

**HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE**

**VETERANS & SENIORS COMMITTEE**

*Of the*

***Suffolk County Legislature***

**Minutes**

A special joint meeting of the Health and Human Services Committee and the Veterans & Seniors Committee of the Suffolk County Legislature was held in the Rose Y. Caracappa Legislative Auditorium of the William H. Rogers Legislature Building, Veterans Memorial Highway, Hauppauge, New York, on May 23, 2007, to discuss the matter of the 2008 Capital Budget.

**Members Present:**

Legislator Wayne Horsley - Vice-Chair/Health & Human Services  
Legislator Jack Eddington - Member/Health & Human Services  
Member/Veterans & Seniors  
Legislator Lynne Nowick - Member/Health & Human Services  
Legislator John Kennedy - Member/Health & Human Services

**Members Not Present:**

Legislator Eli Mystal - Chair/Health & Human Services  
Legislator Steven Stern - Chair/Veterans & Seniors  
Legislator Cameron Alden - Member/Veterans & Seniors  
Legislator Jon Cooper - Member/Veterans & Seniors  
Legislator Jay Schneiderman - Member/Veterans & Seniors

**Also in Attendance:**

Fran Siems - Aide to Presiding Officer Lindsay  
Kara Hahn - Director of Communications/PO Lindsay's Office  
Ben Zwirn - Assistant County Executive  
Greg Moran - Aide to Legislator Lynne Nowick  
Gail Vizzini - Director/Budget Review Office  
Lance Reinheimer - Assistant Director/Budget Review Office  
John Ortiz - Senior Budget Analyst/Budget Review Office  
Diane Dono - Senior Budget Analyst/Budget Review Office  
Verna Donnan - Budget Analyst/Budget Review Office  
Matthew Miner - Deputy Commissioner/Dept of Health Services  
Margaret Bermel - Director/Health Adm.Services/Dept of Health Services  
Tom Ronayne - Director/Suffolk County Veterans Service Agency  
Julianna Petrone - Suffolk County Veterans Service Agency  
Lydia Sabosto - 1st Vice-President/AME  
All Other Interested Parties

**Minutes Taken By:**

Lucia Braaten - Court Stenographer

**Minutes Transcribed By:**

Alison Mahoney - Court Stenographer

*(\*The meeting was called to order at 12:01 PM\*)*

**ACTING CHAIRMAN HORSLEY:**

May all the Legislators please come to the horseshoe, we are about ready to take a look at our Capital Budget referring to the Health & Safety Committee as well as Veterans and --

**LEG. NOWICK:**

Seniors.

**ACTING CHAIRMAN HORSLEY:**

Seniors.

**LEG. NOWICK:**

What did you look at me for?

**LEG. KENNEDY:**

He's getting off to a good start.

**ACTING CHAIRMAN HORSLEY:**

Thank you. May we all stand for the Pledge of Allegiance

***Salutation***

Thank you. Would we please stand -- please sit, please. All right, since we have -- Tom, you were here nice and early, would you -- why don't you come join us at the podium; this is Tom Ronayne.

**DIRECTOR RONAYNE:**

Good afternoon, good morning. Thank you for noticing.

**ACTING CHAIRMAN HORSLEY:**

Good morning, Commissioner. And as we noted, we're looking at the Capital Budget for Vets & Seniors and we're taking a close look at it and we'd like to see how your feelings are about it, issues that may be of concern to us, etcetera.

**DIRECTOR RONAYNE:**

Thank you, Chairman. I think I'll be very brief today. I've provided copies of our goals and our achievements that will be included in our budget request. We -- in my department, we don't see any problem adhering to the County Executive's mandate for a zero growth. We have implemented several programs over the last year, we've been able to assimilate all of them into the operations of the office without incurring additional expense.

The only thing that we did this year that was not budgeted for, and we were able to do it successfully at no cost to the County, was hold our first annual veteran -- Homeless Veteran Stand down. Because of the success of the event, the Veterans Administration, Department of Veterans Affairs, has invited us to participate in a grant that funds County Veteran Service Agencies hosting of homeless veterans stand downs and we anticipate that by participating in that grant at the invitation of the VA, that we will have adequate funds to conduct the event in the future without cost to the County. So our staffing, our programs and our operations are, in my opinion, very satisfactory and we're happy.

**ACTING CHAIRMAN HORSLEY:**

Nothing like a happy camper, that's what we always say around here. Are there any questions that -- yes, sure, Legislator Eddington.

**LEG. EDDINGTON:**

Since this is Health & Veterans, right?

**ACTING CHAIRMAN HORSLEY:**

Yes.

**LEG. EDDINGTON:**

How about the Veterans Health Center, what's happening with that?

**DIRECTOR RONAYNE:**

We've corresponded about two weeks ago -- and you just made me realize that I promised I would send copies to the members of the Veterans & Seniors, I'll forward those today. We did respond to the VA's letter, their bill of particulars and their lists of concerns for the two locations that we had scouted on the east end. The VA is preparing their response to our letter.

They have also informed me that they will in the near future be asking permission to go back and visit one of the sites, the site that they're looking to go back and visit again is the Riverhead County Center site. There was a meeting yesterday at Northport VA of the Veterans Advisory Council, the matter was discussed. Their Director of Facilities reported on the status and on the progress and at this time all involved and are content that the process is moving forward.

The dialogue between County and VA is continuing inasmuch as -- the real concerns come with the fire safety and access and egress. The VA has a set of Federal regulations that they're required to have their spaces conform to. Some of their codes are more stringent, more strict than ours are, I think probably the single largest one is that they require the stair towers into and out of their facilities to be completely fire-rated which would probably result in us having to modify the tower at the southeast and northeast corners of Riverhead Center were we to go in there. But all things considered, I don't see that to be anything approaching an insurmountable obstacle.

**LEG. EDDINGTON:**

Can I have a follow-up?

**ACTING CHAIRMAN HORSLEY:**

Sure.

**LEG. EDDINGTON:**

Now, the other place was the Peconic Bay?

**DIRECTOR RONAYNE:**

Peconic Bay Medical Center

**LEG. EDDINGTON:**

Now, that access would accommodate the Veterans organization?

**DIRECTOR RONAYNE:**

The access to Peconic is a little bit different because it's new construction and it's being constructed at grade level. So the access issue I don't know would be a real point of contention at Peconic.

**LEG. EDDINGTON:**

Okay, good.

**DIRECTOR RONAYNE:**

The question with Peconic is we have yet to receive a response from them. We've requested several times that a proposal be submitted so that we can further consider that space and we have yet to receive that proposal.

**LEG. EDDINGTON:**

Yeah, I believe they were holding off because of the Governor's project and so on? Because I know

I was out there and that's what they had said.

**DIRECTOR RONAYNE:**

They have a number of ongoing construction projects at the hospital right now, I don't know -- I don't know the nuts and bolts of what's going on over there in terms of their responding to us in a timely fashion or not.

**LEG. EDDINGTON:**

Okay. Thanks, Tom.

**LEG. KENNEDY:**

Mr. Chair?

**ACTING CHAIRMAN HORSLEY:**

Yes.

**LEG. KENNEDY:**

Just one follow-up to that with the Vets Centers. I think that the bid for the County Center renovation is supposed to be back or here imminently? In that renovation plan, was this space addressed or is it included? It is not. We're surmising, we know that definitively or what?

**MS. VIZZINI:**

Well, we took a walk through and there was two possible choices in terms of space for the Veterans Administration. I'm not sure if that was included in the main bid, hopefully it was at least in one of the alternates, we'd have to talk to Public Works about that. But the -- I believe the bids are due back the 23rd, which is today.

**LEG. KENNEDY:**

Let's just, for argument's sake, say that what happened is it turned out that one of those areas in the Dennison -- I'm sorry, in the County Center did prove to be the best site; how would we work with the additional renovations that would be necessary then? I mean, are we talking about just another resolution, we would have to amend the project, we would have to get -- fund, you know, whatever the additional cost of renovation would be?

**MS. VIZZINI:**

Out of the two sites, one site, it was formerly occupied by the Sheriff's Office, is pretty much set up as offices with fairly decent carpeting and what have you, so that would be a minimal amount of a renovation. The Veterans Administration was considering that as, you know, quasi-administrative space. The other one is the former Methadone and Health Clinic area which would be a more extensive renovation. So if it couldn't be accommodated within the budget, then you have your usual offset requirements.

**LEG. KENNEDY:**

Both areas were second floor. I'm familiar with the Methadone Clinic, the other area that the Sheriff's Office was, that's second story, too, is that where Judge --

**MS. VIZZINI:**

They were both upstairs.

**LEG. KENNEDY:**

-- Catterson's Chambers were, up there up on the corner?

**MS. VIZZINI:**

I'm not sure if that was the case, but they're both upstairs.

**DIRECTOR RONAYNE:**

The second space was the old courtrooms and chambers.

**LEG. KENNEDY:**

Yeah, that was Judge Catterson's; okay. All right, well -- I guess as it materializes, then, we'll look at it as far as what the budget aspects are going forward.

**ACTING CHAIRMAN HORSLEY:**

Thank you very much, Legislator Kennedy.

**LEG. KENNEDY:**

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

**ACTING CHAIRMAN HORSLEY:**

Are there any further questions of the Commissioner? Tom, is there anything else you'd like to add at this point in time?

**DIRECTOR RONAYNE:**

Not at this time. Thank you for hearing me out.

**ACTING CHAIRMAN HORSLEY:**

Well, we're always here for you.

Okay, are there -- the Health Department, is there anybody here who would like to represent the Health Department? Good afternoon.

**DEPUTY COMMISSIONER MINER:**

Hello.

**MS. BERMEL:**

Good afternoon. Margaret Bermel, Director of Health Administrative Services.

**DEPUTY COMMISSIONER MINER:**

Matt Miner, Deputy Commissioner of Health.

**LEG. EDDINGTON:**

Matt, I don't think your mike is on.

**DEPUTY COMMISSIONER MINER:**

Matthew Miner, Deputy Commissioner of Health Services.

**ACTING CHAIRMAN HORSLEY:**

Welcome. Let me -- just the broad question of you've taken a look at your Capital Budget, you've seen the ins and outs of it, what do you guys think at this point in time?

**MS. BERMEL:**

We concur with the County Executive's proposed budget and we also concur with the additions that Budget Review Office had recommended in their Budget Review report. We appreciate --

**ACTING CHAIRMAN HORSLEY:**

Are they the same?

**MS. BERMEL:**

I'm sorry?

**ACTING CHAIRMAN HORSLEY:**

Are they the same, what the County Executive has recommended and what Budget Review has recommended?

**MS. BERMEL:**

Essentially they're the same. Budget Review had recommended the addition of a generator for one of the health centers and they had also recommended the addition of a {mas chromatograph}, {mas spectrometer} to add to our projects, so we concur with that.

They also did recommend that we have a separate project for all the specialized vehicles, but that's more of a technical aspect than anything else. But we do appreciate their addition and we concur with the budget as presented and with the suggested recommendation as presented by the Budget Review Office.

**MS. VIZZINI:**

The dollar impact would be \$57,000 in 2008 for the generator for the Coram Health Center, and \$74,000 in 2008 for the {mas spectrometer} system, but you could reduce subsequent years by that same amount so there would be no net --

**ACTING CHAIRMAN HORSLEY:**

So there really is parody between the Budget Review Office; boy, kumby yah.

**MS. VIZZINI:**

Well, the Health Department did pretty well. A lot of their ongoing laboratory projects were funded, so they're -- you know, it's not bad.

**ACTING CHAIRMAN HORSLEY:**

Well, that's good to hear. Legislator Kennedy?

**LEG. KENNEDY:**

Yeah, just three quick areas. And I'm scanning this and I just want to make sure that I understand. The digital mammography unit for Riverhead, that is funded, that's Capital Project 4055, the purchase of equipment for health centers?

**MR. ORTIZ:**

I believe that funding was put in subsequent years pending the renovations to the health center -- to the County Center.

**LEG. KENNEDY:**

Well, subsequent years usually means that we're more than, what, three years out; that would be after '010, is that correct?

**MR. ORTIZ:**

I believe so.

**LEG. KENNEDY:**

Okay. Are we anticipating that it's going to take three years to go ahead and renovate the County Center?

**MR. ORTIZ:**

There is funding for digital mammography units for three health centers, but I believe Riverhead will be the fourth.

**LEG. KENNEDY:**

Okay, I guess that's something I've got to look at a little closer then, because I know that was an issue that was important to us, particularly for access on the east end.

The other one is 4057, I guess, the improvements at John J. Foley.

We just had an opening there, I guess, the addition was done and it seems that there were some additional funds that were sought by the department in the first instance?

**DEPUTY COMMISSIONER MINER:**

Yeah. Subsequent to our request, we were awarded a \$2.6 million grant and we're in the process of completing that work through that grant rather than through the Capital Projects.

**LEG. KENNEDY:**

Sidewalks, everything else there is included, you've got more than enough money?

**DEPUTY COMMISSIONER MINER:**

Yes.

**LEG. KENNEDY:**

Super, great; that ends that conversation.

The last item is the electronic medical records. I was under the impression that we actually did have an electric medical records project or software that was procured at one point and attempted to be implemented in the Health Department. Was it integrated with our billing on the front end, our calendaring and our appointment aspects, a unified system that actually linked from point of contact to creation of records?

**DEPUTY COMMISSIONER MINER:**

We have the first two components, the billing and scheduling. We do not have the actual electronic medical record that the provider would enter in, the diagnoses for the coding, but we do have the first two portions in an existing system. We're looking at how we can better expand that into electronic medical records, but we're also working with the health centers and the hospitals to see what type of systems they're going to be putting in as we go forward with their new contracts to make sure that we're putting something in that can be utilized by all the centers. And we have a HEAL Grant in with the State right now for a consultant to assist us in evaluating our electronic medical records, not only in Patient Care, but throughout the Health Department.

**LEG. KENNEDY:**

A simple record request at this point is still being done by paper, is that correct?

**DEPUTY COMMISSIONER MINER:**

That is correct; the billing and scheduling is electronic, the charting is being done through paper.

**LEG. KENNEDY:**

How long do you anticipate that the grant or the evaluation is going to take to recommend whatever the preferred technology will be?

**DEPUTY COMMISSIONER MINER:**

We should be notified hopefully of the award within the next month or so for the HEAL money, then we would have to retain a consultant to do an evaluation and then go forward. I think, you know, hopefully for the next Capital Budget cycle we'll be able to propose something with a little bit more concrete numbers in it as to what best fits the needs of the Health Department.

We are simultaneously, though, through the one grant we got through the John J. Foley Center, we will be implementing electronic medical records in that area.

**LEG. KENNEDY:**

But just the --

**DEPUTY COMMISSIONER MINER:**

But that was part of the grant, it's kind of unique to the nursing home. And that's one of the things that we're looking at, each -- you know, the mental hygiene component, the public health nursing component, the health center component. They do have some variables in there so we really need a consultant to come in to make sure the new jail, the Jail Medical Center will all need electronic medical records at some point. But we want to make sure that when we go forward with this we do it in a manner that, you know, we're spending the County money wisely.

**LEG. KENNEDY:**

Which we all want to do, of course; as a matter of fact, uniform technology makes a lot of sense. And of course, what you would look at is the ability to go ahead and have the receivers be able to go ahead and take it, you know, in any fashion.

**DEPUTY COMMISSIONER MINER:**

We also are a stakeholder in the Suffolk County RHIO, the Regional Health where we are participating and looking at possibly using either Riverhead, Coram or both or possibly John J Foley as part of that pilot program under the RHIO. So we are pursuing it, we're just not in a position at this point to go forward with the Capital Project, we need the consultant to come on board first.

**LEG. KENNEDY:**

I'm going to ask you to make a note, if you would please, and clearly that's probably not pertinent for this Capital Budget thing, but I'm not directly familiar with that affiliation or partnership. So perhaps at the committee cycle in the beginning of June, if you could brief us in the Health & Human Services Committee a little bit about that partnership and this role that a County facility would take in it.

**DEPUTY COMMISSIONER MINER:**

Certainly. We had just met with them the other day and they had provided us with a nice Power Point presentation, I'll share that with the Health & Human Services Committee in advance and then we can talk about it at one of the upcoming meetings, that would be fine.

**LEG. KENNEDY:**

That would be wonderful. But I'm going to go back to one last question, then, and I guess I'm going to shift either over to BRO and/or to Ms. Bermel. So I was mistaken, then, that the original project to move to electronic fashion in the Health Department did not include a medical records component?

**MR. ORTIZ:**

Like the Deputy Director said, it was more of a billing program. The sharing in medical records is an evolving technology and so we're not including the project in the Capital Program, so we figure out the best way to go.

**DEPUTY COMMISSIONER MINER:**

The system that we did purchase, it's my understanding, can -- we can add stages or components to it to allow it to be a true electronic medical system. We don't -- we do not have all components yet.

**LEG. KENNEDY:**

We've not gone ahead, so we have a framework, an architecture --

**DEPUTY COMMISSIONER MINER:**

We have a framework and whether we stay with that system or go with a different system, I think that's really where the consultant needs to come in and advise us so that we make sure that we're covering all areas.

**LEG. KENNEDY:**

You'll come back and talk to us before there's a decision made?

**DEPUTY COMMISSIONER MINER:**

Once we have the consultant on board and we get a recommendation, certainly.

**LEG. KENNEDY:**

Okay. All right, thank you. I'll yield, Mr. Chair.

**ACTING CHAIRMAN HORSLEY:**

Thank you very much, Legislator Kennedy. And Deputy Commissioner, just for the record, on the invitation to speak in front of the committee, would you please run that by the Chairman?

**DEPUTY COMMISSIONER MINER:**

Certainly.

**ACTING CHAIRMAN HORSLEY:**

Thank you. Are there any other further questions concerning the Health Department? Is there anything else that you guys would like to add.

**MS. BERMEL:**

No, I think that covers everything, Legislator Horsley. Thank you.

**ACTING CHAIRMAN HORSLEY:**

It's my pleasure. Ms. Vizzini, is there anything that you'd like to add on this?

**MS. VIZZINI:**

No, but thank you.

**ACTING CHAIRMAN HORSLEY:**

You're welcome. Okay, thank you very much.

All right, is there anyone else that would like to be heard?  
We haven't heard from Seniors?

**LEG. EDDINGTON:**

There's no seniors here?

**LEG. NOWICK:**

Don't encourage them.

**ACTING CHAIRMAN HORSLEY:**

Don't encourage them, okay. If no one else would like to be heard at this point in time, I'll entertain a motion to --

**LEG. KENNEDY:**

Motion.

**ACTING CHAIRMAN HORSLEY:**

To adjourn, second by Legislator Eddington. Thank you very much.

*(\*The meeting was adjourned at 12:20 PM\*)*

{ } - *Denotes Spelled Phonetically*