

**PARKS & RECREATION COMMITTEE
ENVIRONMENT, PLANNING & AGRICULTURE COMMITTEE**

OF THE

SUFFOLK COUNTY LEGISLATURE

MINUTES

A special joint meeting of the Parks & Recreation Committee and Environment, Planning & Agriculture Committee of the Suffolk County Legislature was held in the Rose Y. Caracappa Legislative Auditorium of the William R. Rogers Legislature Building, 725 Veterans Memorial Highway, Smithtown, New York on October 21, 2008 to discuss the matter of the Operating Budget.

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Leg. Vivian Viloria-Fisher, Chairperson of the Parks & Recreation Committee
Leg. Jay Schneiderman, Chairman of the Environment, Planning & Agriculture Committee
Leg. Lou D'Amaro, Vice Chair of the Environment, Planning & Agriculture Committee/Vice Chair of the Parks & Recreation Committee
Leg. Lynne Nowick, member of the Parks & Recreation Committee
Leg. Brian Beedenbender, member of the Environment, Planning and Agriculture Committee

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

Leg. DuWayne Gregory, Fifteenth District
George Nolan, Counsel to the Legislature
Tom Isles, Director of Planning Department
Carrie Meek-Gallagher, Commissioner of Environment and Energy Department
Christopher E. Kent, Director of Real Property Acquisition & Management
Lance Reinheimer, Assistant Director of Budget Review Office
Kevin Duffy, Budget Review Office
Wallace Broege, Historical Society
Steve Gittelman, Vanderbilt Museum
Carol Ghiorso Hart, Vanderbilt Museum
John W. Pavacic, Commissioner of Parks Department
Tracey Bellone, Deputy Commissioner of Parks Department
Nick Gibbons, Chief Environmental Analyst, Parks Department
Karen Summers, Principal Accountant
Allen Kovesdy, Budget Office
Justin Littell, Aide to Leg. D'Amaro
Greg Moran, Aide to Leg. Nowick
Debra Alloncius, AME Legislative Director
William Shilling, Aide to Presiding Officer
Terrance G. Pearsall, Chief of Staff

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE (continued)

Marge Acevedo, Aide to Presiding Officer
Barbara LoMoriello, Deputy Clerk

Michael E. White, LI Regional Planning Council
Ginny Suhr, Aide to Leg. Viloría-Fisher
And all other interested parties

MINUTES TAKEN BY:

Diana Kraus, Court Stenographer

MINUTES TRANSCRIBED BY:

Denise Weaver, Legislative Aide

THE MEETING WAS CALLED TO ORDER AT 1:37 PM

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

We have a two o'clock meeting with the working group so we have to get started. My aide, Ginny Suhr, is checking with George Nolan to see if we need a quorum to begin, but I don't believe we do. So we just want to put your comments on the record. And so if you could please join me in the Pledge of Allegiance.

SALUTATION

Thank you. I have two cards. Wallace Broege.

MR. BROEGE:

Well, that's what I call getting right to it. Okay. My name is Wallace Broege. I'm the Director of the Suffolk County Historical Society. And I'm here to speak on behalf of the historical society in the 2009 budget.

The County Executive's recommended budget for the historical society for 2009 sets funding at \$185,000, which is 34% less than the 2008 level or a loss of \$95,000. Another way of thinking about it is it's \$115,000 less than our requested level of funding for 2009.

The impact of that budget on the historical society will be nothing short of devastating. It will mean losing eight part-time staff members, which will leave only two full-time employees at the historical society. We'll close the museum an additional three days a week leaving it open only two days. We'll close the research library. We'll close the Weather Vane gift shop and we'll eliminate our public relations program completely. Unfortunately, most of the new programs and improvements that we've been able to put in place during 2007 and 2008 will be lost.

The Legislature has always been very supportive of the historical society and we're grateful for your continued interest and support. By increasing the level of funding at the historical society over the last several years you've enabled the organization to take a simple three pronged approach. We've been able to increase the number of temporary exhibitions that we're doing. We have been able to publicize the organization that people -- so that people will know who we are, where we are and what we do. And we've been able to increase the hours that the museum and library are open to the public.

By strengthening the historical society you've made it possible for the society to build on a foundation of artifacts and documentary material that we've been collecting since 1886. The material I've left with you today explains our accomplishments for 2009, our accomplishments for 2008 and also some of our plans for 2009. So I see no reason to review that today.

We have received the Budget Review Office's recommendations for our budget and you'll find them for the historical society on pages 363 and 364. I feel as though it's a fair review of our programs and our accomplishments and the impact of the recommended cuts to our budget. Although BRO has not recommended increasing our funding for 2009, they have recommended keeping our funding at the 2008 level, which seems to me is all we can ask for in the fiscal climate today. That's certainly something we can live with.

So I would urge you to support replacing or reinstating the funding that the County Executive has taken out of the Historical Society's funding for 2009 and bringing us to \$280,000. Thank you for giving me this opportunity to speak. If you have any questions, I'd be happy to answer them.

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

Thank you very much.

MR. BROEGE:

Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

I think you've given us a very informative backup and your presentation is certainly very clear. And we understand the level of apprehension that you have.

MR. BROEGE:

Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

Thank you. Thank you for coming down. Carol Hart. Carol?

MR. GITTELMAN:

Is it all right if I go first?

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

You want to -- you want to go first, Steve, and then Carol? Okay. You have five minutes. I'm going to try to keep you to the five minutes because of the meeting that we have to attend at two o'clock.

MR. GITTELMAN:

I don't know if what I have to say will take more than five minutes.

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

Okay.

MR. GITTELMAN:

We've reviewed the budget proposed by Budget Review and we're kind of at a loss because I feel like I'm carrying around an 800 pound gorilla. It's very clear that the museum's income is dependent upon the endowment, that the endowment is now down to historic low levels that the endowment is possibly going to reach the principal at any day making it impossible for the museum to draw any money. \$1.2 million, a \$100,000 a month of the money that we survive on, is currently coming from the endowment. We would typically be putting in a resolution today to renew the endowment income for next year. But it's almost pointless because if the endowment drops down to 1.2 the principal you won't be able to give it to us.

Therefore, we need a consensus of heads. You must explain to us how you wish us to proceed. We have done all kinds of projections of where we stand. We can't cut our budget without closing doors. If the endowment was reduced to \$400,000 a year interest income, the museum would close. And there is no beating around the bush. We would not be able to stay open if that were the case. So we need Legislative help. We need direction. Okay. I can go to anyone of you and ask you to put in the same resolution I put in in past years, but if you don't have the resolve to support that resolution with tax dollars, we are going to be forced to close our doors.

Now I don't want to -- you know, I want you to understand that the endowment goes up and down by some \$300,000 on a daily basis. It's currently at 8.9 million. Earlier in the week it was 8.4 to 8.5 million, the threshold is 8.2 million. We're drawing it down at the rate of a \$100,000 a month. By the end of the year we're going to be waving around at the current levels, 8.2 million. We could hit 8.2 million on any day. And Budget Review has informed me they will not turn over -- they will not allow investment counsel to turn over the funds to us that we need to operate on a daily basis. So we don't know when we would close. But without a resolution that infuses tax dollars at this point, the museum is in jeopardy.

I also wish to make the point -- and please tell me -- cut me off when I hit five minutes -- that the original commitment was one in which the endowment was one of the ways in which Mr. Vanderbilt and the County saw that we would fund the institution. It was not the only way. The County agreed to fund the mission of the institution in perpetuity; that's the exact word. Okay. The endowment was one of the sources. If the endowment doesn't do it, the County made a deal to take care of it. So we turn to you, regrettably, this is not something a president wants to do and say for the first time I'm asking for your fiscal support from tax dollars.

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

Thank you very much, Steve. And as you know we're painfully aware of the situation that we're in. And we're combing through the budget to see what level of support we can give to all of the different very, very important and critical areas in our budget. Thank you for coming down.

CHAIRMAN SCHNEIDERMAN:

Wait, don't go yet.

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

Okay.

CHAIRMAN SCHNEIDERMAN:

Steve, I'll be quick. You know the endowment you referred to, you know, we know the market's up, the market's down; it depends on the day. Who's making decisions as to where to put the money, where is the money, how does that work?

MR. GITTELMAN:

Investment counsel is Bank of America. You choose investment counsel. One of the recommendations by Budget Review was for you to again put out the operation of the endowment up for bid. We have no say in where the money is invested at any given time.

CHAIRMAN SCHNEIDERMAN:

Okay. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

Okay. Thank you, Steve.

MR. GITTELMAN:

You're welcome.

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

Carol Hart.

MS. GHIORSI HART:

Yes. In light of the current situation, Steve Gittelman did ask me to look very carefully at our budget, see where we could make cuts. Imagining big deep cuts of -- and in looking at that what's interesting is assuming a total shutdown that we're talking about, in looking over our numbers, the cost of a total shutdown for 2009 would be about \$815,000. And that's just -- just to maintain the property with a couple of grounds people. We would still need security. There would still be some utility cost. Clearly it would cut a little bit, but there would still be substantial utility cost. Insurance costs would still be there. Auditing costs would still be there. The unemployment costs for 2009 would be substantial. And again, looking at these figures with zero income. So that's a pretty scary scenario right there.

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

Carol, how many employees would have to be let go if you were to close?

MS. GHIORSI HART:

In this scenario, we currently have 15 full-time people and 50 part-time. They range from very reasonable -- seasonal to more substantial. But certainly we would be cutting -- we would be down to three full-time people, I think, and maybe a part-time person in a total shutdown scenario.

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

Okay. You know I think that we have to think in terms of the economic impact on our County if we allow the closure of these very important institutions. You're talking about 15 full-time workers, that's 15 more people in Suffolk County who would be unemployed and the 50 part-time people. We just heard from the historical society the number of people who would be -- there would be eight part-time staff that would be eliminated. And that's all part of our economic engine here in Suffolk County.

So these are very, very serious considerations that we're -- that we have before us. And, Carol, I certainly hope that we can prevent your having to close.

MS. GHIORSI HART:

And I have to --

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

And I certainly will give you my word that I'll do everything I possibly can to keep it open.

MS. GHIORSI HART:

Okay. In addition, of course, I haven't talked about our losing accreditation, our standing with Better Business Bureau, our --

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

Wait a minute, if you closed for one season you would lose your accreditation with the American Association of Museums? Is that --

MS. GHIORSI HART:

For a year I think we'd certainly would lose the accreditation.

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

You have to maintain --

MS. GHIORSI HART:

You have to maintain a certain --

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

-- all of the exhibits available to the public.

MS. GHIORSI HART:

Yes, a certain number of days you have to be open. Our Charter with New York State as education, I think, there's a lot that's threatened. And I think it would be very difficult to come back and get more public support, donations, foundation support, once you've got this scenario.

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

Can I ask you this --

MS. GHIORSI HART:

Yes.

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

We bought the Normandy Manor --

MS. GHIORSI HART:

Yes.

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

-- property a couple of years ago. Is that currently in our protected -- or maybe, George, you might know?

CHAIRMAN SCHNEIDERMAN:

Is it in park status, the zoning?

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

Is it -- was it dedicated parkland, is it in our historically protected buildings?

CHAIRMAN SCHNEIDERMAN:

In other words, can it be sold?

MS. GHIORSI HART:

I believe it is now part of the -- on the national register. I know it is on the national register. I don't know specifically.

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

Okay. But I think I have to ask Richard Martin about the status. Do you --

MR. NOLAN:

Yeah, I don't know offhand.

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

-- you don't know offhand. And in the 800 some odd thousand that you would have to expend to maintain your facilities, does that include Normandy Manor?

MS. GHIORSI HART:

That would be with a shutdown of Normandy Manor. And, you know, again we'd save some utility bills there so we calculated that in.

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

But when you're saying 825,000 does that include Normandy Manor?

MS. GHIORSI HART:

The 820 --

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

-- five thousand that it would cost --

MS. GHIORSI HART:

Yes.

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

-- if you had to shutdown the --

MS. GHIORSI HART:

Yes.

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

-- facility includes Normandy Manor.

MS. GHIORSI HART:

Shutting down that, yeah.

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

How much revenue is brought in through Normandy Manor?

MS. GHIORSI HART:

Normandy Manor is currently our administration center. Our site-use office is out of there so have appointments meeting in there. We --

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

But it doesn't generate any revenue.

MS. GHIORSI HART:

Not in and of itself. It currently has a number of capital projects going to make it handicap accessible and -- for public use. So we are hoping, I think, in a year when the capital projects are finished we would be able to use it as a site-use. We do do some photographic shoots on the site right now for weddings, things like that. So there's that revenue coming. In a year or two once the capital projects are done, we expect to be able to do more.

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

But at this point it's not bringing in any revenue and it is an expense. Okay. Because the question has come up as to its sale and what the feasibility is and how that could help to bring in some money to help support the Vanderbilt. I'm not proposing it at this time. I'm asking you the question so that we can have a discussion on it.

MS. GHIORSI HART:

Currently not. There could be scenarios where the Vanderbilt could make more use of it as a site for revenue producing.

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

Okay.

MS. GHIORSI HART:

We'll be looking at that.

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

Okay. Legislator Schneiderman.

CHAIRMAN SCHNEIDERMAN:

Yeah, I wanted to ask specifically about the revenue generation other than county subsidies, weddings, those types of events. Are you doing more to attract those types of events, maximize revenues, also grants, outside grants, if you can say a little bit, you know.

MS. GHIORSI HART:

Yes. Yeah, we have done more. Our site-use is twice in '08 what it was in '07. This is with our wedding -- weddings and photographs, shoots like that. We have, again, gotten some wonderful support from -- Arrow Electronics is sponsoring an open house Christmas week, for example, where it will be free for anyone to come visit. So we are trying to get out there getting grants, getting that kind of support and looking at new avenues for more revenue. They do tend to be labor intensive. As we've cut down staff --

CHAIRMAN SCHNEIDERMAN:

Right.

MS. GHIORSI HART:

-- and just -- in 2003 there were almost twice the number of full-time staff we have now. In the early 2000 we had 29 full-time; we now have 15 full-time. We've been losing development positions, these administrative positions that could continue to help us do grant writing, do the outreach. So more and more we are taking that on in other departments, but it stretches us.

CHAIRMAN SCHNEIDERMAN:

Do you know how many visitors you have a year?

MS. GHIORSI HART:

This past year I think it was about 105,000.

CHAIRMAN SCHNEIDERMAN:

In the planetarium in particular, how many people came to the planetarium?

MS. GHIORSI HART:

The planetarium, it's roughly half, I think. It's a little hard to know how they impact back and forth.

CHAIRMAN SCHNEIDERMAN:

About 50,000 people.

MS. GHIORSI HART:

But people come, they see both. We tend to be more planetarium only people in the winter. In the summer we have visitors coming from all over the world who concentrate more on the historic area. Schools come, they double up, they do a one-hour planetarium, two-hour mummy programs so sometimes it's hard to see if you lose one or the other, how many -- how it would affect your visitation, but --

CHAIRMAN SCHNEIDERMAN:

Right. Is that something that is a moneymaker or a money loser for the County?

MS. GHIORSI HART:

The planetarium?

CHAIRMAN SCHNEIDERMAN:

For the museum.

MS. GHIORSI HART:

The planetarium makes money. The museum education programs makes money. I was looking as cost centers. There's just sort of a critical mass though of the administration. Once you have the staff in to do one or the other, then you need some people to bookkeep, to do the other things and that tends to be what puts it over, but if you compare one to the other they both generate revenue and make money in and of themselves.

CHAIRMAN SCHNEIDERMAN:

Money beyond the capital costs; I mean their projector was just \$3 million for the planetarium.

MS. GHIORSI HART:

I'm not -- not including capital costs on that.

CHAIRMAN SCHNEIDERMAN:

Okay.

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

And that's a big contribution from the County.

CHAIRMAN SCHNEIDERMAN:

It sure is.

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

Okay. And I keep saying put a better sign on 25A.

MS. GHIORSI HART:

We do have some new signs up there.

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

I can't see it even when I'm looking for it. So you're certainly not going to get walk-ins. Okay. We need a better sign. And I understand there was a question with Huntington Town allowing it, but we've got to work with them. Need a better sign there, get walk-ins. Thank you, Carol.

MS. GHIORSI HART:

Okay. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

Debra Alloncius.

MS. ALLONCIUS:

Good afternoon members of the Budget Committee. My name is Debra Alloncius. I stand here before you on behalf of AME and President Cheryl Felice and speak to you again about positions and funding and knowing the dire straits that you are in, but also knowing that our parks are what draw hundreds of thousands of visitors here. And it's a big revenue source for us. Too bad we couldn't get a little bit more from the state piece of the revenue, but we do need to keep our parks functioning and we do need to keep them in good order. And I know you have a lot of your plate but please keep in mind that the staff to run the parks is important. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

Thank you, Debra. Thank you for making it short. Michael White.

MR. WHITE:

Thank you, Madam Chairwoman, members of the committees. Michael White, Executive Director of the Long Island Regional Planning Council. And I just wanted to briefly make a comment with respect to the proposed budget for the Long Island Regional Planning Council. And support the County Executive's request and hope that the committee and the Legislature will see their way fit to support that request.

I just wanted to bring one piece of information to the committee respecting a comment from the Budget Review Office on the level of funding pursuant to the resolutions that have been adopted by the Legislature. Consistent in both Counties, there's basically a \$100,000 limitation. Not that we shouldn't be funded for more than \$100,000 but it was really a question of accountability such that before we were given more than that amount of money to do the work that the Counties are asking us to do, we would have an approved business plan exactly what we were going to do, how we were going to accomplish this mission and what work we were going to undertake. So I specifically wanted to let you know the status of the business plan.

Today, this morning indeed was the first formal meeting of the Regional Planning Council. We have the appointees -- appointments have been made. As you know the resolutions with respect to the intermunicipal agreement have been adopted by both Legislatures and we had the first meeting. The business plan has now been presented to the members of the Council. And by the next meeting, which will be the second week in November, we would hope to have that adopted by the Council. It will then be submitted to the County Executives and the County Legislature for approval. And we're working very diligently with both County Planning Departments to be sure that what we're putting in that business plan is indeed the mission the Counties intend to -- for us to undertake.

So again, we would ask that you find to move for support for the budget that we're asking for, understanding that there's that limitation, but that was really a question of sort of, you know, accountability; that we weren't just asking money to do things that weren't consistent with the mission. And the business plan is on its way. And we certainly wouldn't be spending that money until the business plan was approved and each -- and all the spending would be consistent with that plan.

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

Legislator D'Amaro has a question, Mike.

LEG. D'AMARO:

Mike --

MR. WHITE:

Yes.

LEG. D'AMARO:

-- congratulations on that first meeting.

MR. WHITE:

Thank you.

LEG. D'AMARO:

How did it go?

MR. WHITE:

It was very, very good.

LEG. D'AMARO:

Yeah?

MR. WHITE:

It was well attended. It was great to have the supervisors and the mayors involved. Thank you for asking.

LEG. D'AMARO:

Okay. I appreciate --

MR. WHITE:

And thank you for your support.

LEG. D'AMARO:

Yeah. And I appreciate what you're doing. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

Okay. That was a good question.

MR. WHITE:

Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

Any other comments or questions? Thank you very much for coming down. We appreciate it. Okay. Commissioner Pavacic and Deputy Commissioner Bellone.

Commissioner, if you could just review for us your comments on the recommended budget and the recommendations of the Budget Review Office. I do see that you had a number of employees who

took advantage of the retirement incentive and that because you don't have a high reimbursement on those employees that those are not going to be replaced. So I don't know whether or not you're going to refer to that but it's just something that I noted as I was reading the budget. But I'll let you go in whatever direction you like with this.

COMMISSIONER PAVACIC:

Thank you. Thank you very much, I appreciate that. Good afternoon. Yes, we did experience significant loss of some of our most important staff, folks who represent a significant portion of the corporate memory of the Parks Department. Our senior superintendent of Parks, Bill Sickles, his deputy, Rich {Holborn}, a key person from our contracts unit, several people from our operations unit. So we did experience a significant loss of some terrific employees who did a wonderful job for us over many, many decades.

What we have done is of the two positions we were -- we identified as wanting to retain, we promoted one of our people into the Parks superintendent title. And that person is a very experienced person who served under both Bill Sickles and Rich {Holborn} and is doing a terrific job for us at this point. And we've identified one other Park supervisor position as being key.

One of the things I would like to just jump into first of all is BRO's recommendations. The most significant one that I need to discuss with you is the recommendation that three titles be abolished. These are 477 fund titles. One is identified as an environmental assistant and two are laborers.

First of all, I'd just like to correct the information. One of the two Labor titles is now occupied so that leaves an -- one environmental assistant and one laborer. In regard to the one laborer, I want to emphasize that this person, this particular position works at our golf course. As BRO has pointed out, the golf courses are our single most important source of revenue that we generate to the County General Fund. If this position is eliminated, you're talking about increasing more overtime.

We've just over the last year been able to work on a plan to try to reduce overtime. This will significantly reduce the progress that we've made in that direction. And it's a position that we sorely, sorely need. As you know, because we have an Organic Maintenance Program, it's a much more labor intensive program than, say, another golf course, a private golf course, another course that is not constrained in having to follow organic maintenance. There's a lot more labor required especially in the summer months. That's when we ramp up our greatest increases in overtime. Without this position we will definitely incur that. And God forbid that somebody is out on leave for a particular reason, that's one less body that we have to rely upon to help us maintain those courses.

So I would ask the Committee and the full Legislature to please, please do not abolish that position. I'd also like to point out that that's in light of the fact that we already lost, you know, seven additional positions this year. And last year we lost four 477 funded positions as well. So this is really cutting into significantly our ability to operate on a successful basis.

The other item I would like to address is the environmental assistant. As the County has acquired more and more property, more of these properties are not active parkland. They're being purchased with funds such as Quarter Percent, which constrains are used for -- being used for active parkland, say, for campgrounds, and so forth, active recreation. The responsibility of managing the vast bulk of those new properties and others that have entered the County Parks system falls on primarily our environmental stewardship unit. They're the ones that are going out there and managing the property.

And I note that although the BRO report points out the need for additional park police officers based on the amount of acreage, the argument could be made about maintaining the line on those folks who actually manage those properties who are out there either cleaning them up, fencing them, posting them and conducting various types of environmental restorations. And I would just like to -- here today I have present our Chief Environmental -- or Principal Environmental Analyst, Nick

Gibbons is here to provide further insight into the necessity of this particular position. I would just like to ask Nick to put some testimony on the record.

MR. GIBBONS:

Good afternoon. Nick Gibbons, Suffolk County Parks. I know most of you here are pretty well familiar with the parks in your district and I could cite probably dozens of examples in some districts of passive parklands that really have no oversight of park staff. And often your aides will call into our offices and make us aware of conditions on the properties that we should already be aware of and we're not. So we're very much reactive and unfortunately not very proactive often in the department.

Without adequate staff within the unit there's really nobody to respond to those calls. With each acquisition that comes into our holdings, and they're all valuable in their own right, we can't continue to constantly redivide existing park staffs' time and responsibilities. We're pulling people out of the active parks that everybody knows and travels great distances to enjoy. We can't be sending them out to every new open space property that only a handful of people might know about, particularly those people in close proximity to those parcels.

So the Environmental Stewardship Unit, the entire unit is funded out of 477. At one time we had nine people out in the field. And as a result of these proceedings last year this body eliminated four of those. So I'm down to five people that are responsible for the majority of our 45,000 acres of park property, our passive recreation; and that is to say they become ultimately my responsibility. We're failing at that and we are not meeting our mission to protect the County's significant investment in these properties. And I know a lot of you are more familiar with those in your own districts. And you can multiply that by all the districts and all of our holdings and it's a substantial task.

I just want to point out a few things that, you know, the recent legislation, recommitment of the County to the 477 Program specifically earmarked restoration, stewardship, those things that we've been doing in Parks since its inception nearly forty years ago. But it further, in my mind anyway, endorses the idea that this unit, small as it is comparatively speaking to all the holdings that we have, is critical to follow up that next step. The -- in my mind the acquisition of these properties is really the easy part. And, you know, once the press releases are distributed and the ribbon cuttings take place, ultimately that's another Parks responsibility to advance stewardship on these properties and restoration. Oftentimes they're very critically needed. And without the support of this unit and this Committee here protecting those positions, we'll continue to fail and more significantly so in the future.

Unless there's any questions specifically about the function of the unit, which I'd be happy to entertain, I'll turn it back over to the Commissioner.

COMMISSIONER PAVACIC:

I would just like to also point out that the County Executive's Office has signed SCIN's for both the vacant laborer position. And for the environmental assistant we expect those positions to be filled before the end of the year because they're so key to our operation.

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

Commissioner, I just have one question about the laborer -- the two laborer positions. They're funded out of 477. And I believe our concern is that 477 monies be used appropriately. I believe in your presentation you did say the one laborer position that you were talking about was in running the organic program at a golf course.

COMMISSIONER PAVACIC:

That's right.

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

And is it therefore -- is that therefore the reason why it's out of the 477 account?

COMMISSIONER PAVACIC:

That's correct.

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

Okay.

COMMISSIONER PAVACIC:

If I just may point out with an Organic Maintenance Program, as I said before, it's very, very much more labor intensive. Instead of just throwing chemicals at a problem, it requires, first of all, if there's an issue such as disease or insect damage, it first requires surveillance and constant monitoring by staff; that's labor hours there.

And then if a problem is identified, there's a hierarchy that has to be -- that one has to go through with chemical use being the last possible item in the tool box and other methodologies are used short of arriving in that standpoint. It also requires a lot more things such as top dressing and doing other kinds of physical conditioning of the golf course to keep it in the healthy condition to reduce the need for pesticides and herbicides and so forth.

And we're also -- we have -- we're serving under a number of mandates that have been enacted by the County that require us to reduce the use of pesticides, institute IPM, Integrated Pest Management, on our courses. Because of that, we need to have the staff there to perform that labor. And without that, you know, we have no other place to turn to.

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

Okay. Is there another question relative to these vacancies?

CHAIRMAN SCHNEIDERMAN:

Just clarification on it. So a position was cut. This was in the recommended budget and this was a 477?

COMMISSIONER PAVACIC:

No. This is in the BRO recommended report.

CHAIRMAN SCHNEIDERMAN:

BRO report --

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

BRO report.

CHAIRMAN SCHNEIDERMAN:

-- eliminated this position.

COMMISSIONER PAVACIC:

Right.

CHAIRMAN SCHNEIDERMAN:

But it's a 477 funded position?

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

Right.

COMMISSIONER PAVACIC:

Correct.

CHAIRMAN SCHNEIDERMAN:

And can I ask you to what extent this coordination with Cornell Cooperative Extension, because we're paying them a couple hundred thousand dollars to help you guys deal with the type of problems you just said in terms of, you know, how to treat a infestation, you know, what chemicals do you use or not use?

COMMISSIONER PAVACIC:

I believe first of all our staff goes to training that's conducted by Cornell. In addition Cornell will be brought in if there's an issue that needs to be dealt with on a particular course. They will -- they'll be brought in and their expertise applied.

CHAIRMAN SCHNEIDERMAN:

So does that help save the County on labor or, no, we still need to have the people?

COMMISSIONER PAVACIC:

We still need -- we still need to have the labor on staff. Cornell isn't responsible for our golf courses; the Parks Department is. Cornell are not Parks employees. They're there to provide advice and input, but ultimately the work that gets done on the ground is done by the Parks Department.

CHAIRMAN SCHNEIDERMAN:

And we don't in-house have the expertise to do this? We still rely on Cornell?

COMMISSIONER PAVACIC:

No. We have a lot of in-house expertise. Our golf superintendent came out of the private side of golf course management. And he's very, very we'll attuned to the latest techniques and organic maintenance requirements. And our folks do go to training as well to keep them up-to-date.

CHAIRMAN SCHNEIDERMAN:

Because I'm wondering since Cornell -- this program, which I believe was set up initially when we passed the pesticide phase out, was to help transition the County out of its reliance on pesticides; yet years later it's still fully funded. And I'm wondering since that's out of 477 if maybe some cuts could be made there to save and then move that money over to help fund this other 477 position that's doing the same thing. It's just a thought.

COMMISSIONER PAVACIC:

Okay.

COMMISSIONER MEEK-GALLAGHER:

Yes. Legislator Schneiderman, if I might add to that. The -- Cornell is actually brought on, you know, big picture Countywide to address pesticide phase out and specifically allowing for exemptions so not just on parks, but in facilities at the community college, at Citibank Bank Park, etcetera and so forth. So it is important to have that technical expertise and assistance with administering that program. We do believe that it's cheaper to continue to use the expertise of Cornell rather than to have to hire the people we would need if we could even find them with that expertise to hire them as full-time staff in the County. And this way we're able to, you know, use Cornell's expertise to, you know, for that program as well as other programs that they're involved with. I mean, we certainly could do a more in depth cost analysis, but --

CHAIRMAN SCHNEIDERMAN:

Oh yeah, I was going to say.

COMMISSIONER MEEK-GALLAGHER:

-- to create a position with a title to find that technical expertise of people who can go out and investigate when they're called in, we have a pest infestation here, how should we respond, what should we, you know, do, which would be the best methodology for treating it. Helping to administer the entire pesticide phase out, the Pesticide Community Advisory Committee, etcetera

and so forth is we do have staff that work on that as well. However, it is a tremendous help to have Cornell's expertise. And I frankly don't know that we would be able to hire that type of expertise into the County per se.

And, again, it's the type of thing that down the road should we decide that we can handle it all in-house, we've trained enough staff, it's much harder, as you know, to then eliminate a position that exists in the County than to phase, you know, to phase out a budgeted program to an outside contractor.

CHAIRMAN SCHNEIDERMAN:

I just might make more sense if they're only being used occasionally to have a consultant being paid by the job rather than being paid a fixed fee for the year to be available when we need them. Unless somebody does an analysis and says, okay, we're getting our money's worth because we're using them, you know, a lot. I don't know. I haven't seen anything like that.

COMMISSIONER MEEK-GALLAGHER:

Well, we are using them a lot. And they certainly do respond to a lot of calls. And their monthly meetings at the pesticide --

CHAIRMAN SCHNEIDERMAN:

Are we using them several hundred thousand dollars worth of 477 funds?

COMMISSIONER MEEK-GALLAGHER:

I have to see how much. The pesticide -- the Integrated Pest Management Program is not several hundred thousand dollars. I think it is over a \$100,000 dollars, but it's not several hundred thousand dollars, whereas the Shellfish Program is.

CHAIRMAN SCHNEIDERMAN:

Does BRO -- Is BRO, Lance, do you guys know offhand what that number is?

COMMISSIONER MEEK-GALLAGHER:

I know it's in the -- I know it's in the report, but I don't have it. I could pull the report up. I just wanted to respond. We definitely, you know, my staff they're involved with, helping to administer the pesticide phase out and do some of the review, feel that Cornell's extremely valuable.

CHAIRMAN SCHNEIDERMAN:

Right.

COMMISSIONER MEEK-GALLAGHER:

And they could not conduct -- they would not be able to meet the requirements of the pesticide phase out law without the assistance of Cornell, so.

CHAIRMAN SCHNEIDERMAN:

Just it was my understanding that part of that was to train the County to do this as during this transition. And if we're supposed to be phasing out, maybe it's time that we need to start phasing out that training.

COMMISSIONER MEEK-GALLAGHER:

Right.

CHAIRMAN SCHNEIDERMAN:

Because we should be able to some of this in-house.

COMMISSIONER MEEK-GALLAGHER:

But again, you'd have to -- I think you would have to hire someone with the same type of background who could go and identify if this is the pest problem you have or the organic

maintenance problem that you're having, what's the best response.

CHAIRMAN SCHNEIDERMAN:

It's just that my understanding that this was temporary.

COMMISSIONER MEEK-GALLAGHER:

Yeah.

CHAIRMAN SCHNEIDERMAN:

This was a temporary program to aid us in the transition. It looks like it's become a permanent program. And you might be arguing that it should be a permanent program and --

COMMISSIONER MEEK-GALLAGHER:

Right.

CHAIRMAN SCHNEIDERMAN:

-- you know, I can accept that. I just want to make sure that if we're already trained and we can do some of this, that maybe the level of funding for a permanent program ought to be examined.

COMMISSIONER MEEK-GALLAGHER:

Yes. It's certainly -- the problem is that you're never going to be able to completely phase out or it's unlikely you'll be able to completely phase out the use of pesticides. There are always going to need to be need exemptions made.

CHAIRMAN SCHNEIDERMAN:

All right, I'll stop.

MR. REINHEIMER:

In answer to your question concerning the funding in the 2009 recommended budget, that program's \$208,080.

COMMISSIONER MEEK-GALLAGHER:

Okay.

CHAIRMAN SCHNEIDERMAN:

Yeah, the funding for that program is 208,000 to assist the County.

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

Okay. There's a question, Lou D'Amaro for Nick Gibbons.

LEG. D'AMARO:

So when the County purchases property, it usually falls under your jurisdiction?

MR. GIBBONS:

More often than not the purchases we do lately are open space more so. The exceptions to those would be historical properties; even those sometimes involve my oversight.

LEG. D'AMARO:

Right.

MR. GIBBONS:

We don't very often any more purchase properties that ultimately become an active park site with new staff.

LEG. D'AMARO:

Right. And it's your opinion that we are -- we the County are failing in doing exactly what?

MR. GIBBONS:

In the sense that we are adding thousands of acres to our holdings, but we are not supporting that after the fact with the staff necessary to do the restoration and stewardship of those properties that they warrant.

LEG. D'AMARO:

Give me an example of restoration and stewardship.

MR. GIBBONS:

In the -- there's an example --

LEG. D'AMARO:

Give me an example of where you see a failure, a specific failure.

MR. GIBBONS:

There are several properties in, say, the western part of the County, the Huntington/Smithtown area, where we've done open space acquisitions. They -- it may be several months to a year before anybody from the Parks Department actually visits these sites. Part of that has to do with the fact of the significant volume of properties we have coming in. We put out those fires where we can and we push others to the side. So it could be that long before typically myself personally would go out and visit a site. When I go out to a site such as that, I'll look for environmental conditions and potentially hazards on the site before we can make a public -- our property a public property open to the public.

It seems straight forward that once we hold title to a property that should be available and accessible to all County residents. But it's not always appropriate nor possible. So I'll go out and take a look which -- with each new property we may have encroachments from neighboring adjacent land owners, private homeowners who have adopted pieces of the parcel over time, that could be an ongoing infraction onto a property. There may be historical dump sites within the site that need to be environmental remediated. Those are -- those may or may not be hazardous. If they're hazardous, they're very costly.

LEG. D'AMARO:

So you don't get involved prior to the consummation of the acquisition?

MR. GIBBONS:

Depends on the acquisition.

LEG. D'AMARO:

You don't review the properties, you don't -- you're not aware of any of the status of the property or what would be required should the County acquire title, or are you? I'm not sure how you work.

MR. GIBBONS:

Sometimes I am. It's not a consistent process. And in some cases acquisitions bypass a lot of the staff level review. Planning and Real Estate do review these properties. They can even identify such encroachments or hazards but the acquisition still has merit and it goes forward. But at the end of that process when the property's ultimately transferred to the Parks Department, it becomes our responsibility then to correct those.

Those that can be corrected prior to acquisition are. Both the division of Real Estate and Planning do have the Park's interest in mind and seek to correct those things prior to their transfer to us. But in many cases the hazards and/or conditions on the property are not as apparent or obvious that would come out as a result of a cursory review of a property prior to acquisition. ATV's are a tremendous problem particularly in remote parts of the County and the degradation to those properties continues long after we acquire it.

LEG. D'AMARO:

So can you quantify for me what is the result of this failure?

MR. GIBBONS:

The property does not retain the environmental significance it did at the time of acquisition.

LEG. D'AMARO:

Well, we're talking about undeveloped, pristine property.

MR. GIBBONS:

Correct.

LEG. D'AMARO:

Right. So in other words, it's really not touched in a sense.

MR. GIBBONS:

At what point? It's very much so touched after the acquisition, but not from authorized uses. We have continued expansion. I could describe to you examples of properties that we put in the nature preserve and only to come out and find that they've been cleared. Who did that clearing and to what end isn't always obvious to us.

LEG. D'AMARO:

Right. Well, that doesn't happen too often I would expect. Right?

MR. GIBBONS:

Far more often than I'm comfortable with unfortunately.

LEG. D'AMARO:

Right. So what do you need to not fail?

MR. GIBBONS:

I need at the very least to sustain the levels within the unit, which is currently eight people. I need to -- if anything, I would be asking for more. Obviously that's not what we're here for today. We're just looking to retain what we've had since the inception of the program. And even that, as I pointed out earlier, is significantly diminished from what we had just last year. We've lost four additional bodies that are out in the field specifically dedicated to visiting these new properties and even going back into properties we've owned for ten or 20 years. Some of these sites are not visited on an annual basis. And the result of that lack of visitation is that you have, when you finally do get to these places, you find all kinds of things that you didn't realize were going on.

LEG. D'AMARO:

I didn't hear the last part. The result is what? I'm sorry.

MR. GIBBONS:

That. When you do come back to these properties --

LEG. D'AMARO:

Yes.

MR. GIBBONS:

-- after a year or two has passed in some cases --

LEG. D'AMARO:

Right.

MR. GIBBONS:

-- what you discover there is that you leave with more to do then when you arrived. And that is to say, you have to follow-up sometimes through enforcement actions. You find environmental conditions that hadn't occurred and would not necessarily have occurred had we the adequate staff to provide the oversight and stewardship of these properties.

LEG. D'AMARO:

Okay. All right. Thanks a lot. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

Nick, I just wanted to add as a response to one of Legislator D'Amaro's questions, when we have an acquisition there's always a Phase I Environmental Review of the property before we acquire it. So that is done. And if it doesn't pass muster at that level, then it goes into a more complex review of the property. It goes to phase II. But a Phase I Environmental Review is done on every property before we sign on the dotted line.

MR. GIBBONS:

Right. Those protect us from the more formal environmental conditions that everybody's familiar with. They do not adequately qualify or quantify the intangible environmental conditions that exist on properties.

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

I'm just answering Legislator D'Amaro's question, which is does anybody look at this environmentally --

MR. GIBBONS:

Yes.

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

-- before we buy it. And there's a phase I.

Now I also wanted to mention that one of the other things that you didn't mention that I have seen you doing, and when I had my Invasives Task Force, your department does go out and look and see where there are invasives and, you know, you -- it's an important piece of the job that you do because that can really destroy the environmental habitat in a, you know, any kind of pond could be -- could have invasives choking it. It could chock out all the native plants.

CHAIRMAN SCHNEIDERMAN:

(Inaudible)

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

No, but invasives aren't natural. What they're doing is they're destroying what we're trying to preserve so the invasive species are -- it's very important to have a pair of trained eyes looking at what's going in our parks with the flora as well as the fauna.

MR. GIBBONS:

I'm glad you point that out just specifically. That's an example of an initiative sponsored and endorsed by the Legislature. But we're not empowered in the sense that we don't have the people to fulfill the commitments that the Legislature makes on behalf of the County. The invasives issue is extremely important as you personally know; but to most people a vegetative property that's green is natural and/or functioning as an ecologically significant property. It's often not the case. And more often than not the opposite is true, that a lot of the properties we purchase are -- and that's a type of thing that would not be identified in a phase I or II. Invasive species is not something they check off of a list.

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

Right.

MR. GIBBONS:

This is -- these are the types of hard restoration projects that 477 is empowered to take on. And we just can't do it without the staff.

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

And that's long term maintenance and stewardship. There's one more thing that I did want to mention, however, when you spoke about your stewardship and maintaining of the parks, some of the things you described seem to me that parks police could look at, at the ATV, the degradation by ATV's and monitoring that. Clearing by neighbors, I mean, you know, Parks police can see if neighbors have been clearing and isn't that more like an environmental crime than actually --

MR. GIBBONS:

It takes somebody going out there and actually visiting the site, doing the inventory and analysis of the site to sometimes discover what is actually going on. In the vast majority of those cases those are coming from the Environmental Stewardship Unit, yes, we do have our own Park police and they're an excellent resource for us in-house to help us advance those environmental crimes as they see as appropriate. But it is -- the opposite is the case. They -- those come from us to them and they respond and coordinate those efforts with us.

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

Okay. I believe Legislator Schneiderman has a question.

CHAIRMAN SCHNEIDERMAN:

Thank you. There are -- you said eight people, Nick, eight people in this Environmental Stewardship Unit?

MR. GIBBONS:

Correct.

CHAIRMAN SCHNEIDERMAN:

Currently none of them are funded with 477 funds.

MR. GIBBONS:

No, they all are funded with 477.

CHAIRMAN SCHNEIDERMAN:

They all? So that was actually -- when was that done? Because the ability to do stewardship, I thought, only recently became part of that program.

MR. GIBBONS:

The unit was formed about three years ago. And don't -- I just don't want to confuse the Wetlands Stewardship Program with our program. We work with them, but it's not -- they're not the same thing. Stewardship in the --

CHAIRMAN SCHNEIDERMAN:

Okay. So I don't understand why BRO would be recommending cutting positions that are funded by 477 funds when there's some \$8 million a year coming into that fund. And only about 3 million of it committed.

MR. REINHEIMER:

In the past there's been discussion in the Legislature as to the intent and the use of existing resources in 477. And we're pointing this out that if it's the Legislature's choice to allocate more funds to capital projects, rocks and boxes, rather than staff, that as positions become vacant, you

have the option of abolishing them. It's basically an option for you to decide whether you want --

CHAIRMAN SCHNEIDERMAN:

Right. But there's no real cost savings to us by doing that. It's a cost diversion but not necessarily a savings. And we can't take that money from those positions and use it for anything else other than water quality related or stewardship related functions.

MR. REINHEIMER:

Right, right. And in addition to that it's, you know, it's our concern of the type of work that they're doing in verification that they are working within the existing 477 laws.

CHAIRMAN SCHNEIDERMAN:

Okay. All right. Thank you.

MR. DUFFY:

Excuse me, Legislator Schneiderman. The Legislature passed local law 17 of 2008 this year, which required the County Executive to include detailed information on the positions funded with Water Quality Protection funds. The law requires that the proposed expense budget for any fiscal year shall include as an appendix a listing of all positions of employment that are funded with revenues generated by the Water Quality Protection Program. Such a listing was included in this year's budget.

Why we had requested that those three positions be abolished is that if you will recall over the last three years we've asked from the Parks Department information detailing what type of duties the individuals performed. Under Commissioner Foley we were given information and we found in going over it, that many of the functions that were being done were not related to water quality.

This -- the Environment Committee asked back in February of 2008, which we contacted the Parks Department, to supply us with updated information. The Committee has never received that information. That's why in our report we recommended that those positions that are vacant be abolished.

CHAIRMAN SCHNEIDERMAN:

I got it.

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

Okay. I'm going to just throw some things out because we -- we're very, very short on time. And I would like just underscore a couple of things.

One, because they are directly related to our budget deliberations. And one of the them is in the Budget Review Offices's review recommendations, and that's on page 268 of that, in which it -- the Budget Review Office recommends that the department improve its internal cash control procedures to ensure that the collection and depositing of fees is accomplished promptly and properly. Okay. This is something that has come up over time with, you know, a clearer -- giving us a clearer picture. I'm just going to say everything and then I'll throw it back to you, okay, because we're really so tight. And I don't want to discuss each thing at length. I throw it all out.

Study the point of sales system to determine what is causing the delay in posting the department's revenues to the IFMIS system. And last year the department indicated that the point of sale system created a large amount of daily paperwork that has to be reviewed prior to the monthly reconciliations. The study should include a determination if the process can be streamlined. Okay. Those are internal recommendations by the Budget Review Office.

Now, in looking at the problems that we're facing, which are huge, including the Vanderbilt, I just wanted to throw out a couple of suggestions that I've asked Budget Review to look at and what kind of impact they will have in our revenue stream. And that is in Parks. Number one; to raise marina

and golf fees to be more in line with other municipalities and public courses, vis-à-vis golf courses. I know that we don't know we want to raise them as high as private golf courses, but I think that they could take a little bit of a bump because we're cutting some very important life impacting budget lines and this is recreational.

Number two: Streamline the entrance fees so that they're consistent among our parks. Going of course in that consistent to the higher level rather than the lower level. Look at increasing penalties for last minute cancelations. And look at permit fees for new users, the dog parks. We've been spending some money on that, fencing, etcetera, maybe some permit fees for those parks.

If we -- I know that some of our members, including myself, are in the working group and we have to leave, but if you could give us some brief response, I know that you were itching, Tracey, to say something about the first Budget Review recommendations.

MS. BELLONE:

Yeah, and I won't take, you know, up your time. I mean, we could send you a written dispute to some of those allegations and we will do that. I just want to assure you, money is deposited within 24 hours of receiving it. It is in the bank. It might not be posted where they may be looking and we'll get them clarification on that, but all revenue taken in at our parks is deposited within 24 hours of receiving and is in the bank or at the Treasurer's Office.

And in regards to the point of sale system, the point of sale system is not the issue. The money is -- received in the point of sale system, it's a staffing issue. And it's a -- it's a staffing issue. Last year you actually cut one of our accounting positions. We need more people to reconcile the money that's taken in before its gets posted to IFMIS. So there may be a delay in when point of sale goes to IFMIS, but the money is in point of sale. We do give those reports of the point of sale money if there's a delay in getting it to the IFMIS system, and that's a staffing issue. But we'll give you that in a report. I know that doesn't affect the underlying money.

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

Okay. I appreciate that. Okay, so you'll give a report to Budget Review and to the Parks Committee. Okay?

MS. BELLONE:

Correct.

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

Thank you very much. I'm heading down to my committee. I'm handing it over to my Co-Chair, Legislator Schneiderman, who's the Chair of the Environment Committee.

CHAIRMAN SCHNEIDERMAN:

Well, we'll try to go quickly because I, too, am on the Budget Working Group and we have a lot of work ahead of us. But I'll ask those from Department of Environment and Energy to step forward. And, Commissioner, if you wanted to comment on your recommended budget as well as BRO's recommendations, it would be appreciated as well as brevity.

COMMISSIONER MEEK-GALLAGHER:

Yes. And before BRO yells at me, I will hand-out -- I do have an updated memo for you on all the 477 funded positions, so. Circulate those. And then I did just want to address a few items that were brought up in the BRO report mainly having to do with Cornell Cooperative Extension and the 477 funded programs, which I know there was concern about the fact that the 2008 funding for these programs --

CHAIRMAN SCHNEIDERMAN:

I'm sorry, what?

COMMISSIONER MEEK-GALLAGHER:

-- it's recommended that all the 2008 funding for four of the 477 funded programs be eliminated as they still are not under contract. However, they've obviously completed most of the work for those programs. We feel that they're important programs and we did kind of after the fact approve them or recommended approval at the Water Quality Review Committee in September. We will do that as we did for the 2009. We will continue to bring those forward to the Water Quality Review Committee from now on. It was more a matter of, you know, this time last year I still had no administrative staff. I was still very understaffed in the water quality fund so in terms of making those types of thing happen.

Plus there's an issue where Cornell Cooperative Extension goes through their own Operating Budget procedure with the Legislature. All of those funds had been approved in the 2008 adopted Operating Budget for Cornell Cooperative Extension. So I just wanted to make sure that you knew that we do feel that it's important to fund those programs.

There's also mention -- I'm just going through the highlights up front, this is on page 12, reduce the 2009 funding by 19,594. That's actually just because the budget that we were given to look at the Water Quality Review Committee meeting was a hold steady budget from 2008. But actually in the Operating Budget that was recommended for Cornell Cooperative Extension, there was a 2% increase, hence the slight difference in the amount. Not that big a deal. But I just did want to point that out.

And then there's also the issue raised of the fact that several of those 477 funded programs are in Health Services. And that's more, I think, an issue of the fact that originally Health Services was the sponsoring agency for those projects when they went before the Water Quality Review Committee and certainly Health Services has the contracting and accounting capability to make the payments, etcetera and so forth. If Environment and Energy were not a takeover, we've taken over for storm water and Oil Tank Abatement Program, but if we were going to take on doing more of the official contracting and paying out vouchers, we would need to probably add a senior account clerk type position to handle that.

So we're just as happy to review the voucher, sign off on the fact that programatically we agree they should be paid and have that administrative process handled through Health Services. So we are very actively involved in overseeing the, you know, the programs and making sure we agree with the programs and what they're getting paid for. But, you know, not taking over that voucher payment procedure.

Additionally, there was a comment made about needing to supply the Legislature with information on the effectiveness of the programs. We believe that we do that every year through the annual report on all the 477 funded programs. However, if you feel that a separate type of report needs to be developed specifically for Cornell projects, we're happy to do that. We just need to know what you're looking for. I know you get reams of information thrown at you and perhaps yet another report is not necessarily what you need, but we're happy to provide a copy of that annual report to BRO, or attention of the Legislators who feel they need it or to cull out just the Cornell Cooperative programs if so desired. And those were really the issues I wanted to address. Chris, did you want to address the revenue?

MR. KENT:

We're on schedule for 2008 in receiving revenues from the sale of tax -- properties taken for non-payment of taxes. We reduced that number for 2009 in anticipation that we won't have as many parcels to close upon since we're only auctioning off about half the number of parcels this year as we did last year.

As for that one parcel that was identified in the report that we close -- we did close upon it. It states in here that we haven't closed. The property was sold at the May 2002 auction for \$775,000. The closing happened in April of 2004. The money is just being held in escrow because there's litigation

by the parties that thought they were entitled to redeem the property. So they sued the County. They also paid money into escrow so we're holding double escrow. And one of the parties is going to get their money back, but the court will have decide that. But the property was closed, the deed was tendered and recorded in the County Clerk's Office. And we're just waiting for the court to decide who has right to the property.

CHAIRMAN SCHNEIDERMAN:

Do you have a list of all the County-owned properties that are not in Park status somewhere?

MR. KENT:

A list of all properties not in Park status, you mean the one's that are --

CHAIRMAN SCHNEIDERMAN:

Right. The county-owned properties that, you know, could be leased or used for other purposes?

MR. KENT:

Yes. Yeah, we do have a list of those properties.

CHAIRMAN SCHNEIDERMAN:

Could I get a copy of that?

MR. KENT:

Sure, I guess so.

CHAIRMAN SCHNEIDERMAN:

Thank you.

MR. KENT:

I don't think there's any reason you couldn't have that. I'll --

CHAIRMAN SCHNEIDERMAN:

I don't think so either.

MR. KENT:

Yes.

CHAIRMAN SCHNEIDERMAN:

Thank you. Any other comments on the proposed budget or the BRO recommendations?

COMMISSIONER MEEK-GALLAGHER:

I just -- two other things I did want to comment on. I do want to draw your attention when you're going through the 477 funded position memo, because we have provided the information to BRO, they didn't -- they did not recommend abolishing any vacant positions. And there was only one at the time of the budget. And what I've been able to do is I had requested some kind of new positions this year, but really because three positions were abolished last year; however, those were not recommended. And what I've been able to do instead is obtain two of those positions by earmarking positions that recently became vacant. So I am going to be getting a Senior Environmental Analyst. He will be starting next Friday. And I will also be getting a Research Technician. So I'm happy that I've been able to, you know, through earmarking vacant positions, kind of professionalize these staff to positions that I feel are necessary to help manage and implement those 477 funded programs.

There was also on page 80 of the BRO report discussion of the Shellfish Restoration Program. It's actually a 477 Program administered through Economic Development. Nature Conservancy is administering that, you know, running that program. And they've requested a no cost time extension so it would not cost us anymore money, but they're -- they weren't able to complete all of the work in this year so they want to complete it next year through 2009. And it was actual -- it's

actually helpful because this year they were able to study intensively the brown tide and the effects on the hard clam population and they'll be able to now see what happens next year.

CHAIRMAN SCHNEIDERMAN:

You say it was a no cost extension? Just a time extension.

COMMISSIONER MEEK-GALLAGHER:

No cost time extension. Just essentially you're transferring the money that would have been spent this year into next year because they were not able to complete all the work. So it's no additional cost to us, just a longer period of time.

CHAIRMAN SCHNEIDERMAN:

Legislator D'Amaro, did you have a question?

LEG. D'AMARO:

Yeah, thank you. Carrie, your department is responsible for Cornell Cooperative Extension in the '08 budget; is that correct?

COMMISSIONER MEEK-GALLAGHER:

No. We're I think --

LEG. D'AMARO:

Or is it Health?

COMMISSIONER MEEK-GALLAGHER:

I think Health has now become responsible.

LEG. D'AMARO:

Well, in the 2009.

COMMISSIONER MEEK-GALLAGHER:

Oh, Planning was still -- in 2008 Planning was still responsible and now in --

LEG. D'AMARO:

Did you say that you -- but your department really administers those contracts?

COMMISSIONER MEEK-GALLAGHER:

For 477 contracts, there are -- which there are five, that Cornell Cooperative Extension has that are 477 funded --

LEG. D'AMARO:

Right.

COMMISSIONER MEEK-GALLAGHER:

-- we -- I would say we're day to day involved in the actual programmatic implementation and managements, you know, making sure that -- that we're satisfied with the performance of those projects. However, the contractual administration voucher payments are through Health Services. And one of the recommendations in BRO was that since the referendum that was passed last November transfers all the really administrative responsibilities to Environment and Energy for 477 funded initiatives --

LEG. D'AMARO:

Right.

COMMISSIONER MEEK-GALLAGHER:

-- that those should be put into our Operating Budget instead of into Health Services. However, I

think the -- the larger issues that Health Services may be taking on Cornell, you know, all 19 programs that Cornell runs for us.

LEG. D'AMARO:

Now, those five programs are they contracted for programs?

COMMISSIONER MEEK-GALLAGHER:

Yes.

LEG. D'AMARO:

Between the County and Cornell.

COMMISSIONER MEEK-GALLAGHER:

Yes.

LEG. D'AMARO:

And do they include family and consumer service -- family and consumer science program?

COMMISSIONER MEEK-GALLAGHER:

That's not one of the Water Quality Protection funded programs, no.

LEG. D'AMARO:

I didn't think so. Obviously not the Farm Meat Production Program?

COMMISSIONER MEEK-GALLAGHER:

No.

LEG. D'AMARO:

There's another one here, Administrative Financial and -- I can't -- it's an abbreviated thing, I can't tell.

COMMISSIONER MEEK-GALLAGHER:

Yeah. No, that's not -- we have alternative pest -- Alternative Management Strategies for Pest, Integrated Pest Management Program, Restoration of Peconic Bay scallops, Storm Water Phase II and Agricultural Best -- Agricultural Stewardship. Those are the five that we're involved with in terms of program implementation.

LEG. D'AMARO:

Right.

COMMISSIONER MEEK-GALLAGHER:

The rest, I believe, are all either general fund budgeted or you receive funds through the state or other sources to run them.

LEG. D'AMARO:

But they're administered through your department. I'm just wondering why they're not on my list here.

COMMISSIONER MEEK-GALLAGHER:

The only one that currently is fully administered through our department is the Storm Water Phase II --

LEG. D'AMARO:

Yeah. No, that's not -- it's all off this list.

COMMISSIONER MEEK-GALLAGHER:

-- Program, meaning that contract, voucher payments, etcetera, everything comes through us. The other four we sign off on agreeing --

LEG. D'AMARO:

So, I'm sorry for interrupting.

COMMISSIONER MEEK-GALLAGHER:

Yeah, yeah, no.

LEG. D'AMARO:

But the programs you administer through your department are all 477 funded?

COMMISSIONER MEEK-GALLAGHER:

Yes.

LEG. D'AMARO:

Okay. I can leave it at that. That's fine.

CHAIRMAN SCHNEIDERMAN:

Any other questions or comments? Thank you. Is there anyone else? Commissioner.

DIRECTOR ISLES:

I can be really brief. I think the first comment we have in the BRO report relates to what you talked about earlier, which was more of a philosophical question as to should the 477 funds be used for operating expenses or capital cost. We have two positions that are filled and funded through 477 and they are completely in support of 477 projects; Agriculture Duck Farm Restoration projects and County parkland and so forth. So respectfully we would request that they remain in the budget under that program.

With regard to vacant positions and our -- in the Planning Department we do have a total of six vacant positions at the present time. And we do have SCIN forms, one approved and one soon to be approved. To replace those positions and we hope to do so by the end of this year.

We have two positions that are proposed to be abolished in the budget and one of those is as a result of the incentive program in the retirement where we lost two people so we're losing one position as a result of that. And the other is the change in -- as talked about before with Cornell Cooperative Extension, we did lose the Assistant Economist this year in May. And with the proposed change by the County Executive to shift that to the Health Services Department, we no longer need that position.

Therefore, we end up with three vacant positions that we'd like to have remain -- pardon me, two vacant positions we'd like to have remain in next year's budget. So that if their funding permits it at some point, perhaps 2010, we could then restore those positions to the department.

I said a lot very fast. As far as, you know, here again, overall the department does not take exception in any material way with the comments at the Budget Review Office. They do make the point that we're going to be underfunded for covering payroll cost for next year. We do understand that, here again, we do have those two positions that are going to be vacant as well as the turnover savings. We don't have a dispute with that. We've met carefully with the Budget Office on that. So we're satisfied with the budget as it's been submitted.

CHAIRMAN SCHNEIDERMAN:

Okay. Any questions? Thank you, Tom. Okay. Anyone else? Okay. I guess that concludes our meeting. I'll make a motion to adjourn. And I'll take that as a second from Legislator D'Amaro and we are adjourned.

THE MEETING CONCLUDED AT 2:49 PM
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