

ENVIRONMENT, PLANNING & AGRICULTURE COMMITTEE

PARKS & RECREATION COMMITTEE

OF THE

SUFFOLK COUNTY LEGISLATURE

Minutes

A special joint meeting of the Environment, Planning & Agriculture Committee and the Parks & Recreation 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 October 21, 2015.

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Leg. Kara Hahn, Chair Environment, Planning & Agriculture Committee/Vice Chair Parks & Recreation Committee
Leg. Al Krupski, Vice Chair Environment, Planning & Agriculture Committee
Leg. Thomas Cilmi, member Parks & Recreation Committee
Leg. William J. Lindsay, III, member Parks & Recreation Committee
Leg. Sarah Anker, member Environment, Planning & Agriculture Committee

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

Leg. Leslie Kennedy, 12th Legislative District
Greg Dawson, Commissioner/Parks
Sarah Lansdale, Director/Suffolk County Planning
Kathy Malloy, AME
Christina Delisi, Aide to DPO Leg. Schneiderman
Catherine Stark, Aide to Leg. Krupski
Amy Ellis, Aide to Leg. Anker
Michael Cavanagh, Aid to Leg. Lindsay
And all other interested parties

MINUTES TAKEN BY:

Diana Flesher, Court Stenographer

THE MEETING WAS CALLED TO ORDER AT 3:12 PM

CHAIRPERSON HAHN:

Okay, welcome to the joint EPA, Parks public hearing -- Operating Budget public hearing. If we can all rise for a salute to the flag led by Legislator Lindsay.

SALUTATION

PUBLIC PORTION

CHAIRPERSON HAHN:

We do have one card, Kathy Malloy.

MS. MALLOY:

This is my last budget speech, I promise. I'm tired, too. (Laughter)

My name is Kathy Malloy representing Suffolk County AM President Brian Macri. Based upon both our and your Budget Review Office review, the budget is not adequately balanced, which directly impacts economic development, the operations of County government and protecting our Long Island environment.

This Operating Budget has not addressed the structural fiscal problem that has existed in the General Fund for over ten years, the absolute need to raise a recurring revenue. Sending a message to other taxing jurisdictions has only negatively impacted the County's fiscal standings and has resulted in the General Fund being less than a mere 1% of total property taxes in Suffolk. Suffolk County AME has born the negative impact of this policy in making a no-pay agreement for no layoffs, a hiring freeze and a deferred payroll. And we have lived through two lag payrolls thus far. As Suffolk County Legislators I am sure you recognize that our greatest asset are our County employees. And AME represents the largest number of County employees often called the backbone of Suffolk County government.

How to find remedies: Although a quick solution might be to tap into reserve account to offset the current imbalance, that would only make the fiscal problems more severe in 2017. We need recurring revenue. Since most budgets tend to be incremental, the only realistic short term solution, which could result in becoming a long term solution, is to increase property taxes. Now I know the financial impact, although symbolically scary, is actually negligible per household. The average household property tax is \$9,875 per year. Out of that a mere \$88 goes to the County's General Fund. Considering County -- incremental County tax increases covering four years at, say, 50% in 2016; decrease it to 33% 2017; further decrease it to 25% in 2018; and even lower to 18.25% in 2019 results in actual increases of an average of \$44 per year per household. After the full four years of General Fund tax increases, the average homeowner just went from \$88 per year to paying 266 per year into the County's General Fund, which now is just \$22.17 per month more. That's important to speak of, not the percentage, not the 50%, but the small actual amount it reflects to maintain our current way of life; the same way we pay more for cable, LIPA, PSEG, phone to maintain our current way of life. And look at what that provides to the County's General Fund. The full goal is in the 570,418 housing units in Suffolk County; 106.5 million additional in recurring revenue. This is a solution. This new formula could close the General Fund in police gaps in just four years. And you'd have recurring revenue of 106.5 million.

In the long term it is necessary to focus on those taxing jurisdictions that have created this problem. And AME is willing to work with you in resolving these issues for all Suffolk County residents as we are, too. There are many people we can blame, many ideas that didn't work, but the bottom is

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better targeted towards solutions, not blame. And we at AME are here to work with you for a viable and a long term solution to this recurring deficit, which could be resolved with the same words recurring but using it as income.

We are here to work alongside the Suffolk County Legislature. And we hope to be called upon to work together. Thank you for allowing me to speak the 15th time. (Laughter) Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON HAHN:

Thank you. That was the one and only card that I had. Are there any other individuals interested in speaking before the Legislature today? Seeing none, we're going to close the Public Portion.

PARKS & RECREATION OPERATING BUDGET

I have a request to take Parks first. Commissioner Dawson, would you mind if we did that? Thank you.

COMMISSIONER DAWSON:

Good afternoon.

CHAIRPERSON HAHN:

Good afternoon. Hopefully you can give us a few brief statements if you'd like to make anything.

COMMISSIONER DAWSON:

I don't really have a prepared statement on the budget other than to say, you know, we understand it's a very difficult process, especially given the financial constraints to the County, you know. I'd like to take the opportunity to thank my staff in putting together a budget and working with the County Executive's Office and Budget Review. We understand it's a difficult process and, you know, preparing a budget that we can live with, and, you know, meet our mission of providing good parks to our residents.

If you have any questions on the budget, I'd be happy to answer them.

CHAIRPERSON HAHN:

Legislator Lindsay, did you have any questions?

LEG. LINDSAY:

No.

CHAIRPERSON HAHN:

Oh. Legislator Krupski.

LEG. KRUPSKI:

Welcome, Commissioner, how are you?

COMMISSIONER DAWSON:

How are you doing, Legislator?

LEG. KRUPSKI:

In the Budget Review Recommendation, it says that park fees -- it's in the Recommended Budget that parks fees will be increased and that further simplification of the park fee structure should be considered. Do you -- can you clarify that?

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COMMISSIONER DAWSON:

Yeah. Our fee structure right now is -- I mean if you look at our park fees on the website, we have about 13 pages. I think the point was to -- to simplify that, to -- we have a lot of categories of discounts. We just really need to kind of -- kind of clean it up a little bit. It would certainly help, you know; either it's a discounted fee or a non-discounted fee. When you look at the fees, again, it's page after page after page of different reductions. So we really should probably address that when you look at the -- we look at the fee structure.

LEG. KRUPSKI:

Address that and eliminate some of the discounts or --

COMMISSIONER DAWSON:

No, I'm not saying --

LEG. KRUPSKI:

Try to organize it differently.

COMMISSIONER DAWSON:

Organize the discounts rather. I don't think we're looking to eliminate any discounts. We'd really just rather organize them into categories rather than have them all over the --

LEG. KRUPSKI:

Okay.

COMMISSIONER DAWSON:

-- all over the fee structure.

LEG. KRUPSKI:

Thank you.

COMMISSIONER DAWSON:

You're welcome.

CHAIRPERSON HAHN:

Legislator Cilmi?

LEG. CILMI:

No.

CHAIRPERSON HAHN:

Are you okay with funding for technology for the reservation system and all that; we're good?

COMMISSIONER DAWSON:

Yes. The reservation system, that comes out of our capital account rather than the operating.

CHAIRPERSON HAHN:

Anyone else? Okay. Thank you.

COMMISSIONER DAWSON:

Thank you and good afternoon.

EPA OPERATING BUDGET

CHAIRPERSON HAHN:

Okay, we have Director Lansdale, come on down. Anyone else? I can't see if there's anyone behind the podium. We'll move onto EPA now.

DIRECTOR LANSDALE:

Good afternoon. Sarah Lansdale, Director of Planning. I'm happy to answer any questions.

CHAIRPERSON HAHN:

We need Counsel here to tell us if we have a quorum, please. Three. But here not -- so if it's a joint committee, do we have to have -- go ahead.

(Counsel Sarah Simpson came into the auditorium. Present Legislators: Leg. Hahn, Leg. Anker, Leg. Lindsay, Leg. Krupski)

LEG. KRUPSKI:

So the question is, there's a proposal to take a position -- a funded position from the General Fund and move it into 477. Is there enough money in that account? And how would this impact the County's ability to fund brick and water -- water quality improvements?

DIRECTOR LANSDALE:

May I answer the question? Great. That is a -- that's a great question. And that is a policy decision that you need to consider.

LEG. KRUPSKI:

Is there enough money there to fund -- to actually fund that position on a year-to-year basis?

DIRECTOR LANSDALE:

There's a detailed write-up that BRO prepared about the status of the assessment of the 477 Water Quality Fund.

LEG. KRUPSKI:

Thank you. I'm good.

CHAIRPERSON HAHN:

Were there position changes that -- or were there any to speak of in your division, in your department that you'd like to mention?

DIRECTOR LANSDALE:

Between last year and this year, there was one person who left our division and that -- that through the Civil Service process, I'm happy to report that that position has been filled again to advance our Open Space and Farmland Acquisition programs.

CHAIRPERSON HAHN:

Okay. Any other questions? You're good?

LEG. KRUPSKI:

I'm good.

CHAIRPERSON HAHN:

Legislator Sarah Anker, you're good?

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LEG. ANKER:

I'm okay. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON HAHN:

Okay, thank you.

DIRECTOR LANSDALE:

Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON HAHN:

Were there any cards for anyone in the audience who wanted to speak to that? Nope. Okay. Seeing that, we are adjourned. Thank you.

**THE MEETING CONCLUDED AT 3:24 PM
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