

VETERANS AND SENIORS COMMITTEE
OF THE
SUFFOLK COUNTY LEGISLATURE
MINUTES

A meeting of the Veterans and 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 March 16, 2015.

Members:

Legislator Steven Stern - Chairman
Legislator Tom Barraga - Vice-Chair
Legislator Sarah Anker
Legislator Al Krupski
Legislator Tom Muratore - excused

Also In Attendance:

Legislator DuWayne Gregory - Presiding Officer
Jason Richberg - Chief Deputy Clerk
Sarah Simpson - Assistant Counsel to the Legislature
Debbie Harris -Aide to Legislator Stern
Bill Shilling - Aide to Majority Leader
Tom Ronayne - Director of Veteran's Services
Holly Rhodes-Teague - Director of Office for the Aging
Rick Brand - Newsday
All Other Interested Parties

Minutes Taken and Transcribed By:

Gabrielle Severs - Court Stenographer

*(*The meeting was called to order at 11:32 a.m. *)*

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Good afternoon, everyone, and welcome to our committee on Vets and Seniors. I'm going to ask everyone to please rise and join us in the Pledge of Allegiance led by Legislator Krupski.

(*Salutation*)

Please remain standing and join us in a moment of silence as we keep all of our brave women and men fighting for our freedoms overseas in our thoughts and prayers.

(*Moment of Silence Observed*)

Thank you.

Did you guys do rock, paper, scissors to see who would like to -- (laughter).

Holly, come on up. While we are welcoming Holly, let me please note for the record that Legislator Muratore is not joining us today. He has an excused absence.

MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:

Well, happy almost spring, I think. We're there. It's sunny out. We're all happy. I just have a couple quick things. One is from the last time. The HEAP program was extended until March 27, and they are doing a second emergency benefit, so again if you have your residents out there that really had a difficult winter and maybe they had all the HEAP they could get, there's a potential they could get one more benefit, so they should really either call our office if they're over 60 or Social Services to see about the extra benefit, and they will close close of business March 27 for the whole program for the year.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Holly, how is that being advertised?

MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:

You know, I don't know. I just received the information last week. I don't know how they put it out there. I don't know how they ever publicize HEAP, to tell you the truth. I don't know if there's a lot of publicity around it. They really thought this program was going to end very early this year, so we're fortunate it has been open as long as it has.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

So, really, very important that we're all aware of it so that we can, in each of our local district offices, that we can use all of our means to get the word out there.

MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:

Just like I said, March 27, so, what, a week from this Friday, so there's not a lot of time, but again that extra second emergency benefit could be huge for some people. The other thing I just wanted to let you know about is the White House Conference on Aging is taking a whole different turn this time around. When they did it in past history, they used to do a big gathering in Washington D.C., and they would have a couple days of forums, workshops, things like that. Apparently, due to a lack of funding, they are not doing it that way this year. They're going to several areas around the country. They will do listing sessions from Washington to these areas. The closest one to New York is Boston. The New York State Office For the Aging is trying to gather information because they believe that that state director will be attending the Boston meeting, which is in May, so they

are doing their own listing tours around New York State. The closest one for us is on Long Island, and it will be at the atrium at Malloy College, which is at the Republic Airport, and it will be held on March 27 from 2:00 to 4:00, which is a week from Friday, and they are looking to really to get input on a number of different areas: retirement security, healthy aging, long-term services, and supports and elder justice; so we have been putting out e-mails to the aging network to let people know about it, and I have flyers if you all would like them. But it might be the only way, in addition to maybe going online and making comments to really get information to Washington as to what people are feeling about different topics, so it's a whole different outlook this time around than it was in past history.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

At this point, do you see that any county participation would be limited to making some type of appeal to the state as they go around the state, or do you see any participation in Boston?

MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:

My understanding is that Boston, as in all of them around the country are going to be invitation only, so I'm not really sure how those invitations are going out. You know, if we hear about it, obviously we would go, but I'm not sure that invitations are being extended. I don't know how far out the invitations are being extended. So I do know the state director is assuming that she will be going, so that's why they're trying to gather their information as best they can from New York State so they can share it in Boston. So I will give you the flyers; I'll hand those out now. But that's all I have. Oh, and the luncheon, May 14. Don't forget about it.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Anybody for Holly? Okay, Holly. Thank you.

Director Ronayne.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

And I almost always go rock; I don't know how she got me this time.

Good afternoon. Thank you, as always, for the invitation. I'll be very brief. A couple of items. I just wanted to make you aware that tomorrow at Adelphi University, the Mental Health Association of New York and Adelphi are hosting a mental health conference, and it will be primarily focused on the issue and care needs specific to veterans, so we will be in attendance at that conference tomorrow, and I'll be looking forward to reporting back to you on the content and on any outcome that we may have as a result. This is the second, I believe, annual conference that they've held on this topic, and last year was very productive, so I hope for this one. I know that Colonel Hesse, Eric Hesse, who is the director of the New York State Division of Veterans Affairs, is coming down from Albany so he'll be in attendance for the full day at the conference. It's always encouraging when the guys in Albany come down to see us for whatever's going on on the Island.

Speaking of Albany, Senator Croci has recently repopulated and reactivated the Veterans and Military Advisory Board that that office had in place under then-Senator Zeldin. I have been invited to sit on that panel and we, this past week, had our first meeting, so I will also report back as appropriate when we have discussions. I will tell you that the original panel was the John P. Jennings Veterans Advisory Panel, and that was the body that ultimately resulted in the creation and the establishment of the Joseph Dwyer Program, so not that past results are any indication of future outcomes, but we're hopeful that this will continue to be a very productive and strong advocacy body.

I would also -- from time to time, I have reported on the very serious issue and I think, unfortunately, the under-reported issue of MST, or military sexual trauma -- this issue has been

receiving a little bit more profile over the past several years, largely in part due to the efforts of Senator Gillibrand. The V.A. at Northport on April 1 will be hosting an all-day MST or military sexual trauma conference with some leaders in the field presenting, and we have been discussing -- I've been discussing with one of the presenting providers, perhaps having a screening of the film that I have spoken of here, *The Invisible War*, at that conference if they can carve out time at the end of the day. We are working with that provider and V.A. to identify some time where we can fit this. I believe it's about an 80-minute film, so we're hoping to be able to do that. The significance of hosting this film at this conference would be that we have been discussing dates and venues to host a screening of this film in the community, and by including a screening with many of the providers in this area who are specifically geared toward working in this field, it would give us, I think, a greater opportunity to advocate within the community and have a strong response when we do hold a public screening, and I will report back to you on that as well.

LEG. ANKER:

What's the date again?

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

April 1, and that will be in building five, the auditorium building at Northport V.A. Registration begins at, I believe, 8:30 a.m.

Certainly we are still working very hard. We continue to be very excited about the upcoming Suffolk County marathon and half marathon to support our veterans. The progress is slow but steady. The number of registrants has been increasing steadily, and I believe GLIRC, the Greater Long Island Running Club, who is our event manager for the race, will be beginning their marketing campaign in early April. My understanding is it would be next month, the actual marketing. So we've been moderately successful -- I shouldn't say that. I think we have been very successful, but with no marketing in place yet, the expectations, I think, were not as high as to suggest that we would have been as successful as we have been to date with numbers of registrants and getting the word into the community. I'm sure once the marketing campaign begins that we'll really see a surge in activity and interest in these events, so we're very excited about that. The marathon has been a topic of discussion in the community, and we're working hard to ensure that this will be a successful event.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Tom, at this point, has there been an estimate given as to what the expected number of registrants should ultimately be?

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

The working number at this time, my understanding, is 5,000 runners. There has been some talk about maybe increasing that estimate, but for the moment I believe it is at 5,000. I can get that information for my next presentation here, but I would tell you that Ryan McGarry in the county executive's office has been the day-to-day point of contact in terms of really all things marathon, so I will check back in with Ryan, but I believe that we're still working with the 5,000 participant numbers.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

And do you know whether the number that they're looking at is an estimate of what will be the big race? Does that include any of the other smaller events leading up to it?

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

I believe that's an inclusive number. I think the 5,000 is an overall number. The decision was made in concert between GLIRC and Suffolk County that they are not going to be a series of smaller events. It will be the marathon and the half marathon. They are not going to do a 5K; they're not

going to do a 10K; it'll be just the two races. Just to avoid any possible confusion, if you do hear of other races associated with the marathon, we are in the process, and we've been very well received, with establishing a veterans series of races, and there are several other races that have occurred throughout Suffolk County during the race season that we have met with and are forming a five-race veteran series. It would be the Michael Murphy Run Around The Lake, the Hopeful Warriors Run in Babylon, the Cow Harbor Warriors Run in Northport, and the -- I did the Grid Race, also in Northport. What we're doing is developing a series, a veterans series so that anybody who participates in all five of these races, to include ours culminating in the series, would receive a special medal, and the medal, I think, has evolved now. It won't be an actual medal, but it will be a challenge coin that is being made to be specific to these races and to this event, and I think the decision was made to use a challenge coin versus as medallion-type medal because of the -- in many way, challenge coins have significance to the military and veteran community, and we thought it appropriate.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Okay.

LEG. BARRAGA:

There's no plan right now to have a 5K or a one-mile kind of run/walk for those cannot participate in the marathon or half marathon? Because there are many race groups that have the smaller events but can't do a half marathon but they can do a 5K or a walk/run or a circle around the track at a school.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

I know that there have been some discussions on this topic. Fun runs, the smaller runs, but I can tell you that any decisions that have been made have been made with the counsel and advice of GLIRC, the Greater Long Island Running Club. I would defer any specific questions in terms of the actual construct of the event to Ryan McGarry, only because I don't meet with Ryan on a daily basis to discuss the race, and if there are points that are evolving, I may very well not be aware of them on a day-to-day basis, so I wouldn't want to misspeak and confuse or complicate anything for anybody.

LEG. BARRAGA:

I just think it would get a lot more to participate if you had (inaudible) as opposed to somebody coming -- not being able to participate themselves for one reason or another but they could do a shorter run or a shorter walk.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

I'd be very happy to bring up the issue again. I will raise the topic at our next meeting and we'll reexplore it.

LEG. BARRAGA:

I'm aware of a couple that have like a one-mile walk or run, and they get over 1,000 People just to participate in that, and people are capable of doing it, but they're not capable of running 5K or 13 miles or 26 miles.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

I will bring it up at our next meeting.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

I know that all of us would look forward to the beginning of the advertising effort on the part of the organization to help raise awareness about the upcoming race, so perhaps you'll, or someone in the administration should, make sure that as advertising materials are being produced and released,

that perhaps all of us have access to that so we can help raise awareness and promote a great cause within our legislative districts in the months coming up.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

Was that an offer to place some race literature in all 18 legislative offices?

CHAIRMAN STERN:

I made the offer to do that in Legislator Anker's office.

LEG. ANKER:

And I'll make the offer for Legislator Stern, too.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Anybody else for the director?

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

Thank you.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

As always, Director, thank you.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

Thank you very much.

Turning to the agenda, then, we have before us tabled resolutions.

IR 1041, Adopting Local Law No. -2015, A Local Law to protect the honor of decorated veterans (Spencer). This had been in public hearing, which is closed and is now before us, so I'll make a motion to approve.

LEG. ANKER:

Second.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Second by Legislator Anker. All in favor? Any opposed? Any abstention? IR 1041 is **approved**.
(VOTE: 4-0-0-1, Excused: Muratore).

There being no other business before the committee, we are adjourned.

*(*The meeting was adjourned at 11:48 a.m. *)*