available for analysis with other data that may be resident at Civil Service. These represent time constraints, obstacles that are in your way. And because they may or may not reside in the same environment, you may have issues with actually translating the data into a common environment to operate in.

So the short answer to your question is yes. All right? And this is paramount. This is very, very important if we are to move forward with regard to making the County a more efficiently run environment and utilizing the technology that we have. As I said, we've got a significant infrastructure in place here. And it is well-defined and can be of enormous use to us. Maximizing something like the Disaster Recovery Center is something that every department should be taking advantage of.

**LEG. CILMI:**

Would you expect that the systems or software that's used to make those connections, would you expect that is something that's developed in-house or is that something -- I mean, I know there's a variety of business management software, you know, complex business management software out there where very large companies run their operations through. Is that something that you've explored? Are you going to explore that?

**COMMISSIONER ROGERS:**

I am currently exploring it.

**LEG. CILMI:**

Can you give us some examples?

**COMMISSIONER ROGERS:**

I mean, we've had conversations with a couple of private corporations. I'm looking at third party software. But software and contracts are two different things. It would certainly be my intention that we're not going to reinvent the wheel; that if there is a software product available that will allow us to crunch significant amounts of data, that would obviously be a possible direction that we'd want to take. Beyond that, I am a strong advocate of us doing development in-house. I much prefer to do that. I am still in the process of looking at what our in-house skill sets are. This is not necessarily easy since we may have people in other departments who may or may not have IT titles, who are doing IT work. So we need to assess that as well. People's inherent knowledge of the departments they work in. Individuals who work for the Department of Health clearly could have

much better understanding of the requirements Federal and State guidelines that have restrictions there. So, that knowledge is invaluable. So, you really need a mix of that talent. The knowledge of the program area doesn't necessarily translate into a technical skill set. So we're looking for the best mix of those things.

But on the grand scheme of things, I would rather see us -- see that we have the people in-house do this work. And even if we -- if that meant we had to bring in outside help to work with our staff initially, to bring them to a level that we want them to be so that -- those people can then be jettisoned and we use our own staff in-house, I'd much prefer that direction.

**LEG. CILMI:**

So the work that you're talking about is a huge undertaking, obviously, and as you say critically important to the operations of the County. Recognizing how important it is and what a big job you have in front of you, when would you expect to have, you know, your next set of plans in terms of how you're going to proceed with some of these challenges?

**COMMISSIONER ROGERS:**

I haven't broken it down into phases for you yet. I would say that certainly within the next two months, we will have identified some of the tools that we want to use, hopefully been able to maybe acquire some of it. I think -- I would like to believe we're going to have a much better handle on the data and the degree of the data that exists. I mean, I don't even have any guarantees at this point that the detail of data that we need is available. And if it's not, what are we going to do about that? We have a significant number of applications out there. We have a significant number of tools that are being used in the departments. They may or may not provide the data in the format that we need it.

Additionally, we need to investigate various state repositories from State systems that we may be able to acquire information from as well. And I'm in the process of trying to do that now. That does take time. You know, you don't always get speed of access with the State that you'd like to have. Their timetable is not mine so -- but I would say certainly within the next couple of months I will be able to present a more formalized plan for you guys. All right? To be quite honest with you, there has been a very large amount of issues just to identify getting started.

**LEG. CILMI:**

I'm sure. I guess last question or last topic that I'd like you to address is, the initiative of the Health Department to have the online permitting available to us, that kicked off a couple of months ago and I'm very pleased with the County Executive's commitment to that, but it kicked off at a very base level accepting residential applications. And I know the intention was to go to accepting commercial applications and wastewater applications as well. Are you -- is your Department working with the folks in the Health Department in that regard or --

**COMMISSIONER ROGERS:**

We are.

**LEG. CILMI:**

Okay.

**COMMISSIONER ROGERS:**

That particular project started shortly before I got here; probably, I think, two or three weeks before I got here. Some of my staff has been involved in it in developing the particular website that is currently online on the internet on the County site. It has been advancing in phases. The next piece, I believe, will be the restaurant component and food service component will be going out there.

**LEG. CILMI:**

Any idea when that will happen?

**COMMISSIONER ROGERS:**

I believe it's supposed to happen by the end of this month. Okay. I believe the restaurant component will be available by the end of this month. The permitting component, they've been moving along with. And, again, part of that there is -- a significant amount of the permits' functionality is at the Town level. So, we're trying to make sure that it's clear to residents when they utilize the portal as to what is County-based, what is Town-based and what they have left. So, they are working ongoing with the Towns to collaborate on that.

**LEG. CILMI:**

Okay. Well, listen, I appreciate you being here. I certainly appreciate the work that you're doing. And if I can personally be of any assistance in driving, you know, your agenda forward in terms of bringing the County up to speed with information technology, I'd be happy to do that. So, please, I avail myself to you.

**COMMISSIONER ROGERS:**

Thank you.

**LEG. CILMI:**

Call my office at any time.

**COMMISSIONER ROGERS:**

I appreciate it. Thank you.

**CHAIRWOMAN ANKER:**

Yeah, and, again, I want to emphasize that the Legislature is here to help facilitate, you know, if you do have a problem, whether -- it's with, you know, within -- from a department, departments or within other municipalities, please let us know because, you know, phone calls, letters, you know, people need nudges. And we'd like to see this technology online ready to use.

I just wanted to follow up, too, as far as ways to help bring our Information Technology Department to a better place, you know. Interns: Have you reached out to interns? I know Suffolk Community College is here today.

**COMMISSIONER ROGERS:**

It's interesting you asked me that. That's on the list. We absolutely want to avail ourselves of that. We are currently taking a look at the different colleges and we do want to reach out to them for interns to come in. Of course, the question always is whether they're paid or volunteer given our current fiscal environment, but we absolutely would love to bring interns in. I think it's a good use of talent.

**CHAIRWOMAN ANKER:**

Okay, if we can me help facilitate that. Again, I spoke to you earlier today about an Eagle Scout who did a project refurbishing computers for a Teen Crisis Center. And I think this boy was 17-years-old and incredibly bright. Again, maybe there's a program we can start here with Suffolk County where -- you know, even high school kids, in addition, of course, the College. College is always good.

**COMMISSIONER ROGERS:**

Again, I think one of the big things that we should recognize is, as I said, we have done a very robust infrastructure. And going forward, I think, it would be well worth our while to looking into how we best maximize that and reach out whether it is to Universities, to School Districts, the

Towns, the Villages. We are having conversations in terms of maximizing some of our efforts with PD and with FRES, so absolutely, I couldn't agree with you more.

**CHAIRWOMAN ANKER:**

Okay. And, again with the PD recently they put up the Scam Alert website. And I've gotten nothing but good comments from that. Newsday. News 12 did an article on it. And there's a lot out there that we need to make people aware of. And I think the best source is information technology.

The other point I wanted to ask is sponsorship, is there any way we could after sponsorships to, you know, complement some of the software and hardware? I know -- you know, Apple computer or HP, is there any way we can get some type of discount if we work with those companies?

**COMMISSIONER ROGERS:**

We currently utilize the State contract in order to get the best price we can. And we negotiate further with them to try to see reductions in price on that. So we do look to do that. The costs within IT are significant. There is absolutely no way around that. I mean, our licensing costs are very significant. And one of the reasons why we want to make every effort to reach out to the other departments is to make sure that we are maximizing our ability to get the best price we can on licensing.

**CHAIRWOMAN ANKER:**

I know the schools talk about shared services. It sounds like something the County needs to do.

**COMMISSIONER ROGERS:**

Yes, absolutely. It absolutely is imperative.

**CHAIRWOMAN ANKER:**

Okay. And as far as other municipalities have you -- I'm assuming you're working with them with the health permit process. Have you looked into other software programs, hardware programs, ideas from other Counties, other municipalities?

**COMMISSIONER ROGERS:**

We haven't yet. That is part of the plan that we are putting together. And, again, I know I sound like a broken record, but I keep going back to -- the infrastructure that we have in place -- and this is not me, this was done before I got here -- the infrastructure we have in place is excellent and we can -- we can leverage that.

**CHAIRWOMAN ANKER:**

Thank you so much. Does any other Legislators have questions? Okay, thank you so much for --

**LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:**

I have one question.

**CHAIRWOMAN ANKER:**

Legislator Schneiderman.

**LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:**

This really has to do with data and -- a software developer came to me not too long ago with a question having to do with -- he wanted to develop like some handheld apps, like I-Phone apps off of our Real Property data. And I guess this is a growing market. These developers -- you know, all kinds of realtime applications that -- in this case he was trying to develop something for real estate agents. But he was told he couldn't have the data, he had to pay \$10,000 for the data or something. And, you know, his feeling was, *well, you know, it should be public information. It's*

*just tax map data, etcetera.* You know, when properties sold, what they sold for, that kind of thing. And he didn't understand that and felt like the County was somehow standing in the way of economic development. This is a merging market. We could be licensing this data in ways that are more affordable to these startups. Do you know anything about this? I know you're a software developer yourself.

**COMMISSIONER ROGERS:**

I don't know anything about this particular item.

**LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:**

I know New York City has an open data policy. We don't seem to have that.

**COMMISSIONER ROGERS:**

I'm not sure who you spoke to, if it was -- there are a number of areas where we have real property data stored in the County, which, again, is one of the items that I'm looking to address so that we can have a comprehensive source of the data, so, I guess if --

**LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:**

Again, he was even thinking like a partnership with the County whereas -- you know, people buy subscriptions to the service they -- you know, the County can make money that way, too. I thought it was really interesting. It's not something I know much about, but I can put him in touch with you.

**COMMISSIONER ROGERS:**

That would be fine.

**LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:**

Okay.

**COMMISSIONER ROGERS:**

I'll be more than happy to speak to him. Again, without me knowing more, I don't know what we are restricted from, you know, from a legal perspective or what we actually can disperse. I do know that generally governments charge for the process that's required to actually put the data out there and distribute it to somebody. The data can be available, but the municipality or the local government may say, "okay, we're going to have to execute so many man-hours to actually provide this to you. And we're going to charge a fee for that, for the media and for the service." But beyond that, I don't have an answer for you.

**LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:**

You know, I think this is different because it's a tax map type of stuff and I think the Head of Real Property felt it was copyrightable or copy-written. I don't --

**COMMISSIONER ROGERS:**

I can have that conversation.

**LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:**

Yeah.

**COMMISSIONER ROGERS:**

If you put him in touch with me, I'd be very happy to communicate with him.

**LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:**

Okay. I'd be happy to do that.

**COMMISSIONER ROGERS:**

Sure.

**LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:**

Typically the cost of -- the cost to reproduce it. So, if you're burning it on a CD or printing a piece of paper under FOIL, that's typically what happens.

**COMMISSIONER ROGERS:**

Yes.

**LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:**

But I think this is a different category somehow.

**COMMISSIONER ROGERS:**

Well, again, it depends upon what he was asking for, you know, and the format.

**LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:**

Right. And I guess really my underlying question is not this one particular individual, but can we take the data that we collect, our technology and --

**COMMISSIONER ROGERS:**

Yes, we should.

**LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:**

-- and make money off it?

**COMMISSIONER ROGERS:**

Yes, we should.

**LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:**

Make money off it, like spreading it out and -- you know into this new world really --

**COMMISSIONER ROGERS:**

Yes.

**LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:**

-- of handheld applications.

**COMMISSIONER ROGERS:**

And, you know --

**LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:**

Could be a good source of revenue.

**COMMISSIONER ROGERS:**

And I hate to sound like a broken record, but it is absolutely something that we are looking at in terms of how we can maximize it.

**LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:**

Can I ask you, too, and maybe you talked about this. Staffing levels, it's probably too early to make any kind of recommendations, but you're about 120 some odd people in that Department?

**COMMISSIONER ROGERS:**

No.

**LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:**

How many people are working --

**COMMISSIONER ROGERS:**

I have 63 people.

**LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:**

Oh, 63. Half of what it used to be, then?

**COMMISSIONER ROGERS:**

Yes.

**LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:**

Okay, all right. So it is greatly reduced already.

**COMMISSIONER ROGERS:**

Yes.

**LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:**

In the recent layoff list, there was -- any layoffs in IT or no?

**COMMISSIONER ROGERS:**

Yes.

**LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:**

There were additional layoffs there, too.

**COMMISSIONER ROGERS:**

There were eight or nine layoffs.

**LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:**

And your ability to function with that crew is -- you're analyzing it?

**COMMISSIONER ROGERS:**

Yes.

**LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:**

Whether you need more, whether you can work with less?

**COMMISSIONER ROGERS:**

The staff has been reduced by about 27 percent since January.

**LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:**

Okay. Thank you.

**COMMISSIONER ROGERS:**

Between vacancies and layoffs.

**LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:**

Okay. All right, thank you.

**CHAIRWOMAN ANKER:**

And, again, it sounds like really the Health Department, we may have a lot of nurses but those nurses are specialized. The same with IT. You may have programmers or certain people that specialize in certain things, but you can't, you know --

**COMMISSIONER ROGERS:**

What's absolutely --

**CHAIRWOMAN ANKER:**

How does that work as far as --

**COMMISSIONER ROGERS:**

What's absolutely imperative, and, again, we are currently assessing staffing within the other departments for people that have IT titles and within central IT as well. And as I'm sure you're all aware, there are various levels of expertise within technology. And within those levels -- I can have somebody who is working on the payroll system for me who is a level of expertise in a particular language. That's not the same skill set that's going to apply to a web developer and it's not the same skill set that's going to apply to an Oracle data base administrator. So, these skill sets are all extremely important. Making sure we have competent staff in those positions is extremely important as we move forward to be able to utilize the data we want to utilize and execute it quickly.

**CHAIRWOMAN ANKER:**

Do you feel that the staffing -- again half of our departments have in-house tech people; the other half, I guess, use your department. What are your thoughts as far as consolidating more or maybe reaching out to those departments to help you in other areas? Is that a possibility?

**COMMISSIONER ROGERS:**

I absolutely look forward to reaching out to the other departments. Again, I'm still in the process -- because quite honestly, the better part of the first month I was here I was occupied with trying to deal with layoff lists. But I am in the process of identifying what the skill sets are within the other departments. Generally speaking they are not at the program level. They are more at the analyst level specifically associated with their department area. And that's significantly different.

**CHAIRWOMAN ANKER:**

Quite a challenge ahead of you. Again, if the Legislature can help in any way, please let us know.

**COMMISSIONER ROGERS:**

Thank you.

**CHAIRWOMAN ANKER:**

Again, facilitating that, working -- you know, we need to work through this. Information technology is important for everyone. And I think Legislator Schneiderman has a wonderful idea. That's a great idea to use our resources and try to help with our -- with the funding issues. Are there any other Legislators who have any questions? If not, we will -- we thank you very much for being here, giving us an update. We're going to move onto --

**COMMISSIONER ROGERS:**

Thank you.

**CHAIRWOMAN ANKER:**

-- Gail Vizzini. You have an update for us on the Suffolk Community College Budget.

**MS. VIZZINI:**

Thank you, Madam Chairwoman. I just wanted to bring to your attention that on June 8th, Friday the Budget Review Office released its review of the College's Operating Budget. So now the College and the County Executive and the Budget Review Office are in agreement in terms of the total cost of the College's Operating Budget and the County contribution will remain flat.

Out of consideration to the County's fiscal circumstances, the College undertook several expenditure reduction efforts, not only out of consideration for the County contribution, but also they are experiencing the same types of cost escalations as we are in terms of retirement and health insurance and the cost of doing business.

So, I want to let you know that we can actually move forward with adopting the College Budget as soon as the next General Meeting. Having met with the working group, everything is consistent with those discussions. And if you have any questions in regards to the report or anything else, I want to make myself available.

**CHAIRWOMAN ANKER:**

Okay. Does any of the Legislators have any questions? Legislator Cilmi.

**LEG. CILMI:**

Not on the report specifically. I read through it; very comprehensive as usual. But with respect to your statement about we can adopt the budget as soon as the next meeting, this coming Tuesday, is there public hearings that have to be held and --

**MS. VIZZINI:**

I would defer to Legislative Counsel.

**MR. NOLAN:**

There are public hearings required. They've been held at our last two General Meetings.

**LEG. CILMI:**

Very good.

**MR. NOLAN:**

And a resolution to approve the Community College is not subject to normal aging requirements as other resolutions.

**LEG. CILMI:**

Gotcha.

**MR. NOLAN:**

So we can take it up on Tuesday.

**LEG. CILMI:**

Okay. Thanks.

**CHAIRWOMAN ANKER:**

Okay. Are there any other questions? If not, I guess that's it for today. We're adjourned. Thank you.

**THE MEETING CONCLUDED AT 1:30 PM  
{ } DENOTES SPELLED PHONETICALLY**