

**VETERANS & SENIORS COMMITTEE**  
**OF THE**  
**SUFFOLK COUNTY LEGISLATURE**

**Minutes**

A regular meeting of 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, 725 Veterans Memorial Highway, Smithtown, New York, on December 11, 2007.

**Members Present:**

Legislator Steven H. Stern, Chairman  
Legislator Jack Eddington, Vice-Chair  
Legislator Cameron Alden  
Legislator Jon Cooper (not present)  
Legislator Jay H. Schneiderman

**Also In Attendance:**

George Nolan, Counsel to the Legislature  
Renee Ortiz, Chief Deputy Clerk  
Verna Donnan, Budget Review Office  
Deborah Harris, Aide to Legislator Stern  
Joe Dujmic, County Executive Assistant  
Paul Perillie, Aide to Majority Leader  
Fran Siems, Legislative Aide  
Debra Alloncius, AME Legislative Director  
Kathy Rosenthal, FECS Vice President LI Operations  
All Other Interested Parties

**Minutes Taken By:**

Diana Kraus - Court Stenographer

**Minutes Transcribed By:**

Denise Weaver, Legislative Aide

**(THE MEETING COMMENCED AT 1:16 PM)**

**CHAIRMAN STERN:**

The Committee on Veterans and Seniors will come to order. I ask everybody to please rise, join us in the Pledge of Allegiance lead by Legislator Alden.

***SALUTATION***

I ask everybody to please remain standing and join us in a moment of silence, keeping all of our very brave men and women fighting for our freedoms overseas in our thoughts and prayers; and also ask everybody to observe a moment of silence in memory of Legislator Rick Montano's passing of his dad.

***MOMENT OF SILENCE***

Thank you.

Kathy. Kathy, welcome. For the record, I asked Kathy Rosenthal of FECS to join us today. Kathy and her organization have really taken on a tremendous leading role in the establishment of Huntington's NORC Program. I asked Kathy to come in and let us know how that project is going. And then, I guess, if you can add in your remarks some of your thoughts on how we at the County level of government can help, can help in the effort, in the planning phase, if appropriate, and what you may be looking for County government to do in the role that we can and should be playing in the implementation phase. But rather than have me go on and on about what a great idea it is, Kathy, maybe you can talk about NORC, what it is and where you're at.

**MS. ROSENTHAL:**

Well, thank you for inviting me. It is probably my favorite topic. FECS, as you probably know is a very large diversified human services organization. And under my role we have many, many programs on Long Island. We have 22 locations including 14 homes for people with developmental disabilities, four mental health clinics, multi-service centers where we have clinics and employment services co-located, a lot of rehab programs, so there's a real diversification of services under -- at FECS.

And I oversee Long Island operations and directly the day to day operations of our family services. And it's been my baby, I have to say to launch this -- this and one other NORC Program. NORC stands for Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities. It was a term that was coined in the mid-eighties to describe a demographic phenomenon, which were places in which people had aged in place and didn't want to leave. And then subsequent to that definition, government mostly, I have to say New York State really played one of the leadership roles across the country in establishing legislation that led to funding and New York City did the same thing. I think New York City actually predated New York State's legislation and funding.

And so they sort of coined this term that defined these areas in which people had aged in place. New York State defines a NORC as a catchment area in which more than 40% of the residents are over the age of 60. And they released funding under the New York State Office for the Aging. And in the beginning, and it's almost 20 years since this funding has been out there, the NORC Supportive Service Programs that were funded reached NORC's in mostly, they call them vertical NORC's, they were in apartment buildings and complexes in which there were large numbers of seniors that had aged in place.

And as part of the legislation they mandated that the housing entity -- because in those cases you've got a landlord, you've got an owner, a co-op board, whatever it is that is required to kick in a funding match for these programs. Some of the other requirements was that there would be a partnership. The NORC Programs are really defined by a couple of important landmarks. Number one, is the seniors themselves are intensively involved in the development, in the delivery of services, in looking at the outcomes and evaluation of services. So that's one key piece. Again, the funding source, in some cases it's actually attracted interestingly a sort of collaboration of funding between government, private philanthropy and the housing entity, which is a required match when you get the state dollars; I think for the City as well.

So these NORC supportive service programs grew up in mostly in the City of New York, some upstate suburbs. And then a few years ago the people who were advocating on behalf of these NORC's said we need these in the suburbs. We need programs in the suburbs as much as we do anywhere else. And I would like to sort of -- I've been saying that there's more compelling need in a place like Long Island because you've got issues of isolation. When you've got a housing complex, you've got seniors in -- co-located in buildings, they've got neighbors right next door, they've got people that are sort of monitoring them probably much more often than you have in single isolated -- single homes that are where you have seniors that are isolated.

Number two is, you've got maintenance of homes and properties. If you live in a building, you call somebody if you need a light bulb replaced or if your drain's not working or if -- whatever is happening, you have somebody to call, they come in and fix that. In a single family home you have to research that. You have to trust somebody. And seniors get taken advantage of. And so there's maintenance of homes and property that become a huge issue. Like anything on Long Island, transportation is a huge issue. If you're a senior it becomes even more daunting to get to and from shopping, to get to and from a doctor appointment.

So we made the case, we went up to New York State. I went up on a bus with a whole bunch of seniors that have been served in NORC's in Queens. And it was a real eye-opening experience for me. And we were just in the process of saying we needed to do this on Long Island. As one of the human services providers, we really saw this as a need and a model that could be replicated and really tailored to the needs of Long Island.

And so what we did that -- and last time I was here I was with Evelyn Roth who's my predecessor, it was actually her brilliant idea, and it wasn't until we had some hindsight that we realized just how brilliant it was to partner with local government. Because on Long Island you don't have a housing entity. And the local government in many cases has an infrastructure of support services for its senior community. And so we had a connection to Madge Kaplan, who just died a couple of weeks ago, she was the Commissioner of Community Services in the Town of North Hempstead, she brought it to the board, she brought it to the supervisor; literally in a matter of weeks they passed a board resolution to help fund a community organizing person.

And FECS went after the state dollars. We secured money for that and started working in partnership with the town government, Town of North Hempstead. It's a great model. It's called Project Independence. We've seen probably almost 400 seniors with one-on-one surveys to assess their needs. We have an advisory committee that seniors come to regardless of the weather. Every month we have probably 30 to 40 seniors on that advisory committee. They write the newsletter, they do volunteerism. It's a really successful model.

And when the second year of funding came out from New York State Office for the Aging, FECS looked for another town to partner with that, of course, met the NORC criterion in terms of demographics, but also had an infrastructure of support services for its seniors. And the moment we were reaching out to the Town of Huntington, Frank Petrone and his staff were reaching out to us. So it was really just this moment where things came together. And I have to say the Town of Huntington is a phenomenal place to partner for a program like this because they have a such a --

an instated program that's so broad and expansive and serves so many seniors in so many ways.

And so our Director of our NORC Program, Hands-On Huntington, sits in the Senior Citizens Division, works with Sue Hardy, who I know you are all very familiar with. And she's phenomenal. And Frank Petrone's been great and his staff has been great. And they lend a whole bunch of infrastructure support. They give us space, they give us staff, they help with PR and marketing. And, of course, it's that partnership of the services.

The other key partner is a health partner. North Shore LIJ Health System has been our health partner. They're the partner on seven NORC Programs from Queens to now Suffolk County. It's great. It's the nurse social work piece and the town government that together just makes a wonderful program.

Are there challenges? Yes. You want to serve -- I mean, the biggest challenge for the town is that they have to serve the whole town. When you have a NORC, the way it's defined is this tight catchment area because the state in our case, wants to make sure you have what you need in terms of resources. And they don't give you enough, of course, to do what you need to do to reach no more than 2000 seniors in that catchment area. So they don't you to bite off more than you can chew, which is important. But the resources are limited. We've been going after other grants. We also have a Legislative grant in Huntington from Senator Carl Marcellino, which helped us. It was unrestricted to help us just to unfold the program.

That's kind of it in a nutshell. What can the County do? If there's anyway to figure out how resources could be devoted to this, I know that in -- I think in Frank's vision and -- in Supervisor Petrone's vision and Supervisor Kaiman's vision, they would love to do NORC Greenlawn, NORC Elwood, NORC, you know, every part of the town in Project Independence. It would be Project Independence Great Neck, Project Independence Manhasset, Project Independence New Hyde Park because you don't want to expand. The way the model's designed you really want to replicate because you want seniors to be involved. You want each communities' needs, which might be very different from the next communities' needs, be met effectively.

And so that's why replication is key and more resources need to be drawn to this area to do that. I would love to do that in partnership with the County. I would love to do that in partnership with towns. I'm open to suggestions. I'm -- love to go up and lobby Legislators, you know, in partnership. I'll do anything.

Just one other thing I want to add is this is a very sort of premature thing to probably throw out there and he might kill me, I hope he won't. Larry Levy, I don't know if you know who has written for *Newsday* for probably close to 30 years, has been appointed to the executive head of the Suburban Studies Institute at Hofstra University. He and I met for two-and-a-half hours last week. He's very interested in studying the outcomes of this model. So we're going to be looking at trying to raise dollars to do that, which would be so key to really quantifying outcomes on this and be able to leverage other dollars down the road.

**CHAIRMAN STERN:**

Very good.

**MS. ROSENTHAL:**

Any questions?

**CHAIRMAN STERN:**

Questions? Is there -- right now the focus is on Huntington. I guess first of all, where would you say you are in the process right now?

**MS. ROSENTHAL:**

Huntington specifically, as we have a phenomenal director, she's done intakes -- the first part of the

NORC Program is to really, you know, go out, do outreach, meet with different groups whether it's at the library or civic groups or engaging the schools. I mean, it's really about bringing in the community, bringing everyone that's interested and able to the table. And that's in planning and that's in service delivery. We work with Harborfields Schools. We've been working with the libraries to deliver educational programs. We'd love to tie in the businesses. I wrote a grant to tie in the Post Office and train postal workers to recognize when there are -- seniors are having problems so they can be reporters, sort of gatekeepers.

So we've interviewed 50 seniors. We have advisory committee meetings once a month. We've had ten to 15 seniors attend those meetings. They've been great. We even have seniors that are outside the NORC catchment. I started to say this before, the biggest challenge for government in the town situation is that they have to serve the whole town and they can't -- they're only doing this one catchment area so we literally have people on the other side of Greenlawn Road saying, what about me, I'm not in that area.

The great thing is that our response to that is always the town has these wonderful, you know, infrastructure support services; we're not going to say we can't help you. Our director of our program will do -- she's established a database of resources. She'll tie in with, you know, the County and the senior services with Holly, wherever she can, she'll help that senior, but it's a challenge. You can't go in and do the intensive services that a NORC is designed to do for everybody in the town.

**CHAIRMAN STERN:**

And as you said earlier, the idea is to keep it limited and not to have it continually expand. In the model, is there possibility for expansion? Do the lines ever move?

**MS. ROSENTHAL:**

They can because you can serve up to 2000 seniors. So in the case of Huntington, we chose a census district that was only 1200 people. So could we expand? We could. We could go up to 2000. And that's the max that the state wants you to do as I said because they don't want you to bite off more than you can chew with the funding they're giving you.

**CHAIRMAN STERN:**

Is there a minimum?

**MS. ROSENTHAL:**

There is and I'm not remembering what it is. But it's in the legislation, which I can absolutely get for you and provide for you. There is a minimum, yes.

**CHAIRMAN STERN:**

And so ultimately the services that are provided are paid how? Is it different services are paid by different levels of government or is it just one pool of money whether that's government funding or grants? And then who determines, you know, what services, you know, those to be served actually receive?

**MS. ROSENTHAL:**

In the case of the New York State Office for the Aging grant, they give us a line item grant. We don't charge for services. The services are free. The model also dictates that you really want to bring in anybody else that's providing services. So we do a lot of information and referral and linkages. It's really a case management model. So we'll link with Family Service League, we'll link with Pederson Krag, we'll link with the hospitals. We'll link with whomever is in a position to provide whatever service that senior is in need of, Meals on Wheels, home delivered meals. So we'll make those linkages and connections and access whatever services are out there rather than trying to deliver them all ourselves. Because if we had to do that, the \$145,000 we get from the state would never be enough. We have a person who's four days a week. That's what the grant supports and the nurse who's on the program two days a week.

**CHAIRMAN STERN:**

The physical characteristics of the area to be served in Huntington, I assume it's chosen not just because of census and the population, but because in that particular area there are senior communities, Paumanok Village --

**MS. ROSENTHAL:**

Right.

**CHAIRMAN STERN:**

-- and so, you know, plenty of seniors who are right there. I'm not familiar with the Project Independence in North Hempstead, but it -- does it look similar? Is it more spread out geographically or was that area chosen not just because of census, but also because of these senior communities that tend to concentrate seniors in a particular area?

**MS. ROSENTHAL:**

I think it looks pretty similar. And we chose that -- I mean, again, the real -- the reason we chose those areas is because they fit the criterion, which meant not just we were able to access the dollars, but more importantly that there were these, you know, this proliferation of seniors that had aged in place that needed services.

You know, one of the biggest things that we found in working with the seniors is that their biggest issue is trust. They're scared to say they need help. These are mostly people who have been successful and, you know, these are not -- a lot of the populations that FECS works with are people who are mentally ill or developmentally disabled. These are people who were, you know, lived normal, happy, successful lives. They're scared to death to ask for help because they think someone's going to tell them you need to go into a nursing home or into a supported environment when they want to stay in their homes. So the goal of the program is to do whatever we can to help them stay in their homes as safely and as long as they possibly can. I don't know if that answers your question exactly. I think they look similar the areas.

**CHAIRMAN STERN:**

And part of the theory here is that with a concentration you can provide services to more than one in a more economical, you know, fiscally responsible way. Has there been discussion on not just providing services to this one area, but perhaps making -- and I just ask it in form of a query, has there been any discussion in not just providing services, but coordinating with other levels of government in making it easier for seniors who are represented in this catchment area to deal with their government representatives or to make application in that area, which might make it much more convenient and maybe overcoming that trust factor; and maybe making it easier so that they don't have to get on a bus system that takes them three hours --

**MS. ROSENTHAL:**

Right.

**CHAIRMAN STERN:**

-- to get to the place where they have to submit an application, wait outside for two hours in the cold? Any discussion on whether it's County level of government or others in essentially bringing it to them rather than having them come out of this catchment area and applying for these services in our already established locations?

**MS. ROSENTHAL:**

I think that, you know, I wish that Tina were here because she could talk more to the day to day of what her job looks like. Tina's our Director. But I think that's exactly what she tries to do. I think more than anything else she tries to bring as much information and then help the senior walk through whatever system it is that they're navigating, if it's a government system or a medical

system or, you know, and connect and link to services.

I don't know if this is responsive to your question, but we just did a whole sort of informational piece that's going into a newsletter on accessing the tax benefits for seniors. So we went, you know, worked with the town and brought to the seniors, here's what you're entitled to, here's how you can access the information, bringing them the forms if that's what it is that they need. That kind of thing is what we're striving to do.

We do -- you know, one of the things about the model, too, is that it's not a crisis model. You want to do educational and health chat kinds of forums and bring them information. We just had a health chat that we brought out a pharmacist that talked about interactions between supplements that are over-the-counter or natural remedies and drugs because sometimes, you know, your doctor doesn't know that you're taking whatever else you're taking. And you need to know that there are interactions between the drugs that you're prescribed to take and something that you may think is very benign. Things like that is just what we want to do. We want to really bring information to the seniors, help them link and connect with whatever it is that will help make their lives, you know, better.

**CHAIRMAN STERN:**

So if Tina's able to have this conversation and provide education, even provide direction, even provide forms, she's still or anybody associated with this project, they don't have the ability to actually receive applications? That's still right now something that seniors would have to do on their own, I mean. Ultimately if they need to make application for services they can receive the guidance, but still it has to be submitted to someone at --

**MS. ROSENTHAL:**

Right.

**CHAIRMAN STERN:**

-- Department of Health --

**MS. ROSENTHAL:**

Right.

**CHAIRMAN STERN:**

-- or DSS or whatever it is. There's still that additional step that they have to take on their own, correct? Even in this model?

**MS. ROSENTHAL:**

Yeah, pretty much. I mean, we'll help, you know, as a case management kind of role, we'll help them out fill out the forms and even sometimes accompany them if that's something that we can do. But, yeah, I think ultimately they do have to make those. So if there's a way to, you know, bring those services to the seniors --

**CHAIRMAN STERN:**

Right.

**MS. ROSENTHAL:**

-- more directly, we'd be open to working with you on that.

**CHAIRMAN STERN:**

Very good. Legislator Eddington.

**LEG. EDDINGTON:**

I'm just trying to get the role that your organization plays. I mean, like the town -- say the Town of Brookhaven has an Office of Aging. Suffolk County obviously has one. Do you facilitate -- in other

words, how do you get your clients? Do they have to -- do you get them from the town or the County or do you pursue them actively? Or, you know.

**MS. ROSENTHAL:**

Well, many ways, I would have to say. We do a lot of outreach, a lot of mailings. We have mailed thousands of newsletters, thousands of fliers, postcards.

**LEG. EDDINGTON:**

Kathy, how do you know who to send to? Am I going to get one?

**MS. ROSENTHAL:**

Everyone in this census track will get a mailing.

**LEG. EDDINGTON:**

Oh, so you get the age of the person?

**MS. ROSENTHAL:**

Because we don't give it just to the seniors because a neighbor might say, oh, Mrs. Smith, did you know about this? And they might encourage them to attend.

**LEG. EDDINGTON:**

So it's sent out to the general population in a specific area?

**MS. ROSENTHAL:**

Right, right.

**LEG. EDDINGTON:**

Got it.

**MS. ROSENTHAL:**

And we use the voter registration --

**LEG. EDDINGTON:**

Got you; okay.

**MS. ROSENTHAL:**

-- information to get that data.

**LEG. EDDINGTON:**

Great. Okay, thank you.

**MS. ROSENTHAL:**

But we do a lot of outreach. Again, we're in the community. Tina's doing presentations at the library or the civic groups or, you know, wherever she can get a soap box to stand on where seniors might be. And then she also does lots of mailings to let the seniors know, on Thursday, December whatever, I'm going to be speaking on X,Y,Z at -- and hopefully, you know, then word of mouth spreads. I mean we've -- you know, in -- Project Independence is a little bit more mature in its development. And we've just had such a huge success there. And I think that Tina's going to be able to do the same thing. As I said, we have 50 individuals that we've surveyed. We've seen probably close to 200 people. Then there's -- it's not un-duplicated, but in -- we gave out -- we had a Flu Program. So our nurse gave out flu shots for free at the center. Oh, actually, they did it at the library, at Harborfields Library. So like that's another program that we've implemented.

**LEG. EDDINGTON:**

Okay, thank you.

**MS. ROSENTHAL:**

Okay.

**CHAIRMAN STERN:**

Very good. Okay. Kathy, thank you.

**MS. ROSENTHAL:**

Anytime you want to talk about this topic, I'm there.

**CHAIRMAN STERN:**

And continue to think about in what ways we'd be able to provide assistance to the effort.

**MS. ROSENTHAL:**

Great, thank you.

**CHAIRMAN STERN:**

All right. Very good.

**MS. ROSENTHAL:**

I will.

**CHAIRMAN STERN:**

All right. We have one item on the agenda. We have a memorializing resolution.

***MEMORIALIZING RESOLUTION***

**MR 58, Memorializing Resolution in support of New York State Assembly Bill A 09514, to disseminate information to Local Veterans Service Agencies (Stern)**

**LEG. EDDINGTON:**

Motion to approve.

**CHAIRMAN STERN:**

Motion to approve by Legislator Eddington. I'll second the motion. Anybody on the motion? On the motion? This is legislation in support of what they're trying to do up in Albany. It really goes to what we've been discussing here the last couple of sessions in trying to get the information on returning veterans so that we can be better informed of who's returning and better outreach effort to provide services to those who desperately need them, so. All right. Call the vote. All in favor? Any Opposed? Any abstentions? Motion carries. **(VOTE: 4-0-0-1. Not Present: Legislator Cooper)**

And that's it. Anybody else? Anybody else? Very good, we are adjourned.

**(THE MEETING CONCLUDED AT 1:40 PM)  
{ } DENOTES SPELLED PHONETICALLY**