

**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 April 20, 2015.

**Members Present:**

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

**Also In Attendance:**

Jason Rosenberg - Chief Deputy Clerk  
George Nolan - Counsel to the Legislature  
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 11:43 a.m.\*)

**CHAIRMAN STERN:**

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

(\*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\*)

Again, welcome, everybody. Good afternoon. Thank you for joining us. Before we go to Introductory Resolutions, we do have guests with us today. Holly, let's start with you.

**MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:**

Hello. I guess I'd like to ask for your support for the resolution that's in front of you on replacing vehicles. As most of you know with the nutrition programs, we need vehicles to get people to the centers where they have a meal or to provide those meals in the community. In the county, I've been really fortunate the last 20 years. We've done capital projects to maintain the fleet. The county provides the vehicle out to the contractors, so I lease the contracted vehicles out to them. They provide the fuel, the insurance, the drivers and that, so it really is a cooperative relationship we have with our contractors to provide those meals, and without the vehicles, we would not be able to provide them, so I'm hoping that you will continue to support that. We do not increase the size of the fleet. We've kept it pretty stable over all these years. We have somewhere around 50 vehicles that are purchased through capital, and we go by the condition of the vehicle and the mileage of the vehicle and things like that, so we keep an eye on that as we ask the for vehicles to be switched around, so I appreciate your support.

The vehicles that we're looking to purchase, one is a center-aisle bus because it takes new people to and from the centers and also can deliver if they have to; and the other one is just a vehicle to deliver because that program is a home-delivered meal program only, so those are the two that are in front of you today.

The other thing I just wanted to mention is that New York State Office for the Aging did do their White House Conference on Aging seminar in Farmingdale a couple weeks ago. They had approximately 50 people there between Nassau and Suffolk. Legislator Stern was there. Thank you for your support on that. They went over the four topics that they were really interested in: healthy aging, elder justice, community services, and the fourth, I forgot what the other one is, so you could just take a look at it at your leisure. But they had questions that they wanted people to consider and then they ask for people's comments. That information that was taken there is similar to what they were doing around the state at five other locations, and that will be submitted in a report by the state director to the White House Conference on Aging meeting that will be held in Boston in May because that's by invitation only, so she was taking New York's concerns in one package to that meeting when she goes in May, so I just wanted to give you a little heads-up on that. Any questions that I can answer for anyone?

**CHAIRMAN STERN:**

Yeah. Holly, the resolution before us today, it's \$112,058 for the purchase of the replacement vehicles, two vehicles.

**MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:**

Yes.

**CHAIRMAN STERN:**

After this resolution is approved, what kind of timing do you anticipate?

**MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:**

It takes a while to get vehicles because we go by state bid. The center-aisle vehicle, you know, they have to generally -- you order it and they build it. The other one, it depends on what's out there. Depending on purchasing, they might be able to find one locally that we can purchase. Generally, when it's a home-delivered meal vehicle, we're looking for, like, a hybrid-type of vehicle, maybe a Ford Escape-type of vehicle, you know, where they have room in the back to put the meals but it's somewhat efficient in terms of mileage because in the old days, they weren't quite efficient; and the programs, you know, they don't have the money, really, to pay for gas and stuff, so we try to help them out with that as best we can.

**LEG. STERN:**

And then the vehicles that are no longer used?

**MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:**

Those vehicles that they turn in because, again, we don't increase the size of the fleet. They turn them in to us, and then they go to DPW. DPW will then auction them off when they do one of their auctions. They ultimately belong to Suffolk County, but we lease them out for long term.

**LEG. STERN:**

Legislator Krupski.

**LEG. KRUPSKI:**

Thank you. My question was towards the vehicle and who makes the decision as to what type of vehicle to buy.

**MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:**

The center-aisle vehicles, we went to -- I can't remember how many years ago -- we started doing those. They're more expensive, but they are much easier for seniors to get in and out of the center aisles. They are all ADA-compliant. You know, in the old days, we used to do the Econoline vans; this way, nobody could use the third seat. I mean, you know, they had to go over the wheel well to get to it. I mean, they were really just not very user friendly, so we've gone to the more expensive vehicles but they are definitely much needed for the older population that we serve. And then for the home delivered, we do try to buy something that's more efficient.

**LEG. STERN:**

Okay. Anybody else for Holly? I just want to say, Holly, it was good to be with you at the White House conference event that they had had, and it was interesting, I'm sure you would agree, that a lot of the comments that had come from so many of the attendees, it was good to hear, actually, that a lot of their concerns, a lot of their ideas are exactly the kinds of things that you and your staff are doing here in Suffolk County, so that was good --

**MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:**

Makes us feel a little better that we're doing what we're supposed to; it definitely does. And it was quite a cross-section of people who were at that event when I'm still trying to get a list of the attendees which I haven't received yet. But they were from all over the place, a lot of home care agencies were at it, you know, agencies that we contract with, agencies that Nassau contracted with. There's a huge need for services, and nobody wants us to forget about community-based, and

I'm happy about that.

**LEG. STERN:**

Thank you.

**MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:**

Yep.

**LEG. STERN:**

Director Ronayne.

**DIRECTOR RONAYNE:**

Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman, Members. Most of what I have to report on today is really housekeeping just to keep you informed of some of the programs and activities that are in various stages of being underway. Obviously, the marathon, we are still very engaged. We are very excited about the marathon. It's being very well-received in the community. Now that we are sort of into the season where the weather seems to have shifted in our favor and the ability for folks to be able to go out into the community walk through to go out into the community and train and be a part of preparing for this event, we're seeing a lot more interest and activity in the community.

Last week, we were fortunate that we were able to announce publicly with the county executive the Suffolk County Marathon Veterans' Series, and what the Veterans' Series is, for anybody who may not be familiar, is a group of races, they pre-existed the marathon and they take place at various times throughout the season in different parts of Suffolk County. The common theme in all of these races is that they are military or veteran in their design for what they are intended to support. What we've done is we've created a veterans race series centered around our marathon, and this really is an opportunity for not only these other races and the communities that support those races to come on board and be additionally supportive to our marathon, but these tend to be smaller, not in all cases, but for the most part, they tend to be smaller events that will benefit tremendously by their affiliation with our marathon. They will have placement on the Suffolk County Marathon website, and we expect that those smaller races will benefit enormously by their affiliation with the marathon. Anybody who participates, veteran or nonveteran, who participates in each of the five races that comprise the Veterans Series will be presented with a special commemorative challenge coin that has been designed specifically for the acknowledgement of participation in the race -- in the veterans race series. It'll be interesting to see how that develops. It seems to be receiving very wide support, and we are in the homestretch of advancing the races and looking forward to it.

We attended this morning, the chairman and I, were in attendance at a ceremony this morning with Legislator Spencer who sponsored the enhancement of the Veterans Valor Act in Suffolk County. We were joined by the county executive, Legislator Trotta, and members of the community, Mayor Dolan, some of the officials from the Village of Northport, Supervisor Petrone from the Town of Huntington and a great many veterans. I would say the attendance in the room was certainly in the excess of 100, and it was gratifying to see a strong response, even on a not-so-pleasant day, to see a strong response from the community to turn out and be a part of the bill signing where the county executive signed into the law the bills specific to Stolen Valor and the deceptive practices that we have unfortunately witnessed in Suffolk County with regard to solicitation and raising of funds on behalf of veterans. These two acts will strengthen our ability to ensure that the folks engaged in these types of activities are doing so legitimately and that we are protecting the interests of our veterans as well as the members of our general community, so that was outstanding.

This weekend, I know the presiding officer -- who just joined us -- the presiding officer will be attending the dinner on Saturday evening for the American Gold Star Mothers. The American Gold Star Mothers will be holding their annual -- their 2015 convention in Suffolk County this coming weekend, Friday, Saturday, Sunday. This will be the first time that this group has met as a group in

Suffolk County since, we believe, 1964. They will be bringing gold star mothers and gold star families from, obviously, many areas outside of the Long Island region and they will be -- primarily of interest to the community would be the memorial ceremony, which will be taking place on Friday evening. This will take place at the Courtyard Marriott in Ronkonkoma at exit 60. That will be at 7:00 p.m.; and on Saturday, the banquet dinner for the Gold Star Mothers will take place at the East Wind catering facility in Wading River. Just wanted to make sure that everybody was aware of that and is up to date. You may have received invitations in your offices. The invitations that were sent stated that the dinner on Saturday was going to take place at the Courtyard Marriott. They outgrew that venue, so the dinner has been moved. Just please be aware of that. Anybody going to the Courtyard on Saturday evening will be eating alone. We're very honored to have this organization here in Suffolk County with us this year.

Not insignificantly it's important to mention that the reason it is here in Suffolk County this year is that their president for 2015 is Michele McNaughton, who I know many of you know, Michele McNaughton being the mother of Sergeant James McNaughton who was KIA in Iraq, and given Michele being a Suffolk County resident, she thought it important to bring it to our area.

My apologies. I wanted to apologize to the chairman for not being able to attend his annual monster mini golf event. Unfortunately, or fortunately, my wife and I and our family were on vacation. We were not in New York, and I was unable to be there, but, you know, we always try to be supportive of that event. It's always a nice thing to be able to get the families together and watch the children, the young and the not-so-young, enjoy themselves at that event, so congratulations on again pulling that off, and I know, despite your many, many, many hours of hard work and effort, Debbie has a small role in that and I just wanted to acknowledge that through Debbie's hard work and efforts, that event is always well anticipated, and everybody's always very happy when they take part in that.

I'd like to mention -- this doesn't directly involve us, and it is not taking place in Suffolk County, but I'm a little bit of a Teddy Roosevelt buff, and I'm happy to announce that Sagamore Hill, after having undergone extensive renovation and, I'm told, beautification -- I don't know how they would have made it more beautiful -- will be rededicated and reopened on July 4, this coming July 4. I mention this primarily because the Theodore Roosevelt Division of the U.S. Sea Cadet Corps., which is based out of Rocky Point, has been chosen as the honor guard and the ceremonial detail for this rededication, so I think it's a great honor for a Suffolk County unit to have been selected. They are the namesake of Theodore Roosevelt, but I thought that having an entity from Suffolk County be having such a central role in the rededication of Sagamore is noteworthy, and I wanted y'all to be aware of that. As literature, programs, fliers anything of that nature become available, I'll be sure to forward it to you. I haven't seen anything of that type yet, but as I have access to it, I can certainly forward it along to the community, and barring any unanticipated changes, that's where I'll be on July 4.

**LEG. STERN:**

Legislator Krupski.

**LEG. KRUPSKI:**

I've got a question about the veterans' office at the county center in Riverhead.

**DIRECTOR RONAYNE:**

Yes, sir.

**LEG. KRUPSKI:**

And it's closed now.

**DIRECTOR RONAYNE:**

We had an unexpected retirement take place in that office. We weren't given -- we were given less than two weeks' notice that the service officer manning that office was retiring. I'm in the process now. I've already met with my office and we are going to be reassigning a service officer to that office. To compound the issue of presence in that office, unfortunately, we provide space in that office for the New York State Division of Veterans Affairs; unfortunately, we also learned fairly recently that the counselor employed by New York State Division of Veterans Affairs who occupies an office in that suite of offices was recently diagnosed with a -- she believes to be a terminal illness. She was diagnosed with leukemia, and she is on indefinite leave, so within a very short period of time, we lost counselors in that office unexpectedly. We were not in a position to have prepared for it, but again, we are -- we do intend in probably the next week or two to reopen that office. It's a critically important office, it's always been there, and we're well aware of it. We are tracking, and we're doing the very best that we can right now.

**LEG. KRUPSKI:**

I appreciate that, and I'll pass that on because we certainly get a lot of calls about that, if people were alarmed, you know, and what happened, you know, when they show up because they expect it to be there, so I appreciate your due diligence on keeping on top of that.

**DIRECTOR RONAYNE:**

And I'll keep you specifically informed of the progress as we get back in in terms of I'll provide you with the contact and communication information for the service officer that will be assigned to take over that office.

**CHAIRMAN STERN:**

Anybody else for the director? All right. Director, thank you.

**DIRECTOR RONAYNE:**

Thank you.

**LEG. STERN:**

Okay. It is my pleasure to welcome Melissa Schumacher, who joins us today. Melissa is a director at the Arbors Assisted Living Communities and she's here to speak to us about some of the very important and very pertinent programs that her organization offers, so thank you for being with us today.

**MS. SCHUMACHER:**

Thank you. Thank you for having me. As Legislator Stern said, I'm from the Arbors Assisted Living so we have five locations on Long Island, and the reason I'm here today is because we do a lot for our veterans on Long Island. So obviously most people living in our community are World War II veterans at this time, but we -- the Federally-Funded Aid and Attendance Pension Program, as I'm sure you all know, we have always been bringing that up to our families and our residents moving in because it's a big help for the residents living in our community to have that pension program to help pay for it; and then on top of that program, we, the Arbors, a few years back created our Heroes' Welcome Program, and our Heroes' Welcome Program was -- it's to recognize all the veterans, first responders, and then even healthcare heroes. So we did start it a few years ago just for veterans and their immediate families to receive up to 10 percent off the monthly rent as well as the federally-funded aid and attendance program, so with both of those together, hopefully to bring down the rent to make it more affordable for them, and in the years, it's been so successful for everybody moving in that we extended it to first responders and healthcare professionals, So it's for them moving into our communities as well as their extend families, their immediate families. So we try to grasp everybody in that so that they could really have a nice affordable place to go to that's absolutely beautiful in my mind, and all the residents are very well taken care of.

So with the two combined, we do a lot for the veterans for that. We not only offer them the discount, but we have a lot of different seminars in our communities, aid and attendance seminars that are hosted by our veterans liaisons, and we do that quarterly. We try to be a resource to everybody on the Island in terms of what they can get in assisted living to make it affordable. And we have veterans chats for all of our residents about every month and community to be invited in as well to get together to talk about what they have been through and figure out ways to work together. So it's been great for our residents living in our communities and we have five on Long Island, and that's what our program is.

**LEG. STERN:**

So you have five communities; they are located where?

**MS. SCHUMACHER:**

So we have two in Islandia, one in Hauppauge, one in Bohemia, and one in Westbury, so we're primarily out in Suffolk County. Our Westbury location is our only Nassau County one, and all of our communities are strictly assisted living, but Islandia does have a dementia neighborhood for residents who might need a -- more of a secure community due to advanced Alzheimers. And our communities are starting at right now \$2,900 a month, which is extremely affordable for assisted living on Long Island, and that's all inclusive with everything included in their rate. Not anything is extra. So we really try -- we choose to keep it affordable. The president of our company chooses to make it that way. We don't have to, but we really wanted to be for middle America and also for those residents who want to move in and not spend so much and maybe save money for their children in the future, so we do have the five on Long Island.

**LEG. STERN:**

And when residents or their families come to you or the professionals that you have there, in your experience, do many of them know that there is an aid and attendance program, or is it something that many of them are learning for the first time?

**MS. SCHUMACHER:**

Many of them are learning for the first time. We've made it a true -- every single person in our community speaks about the benefits of family coming in. Most of them do not, unfortunately, know about the benefits and are very surprised when they hear that they can actually have some extra financial help to pay for it, and it's a huge help for our residents and the families because it takes off a nice financial burden for them; but, no, we are educating them mostly on the benefit. A few years ago, we really started with educating them and we just keep educating them. They are not very aware of it. They are not very aware of much, unfortunately. It's a very hard time.

**LEG. STERN:**

And certainly the aid and attendance program can be critically important and really make the difference.

**MS. SCHUMACHER:**

It can make the difference 'cause if someone's coming in and they are just, you know, shy of the rent or they need a couple of extra bucks, the veterans getting almost 17 and change a month or the spouses, especially, getting, you know, almost 1150 a month, coming in can help if you have a social security of 1500 and the widow's getting that benefit and the rent is 29, there's not a huge gap, so if there's not so much extra assets, families can help a little bit more being that you have the aid and attendance pension, the Heroes' Welcome program, and then whatever the rent may be starting at 2900, so it really is juggle. It will affect them tremendously.

**CHAIRMAN STERN:**

Legislator Barraga.

**LEG. BARRAGA:**

So if the monthly fee is 2900, when you deduct the aid and attendance, what does it net then?

**MS. SCHUMACHER:**

Well, it depends. If it's the veteran coming in, you know, usually, then, you're looking at 1700 and change coming in so -- plus, though, their social security as well, so some of our veterans living in our communities, if they choose to go into a shared room at 2900 --

**LEG. BARRAGA:**

So once you deduct the aid and attendance, it drops from 2900 to, roughly, 1700, and then they -- you're looking, then, at social security.

**MS. SCHUMACHER:**

And then they'll put their Social Security towards it or their social security and pension, and if there's anything left over that they still have to pay out of their assets.

**LEG. BARRAGA:**

Does long-term care insurance play any role in assisted living?

**MS. SCHUMACHER:**

It depends on the policy. So basically if the long-term care insurance policy was taken out and it's in their policy that it will cover assisted living, then it will cover assisted living. Unfortunately, in this generation, most of the long-term care policies that were taken out at that time were more for nursing homes as well as 24-hour home care, so sometimes they are coming in with these policies and they don't have the assisted living part.

**LEG. BARRAGA:**

They don't have the assisted living element --

**MS. SCHUMACHER:**

If they do have the assisted living element, then they do qualify, and they come in, they assess that we're doing what we're saying, what we're doing, and then they do, depending on how much -- it could be \$100 a day, it could be \$300 a day depending on what they paid into it over the years. I think we'll see more and more of it than we do now.

**LEG. BARRAGA:**

How many veterans do you have now in your four or five different facilities?

**MS. SCHUMACHER:**

I'm not exactly sure of the number, but I would say -- I mean in each of our communities -- I know Hauppauge, we're at 50/50 in terms of men and women, which is crazy for assisted living -- mostly, it's usually all women -- and all of the men in there, I would say, or 95 percent of them are veterans, and you're probably split about 60/40 in the other communities. For whatever reason, our Hauppauge location happens to get more of the veterans and the men coming. I don't know why, but that's why -- but we have a lot of veterans living in the communities.

**LEG. BARRAGA:**

A \$2,900 figure is impressive because I'm aware of some assisted living facilities that most of them are 4-, 5-, 6-, 7,000 a month.

**MS. SCHUMACHER:**

\$2900 is for a shared, you know -- living with someone else and then your private rooms start at

about 4,000, but the difference between the Arbors and any other community is there's no a la carte charges for any care in our assisted livings. So if somebody needs help, which moving into an assisted living, you're there for a reason, so if you need med management or you need help with dressing or showering or toileting or any type of services, whether it's when they move in or as they age, the fee will never change for them so the family can financially plan. So not only is it affordable at the start, it's affordable their whole time that they're living with us, and it's very different than the other places.

**LEG. BARRAGA:**

Yeah, because I know of a number of assisted living facilities where they add on different elements --

**MS. SCHUMACHER:**

Right.

**LEG. BARRAGA:**

-- over and above the base, and it becomes extremely expensive.

**MS. SCHUMACHER:**

It does.

**LEG. BARRAGA:**

Thank you.

**MS. SCHUMACHER:**

You're welcome. Thank you.

**CHAIRMAN STERN:**

Director Ronayne.

**DIRECTOR RONAYNE:**

Thank you, Chairman. I certainly am not here to endorse the Arbors. What I will say is that we tend to do an awful lot of work -- we probably do more work through our agency with the Arbors than any of the other individual assisted livings in Suffolk County, and I think one of the reasons is that they have made a concerted effort to apply their programs specific to the needs and the interests of veterans. I can tell you that one of the things that they have done that has always impressed me is my former counterpart from Nassau County, Pat Angstrom, is the consultant and the full-time person who conducts seminars, A and A seminars, provides assistance in the preparation of applications and the other mechanics that go into developing not only A and A but service-connected disability claims for veterans. They also provide a uniquely high level of services to surviving spouses, and not necessarily surviving spouses; certain veteran spouses even with the veterans still living have eligibility for some of these programs, and they've been very good about accommodating the unique needs and some of the unique economics associated with dealing with this population.

We, over the years, have had veterans who have been able to reside in an assisted living at the Arbors after their aid and attendance, after their service-connected disability, after their social security where they will literally living there at no direct out-of-pocket cost, which is pretty significant when you consider the landscape in the healthcare field and specifically with the assisted living and nursing where they tend to become very expensive very quickly. They also have programs that are veteran-centric that they conduct within the buildings. When I go into an Arbors, the first thing you see upon entering their lobby is a sign that says "Heroes' Welcome," so from the moment you enter the property, they are extending themselves to provide a level of service to this

population who I think, without question, is deserving, but I commend them for taking the time, effort, and committing the resources necessary to do so.

**MS. SCHUMACHER:**

Thank you.

**CHAIRMAN STERN:**

Thank you. Thank you, Director. If we don't today -- very important and very impressive unique programs particularly in serving our veterans and our spouses. So again, if we don't today, certainly we want to make sure that all of us have some basic information if we're faced with questions within our district offices from our constituents about available services, especially as it relates to our veterans and our first responders, this is the kind of information that they can and should have. Thank you so much for being with us today, and thank you, Director.

**MS. SCHUMACHER:**

Thank you, and thank you for having me.

**CHAIRMAN STERN:**

Okay. Going, then, to the agenda, *Introductory Resolutions:*

**IR 1231, Appropriating funds in connection with the purchase and replacement of Nutrition Vehicles for the Office for the Aging (CP 1749) (Presiding Officer).**

**LEG. MURATORE:**

Motion.

**LEG. STERN:**

We heard from Holly on this.

**LEG. BARRAGA:**

Second.

**CHAIRMAN STERN:**

Motion to approve by Legislator Muratore. Second by Legislator Barraga. I'll call the vote. All in favor? Any opposed? Any abstentions? **IR 1231 is approved (VOTE: 5-0-0-0).**

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

**(\*The meeting was adjourned at 12:14 p.m.\*)**