

SUFFOLK COUNTY LEGISLATURE
PUBLIC HEARING
On
SUFFOLK COUNTY COMMUNITY COLLEGE BUDGET

JUNE 24, 2004

Minutes taken by:

Lucia Braaten, Court Stenographer

Hauppauge, New York

[THE PUBLIC HEARING WAS CALLED TO ORDER AT 10:05 A.M.]

LEG. NOWICK:

Good morning, everybody. We'll start with a salute to the flag, led today by George Gatta.

(* Salutation *)

LEG. NOWICK:

Okay. We have a few cards. Kim _Hernena_ , _Herena_ . Come on up, Kim. You can come right up here to the podium. I think the switch is on, if not, switch it on.

MS. HERRERA:

It's on. I came here today to talk on behalf of Suffolk Community College Technicenter.

LEG. NOWICK:

Give us your name for the record.

MS. HERRERA:

Kimberly Herrera. Okay. My name is Kimberly Herrera, and I'm a Training Specialist at Data Device Corporation in Bohemia. We are a manufacturing company and employ about 400

people. For the past three years, I have worked closely with the Suffolk County Community College Technicenter to provide an on-site English as a Second Language program to approximately 20 of our employees who are in need and have the desire to improve their written and oral English skills.

English as a Second Language is a skill that is in high demand today, but, unfortunately, there are few places that provide this type of training and do it well. From the start, Maureen David, an Account Executive with the Corporate Training, an Economic Development division of the Technicenter, was cooperative, innovative, and diligent in her approach for setting up this program on site at Data Device Corporation. It was not an easy task to take a program that was designed for delivery in an academic setting and customize it for a corporate on site delivery without sacrificing quality. After discussing the needs of DDC and the requirements of the ESL Program set forth by the College, we were able to build a unique and very successful program that has continued to increase in value over the past three years.

Part of the success is also attributed to Brenda Lesnick, the ESL instructor, provided by the Suffolk County Community College Technicenter. She has been dependable, knowledgeable and creative in her teaching style, and motivates the employees to remain in the program and improve their skills.

The benefit of such a quality program has positively impacted all of the employees in the program, as well as the departments in which they work, and ultimately the overall company. It has been a rewarding experience to partner with the Technicenter to bring much needed skills to our workforce. Thank you.

D.P.O. CARPENTER:

I have a question.

LEG. NOWICK:

Legislator Carpenter.

D.P.O. CARPENTER:

Kim, I have a question for you.

MS. HERRERA:

Sure.

D.P.O. CARPENTER:

How did you hear about the Technicenter?

MS. HERRERA:

While we were looking at different vendors back in 2001 to bring English as a Second Language on site, I went to the website and I identified the fact that they provided this type of training, and then I contacted and I got Maureen David.

D.P.O. CARPENTER:

Great.

MS. HERRERA:

And she's been working for me ever since.

D.P.O. CARPENTER:

I'm just wanting to see how our outreach efforts are working, and, obviously, they are. Thank you.

MS. HERRERA:

Okay, great. You're welcome.

LEG. NOWICK:

Thank you, Kim. Chris Lis Johnson.

MS. JOHNSON:

Good morning.

LEG. NOWICK:

Good morning.

MS. JOHNSON:

Audiovox Corporation employs about 500 in the Hauppauge Industrial Park. In April 2003, a couple of our assembly employees approached me saying that we should hold an ESL, English as a Second Language, class for them. I'm the Safety Director, the wellness Director, I manage the Employee's Suggestion Box Program, I run the employee newsletter. These are all other hats in addition to my title as Vice President of Systems Management, so I'm known as the caring and interested in improving morale and working conditions for the employees, so I guess that's why they approached me. Anyway, I told them yes, it was a great idea, but that the logistics would be impossible; first pick a day and a time that it would suit everybody, and then to find a teacher. They told me that about a dozen of them agreed that Fridays after work would be the best time, because we rarely ask them to work overtime on Fridays.

I was in the process of negotiating with a teacher when I received a flier from Suffolk County Community College on the Corporate ESL Training Program. I called and spoke with Maureen David, who convinced me to arrange the class through SCCC, so that we could get the benefit of the College's structure, student assessment and workbooks. Our first worksite class started at the end of May, with 14 students enrolled. In August, Maureen told me about and convinced me to apply for the SUNY Workforce Development Grant. The funding was approved, and about 40 of our employees had language skill assessments, and we now have employees attending PRE level and Level 1 classes, both at Audiovox and at SCCC's Brentwood Campus. There's a definite increase in the communication skills of these ESL students, and we believe this has improved their confidence and boosted their self esteem, making them happier, more productive employees.

In March of this year, we had a Stress/Time Management class for our Customer Service Reps. This was also arranged by Suffolk County Community College through the SUNY Workforce Grant. The feedback was very positive, and our attendees appreciated the opportunity to learn how to develop skills to help them better cope with their high stress environment.

The management of Audiovox is delighted that, thanks to these arrangements with SCCC, we have been able to offer these programs. When we first started bringing ESL classes to the workplace, there was some concern that the expense was not justifiable, because the students would be entry level, high turnover employees who would learn the language at our expense and then leave the company. While this will always happen to some extent, the alliance with SCCC has made this ESL program affordable for us, and we believe that having such programs

makes us a better company, helping to retain some of our employees, and as for those employees who do turn over, at least they're leaving and reentering the workforce with better skills. For that I'm happy to be a part of. Thank you.

LEG. NOWICK:

Thank you. It's just a question, so I understand it. Your company pays the school for the •• for someone to come out to your company and teach these people English as a Second Language; is that how it works?

MS. JOHNSON:

The first round was •• we paid the College.

LEG. NOWICK:

And now ••

MS. JOHNSON:

And then the second round, we got into the workforce grant, so we're paying at a discount under the grant.

LEG. NOWICK:

And now you have students actually going to the Brentwood Campus?

MS. JOHNSON:

Yes, under the workforce grant.

LEG. NOWICK:

This College just keeps reaching out. That's wonderful. Thank you.

MS. JOHNSON:

We think so.

LEG. NOWICK:

Kevin Peterman. Good morning, Kevin.

MR. PETERMAN:

Good morning. Obviously, I spoke the other day, and I'm not going to give you the same speech, but I do want to hit on a few other things that I think I need to express.

This morning, I want to talk a little bit about Nassau Community College, since we seem to compare ourselves to them often. One of the things I've discovered, as we all know, Nassau Community College has a one-campus operation, and, as you know, Suffolk has three campuses. One of the things that has always perturbed me is, with their one campus operation, their budget has always been significantly higher than ours. And even with the budget issues that they seem to have with recent years, they've been guaranteed a 4% increase for the next several years, 4 or 5% increase for the next several years, even with those budget problems. And I think that's important to emphasize, because here at the •• in Suffolk County, for the •• this could be the third year in a row, if we do not pump some more money into the budget, where we're going to get a zero increase from the County. As I mentioned the other day, 4% or the number 4 seems to be a magic number. I know, under the law, the College can't ask for more than 4%, but I'd like to see us come up with a lot more than that, because I don't think we should continue the trend that happened several years ago.

If you remember, it was about 10, 15 years ago where the College was not getting an increase from the County, for almost eight years we got zeros. And I don't want to •• I hope we don't continue or go down that path again, because that was, in my opinion, a real mistake. We'd have to do catch•up, that I think would be very difficult to do. I think we should think about having smart planning where we don't come with zeroes for several years and then have to play catch•up and try and get a 10 or 12% increase from the County.

So, it's something that I hope that the Legislature would consider, to maybe have a several year budget plan, so that we can plan. We've had a lot of •• we've been hiring new faculty, and I think we need to be able to tell people that there will be money in the budget and there will be money in the budget for the next year.

Also, as you know, the Governor has proposed in his budget a 5% reduction in State Aid, and for Suffolk, that's a 1.8 million dollar reduction. Now, we don't know what's probably going to happen with that until August at the earliest, so the College had to plan, assuming that we weren't going to get an increase, in fact, a decrease.

I think what I want to point out also is the percentage of share that the •• that the sponsor and the State is giving to the College is going down. According to the County Exec's recommended budget, the numbers will be going down significantly, and, in fact, it's Chart 3 in his book. In 2001•2002, the County's share of the College budget was 30.8% and the State's share was 27.2%. The 2004•2005 budget, the County's share will drop to 25.6% and the State share, if not restored, will be 25%. Obviously, the only other group that can make up the difference is the students. And I would hope that we wouldn't burden them anymore than we already are.

There's one other point I want to mention about the administrators at the College. SUNY has, as you well know, 30 community colleges, and Suffolk is consistently near the bottom of the list of administrative costs as a percent of total budget. I bring that up, because the new President wants to address some of the problems with the higher level administrators and their salaries, and I think she can do it and she wants to do it in this budget for well under \$200,000. I think it's something in a one •• in a \$138,000 budget, that's something that the College and that the Legislature, hopefully, will support. Some of the administrators at the College make 30 to \$40,000 less than their counterparts at Nassau.

And I would just hope that you would take these considerations into account when you deal with the Budgeting Office. Thank you.

LEG. NOWICK:

Thank you. Legislator Carpenter.

D.P.O. CARPENTER:

Kevin, I just wanted to thank you for raising those points about the contribution and the increase. I was here when it was eight consecutive years of no increase in County contribution, and then we had that one year in the mid '90's where we actually, to try and catch up, had to propose and we were fortunate to pass a 25% increase in the County contribution. And now, if we do not increase the County contribution, this would be the fourth straight year of flat contributions, so I think your points are very well taken. I don't want to see us in that position where we're trying to really catch up. So, I think an increase in the County contribution is certainly in order.

MR. PETERMAN:

Thank you. I agree. Thanks.

D.P.O. CARPENTER:

Oh, by the way, the information that we received from Budget Review Office was that Nassau Community College was proposing a 5% increase in their County contribution to the Community College.

MR. PETERMAN:

Okay.

LEG. NOWICK:

I think Legislator Carpenter and I are on the same page with that, just so you know. Thank you. Tom Breeden.

MR. BREEDEN:

Good morning. This is in the category of preaching to the choir. I see the best friends the Community College has are here, but I think part of what we do when we speak here is put things on the public record. I'm reminded of an anecdote about Franklin Roosevelt. People were lobbying him to do something, and he said, "I agree with you, now make me do it," so this is along that line of thinking."

The Community College is one of the major middle class benefits. Obviously, police protection benefits the middle class, but the Community College is a direct benefit to the people who pay a large part of the freight of Suffolk County. I think that, and I see Mr. Spero here, so I'm always a little nervous when they talk about money things, when I see him in the same room, but I have a feeling that this is •• that this is going to be a very good year for sales tax revenues. I think one of the things the tax cuts do, and we've had substantial tax cuts on the federal level, is it puts disposable income in the hands of people who already have some disposable income. And I think The Hamptons are going to be hopping this summer, so I think the sales tax revenues are going to be better than ever. And, as we all know, that's where a big part of the funding of Suffolk County comes from.

I understand that Kevin puts in his speech on Tuesday that the average property taxpayer pays \$6.58 a year for the Community College. We're proposing a 4 million dollar increase from the County for the Community College. Let me tell you where that number comes from. I have

documentation, which I will give you.

LEG. NOWICK:

Excuse me one second, Tom. What did you say the average taxpayer pays per year?

MR. BREEDEN:

Kevin Peterman said \$6.58 per household, and that's pretty consistent with what I've heard over the years. And that number, of course, is fairly small, because the property tax is not the major source of income, sales tax is, is a big source of income.

But the 4 million, where does it come from? Let me go back to those eight long, hard years when we had no increase from the County. We got a 25% increase from the County, and what that 25% did was bring the funding level to where it would have been, approximately, had we gotten annual increases. But what it overlooks is the total sum of money to the Community College was still far less. So what I did was, while I was proctoring an exam last night, I ran some numbers. So, again, these are approximate, so I'm hoping Jim will cut me a little slack here. But I believe that in '02-'03, the County gave us approximately 32 1/2 million dollars, something around that number. Had we gotten a 4% increase every year from that time until now, the total amount we would have gotten for the Operating Budget was a hundred and one and a half million dollars. Because we got two years of zeros, even if we get a 4% increase this year, the total amount over those three years from the •• from the sponsor is about 98.8 million dollars. That's even if we get a 4% increase this August. And so that's almost three million dollars, 2.65 million dollars less that the Community College would have gotten over those three years. That's a lot of broken sidewalks that could have been repaired, a lot of roofs that could have been repaired.

We had a roof on the Southampton building a year or two ago that needed emergency repairs. Deferred maintenance, as we all know, doesn't really save you money in the long run, it saves you money this year. But, when the roof collapses and you have to spend •• again, I'm going to make up a number, but I think it's approximately correct, I think we had to spend a million dollars to do that roof immediately, because water was pouring into offices. One of the offices it poured into was the Faculty Association office. You have to spend more money over the long run when you do deferred maintenance.

So, the last reason for this 4 million dollars that the Guild is requesting now is for various

reasons. I doubt the Legislature would be in a position to give us a 4% increase in a year from now, in August of '05. So, if we got the 4% contribution that we probably won't get then now, the total of all those things would be 4 million dollars more this August. That would bring us back to the total revenue stream that we would have gotten if we got a 4% increase each year.

Now, the Community College can •• we can take another zero, there's no doubt about it, but what we'll be missing is a new computer for this classroom that can show what's going on in the world today. What we'll be missing is the exempt administrators will continue to look for jobs. Some of them, I know for a fact, are looking for jobs, because it's a small community, we hear things. Maybe they'll get jobs, maybe they won, but it's not good for the Community College when the upper leadership is looking for jobs elsewhere. That's not a healthy thing.

We need the money. The 4 million dollars •• again, if 32 million dollars is \$6.58 per household, 4 million dollars is like an eighth of that, so we're talking about 70 cents more per property taxpayer. I think your Community College is worth 70 cents per household.

So, in conclusion, I realize I'm speaking to our most fervent supporters. We appreciate the support that you've given us over the past years. We understand that you're in a difficult position and have to make hard choices, we understand that, but an investment in the Community College is an investment in the children of the middle class. And students who go to the Community College have a higher probability of remaining in Suffolk County than those who choose to leave and go elsewhere. So, it's an investment not only in the children today, but the young adult who will stay here and live here and make their homes in Suffolk County. Thank you.

LEG. NOWICK:

Thank you. And, yes you are probably preaching to the choir, but putting this on the record is a good idea. And I think you know that Legislator Carpenter and I, how supportive we are. We are also graduates of Suffolk Community College, but •• and the other thing I said earlier is in this day and age of problems with •• money problems and economic problems, the Community College offers families an opportunity for two years to send their children to college to get credits for a lesser rate, and then they can go on, if they want. What we have here needs to be supported, definitely.

MR. BREEDEN:

Thank you.

LEG. NOWICK:

Legislator Carpenter.

D.P.O. CARPENTER:

Thank you. It really isn't a question for you, Tom, but thank you very much. And I do want to •• I see Counsel is here. We have a copy of the budget that's been submitted by the County Executive, and this is, and I guess Jim and Mea can confirm this for me, but I don't remember ever having a budget sent over and buried in the middle of the budget is an Introductory Resolution, you know, being introduced by the County Executive.

Now, I don't know if this was merely an opportunity to make, you know, a statement, because the title of this resolution is adopting a no tax increase, sound education, affordable tuition, Suffolk County Community College operating budget. And the "whereas" clause, interestingly enough, the first "whereas" clause, and I guess this is a justification on their part for not recommending an increase, was that the voters sent a loud, clear and very strong message on Tuesday, May 18th by voting down 46 school district budgets that had tax increase. Now, subsequent to that, the vast majority, if not all of them, and without doing the numbers, I'm going to guess it was 85 to 90% of all of the budgets that were put back up for reconsideration past overwhelmingly, and I can cite, particularly in West Islip, where the budget vote showed a thousand people •• there was a thousand vote swing voting no, and yet, when the budget went up again, this time it was a twelve hundred vote swing voting yes. And I think when people stopped to realize the facts, as we've heard this morning, if you let things go unattended, if you don't pay attention to repairs, you're going to pay more in the long run. And I'm asking you in this long-winded question, you know, what's the deal here, what is this resolution all about; do you know? I guess you might need a crystal ball for that one, but ••

MS. KNAPP:

As you said, this is the first time that we've seen a resolution like this, I guess, buried in the middle of a budget proposal. And, certainly, when it came in, the Legislative Clerk came to my office and asked the question as to how to treat this. In the past, budget resolutions were simply laid on as budget resolutions, and, ultimately, it was denominated by the County Executive as an Introductory Resolution, and, therefore, the Presiding Officer treated it as an

Introductory Resolution and allowed it to be, I believe, laid on as a late•starter; am I right about that?

MR. BARTON:

Monday. It hasn't happened yet.

MS. KNAPP:

Oh, okay. It is certainly the Legislative prerogative to decide whether or not to allow it to be laid on as a late•starter. And you are quite right, it is unusual. And we certainly, as a •• the Legislature will decide how they want to deal with it, but, certainly, it isn't •• it's an I.R. and not a budget resolution now.

D.P.O. CARPENTER:

Very first paragraph •• thank you •• of his message says this is the first operating budget of his administration, and maybe that's what it's all about, that he just doesn't know that this isn't the way to do it. But, Jim, do you have any read on this?

MR SPERO:

Yeah. If you read the resolution carefully, the first "resolved" clause speaks to Exhibit A that containing •• that we would adopt a budget containing the appropriations, revenues, positions, funds reserve items, reserve funds, line items, interfund transfers that's set forth on Exhibit A and clearly labeled, each of the pages of the budget has been labeled Exhibit A, referring back to this resolution. So, I believe the resolution was put into the budget document that it would become adopted by dint of law, because if the Legislature failed to address the resolution and make a change to it, it would become part of the adopted budget, as would any other line item that was not changed by the Legislature, because, typically, the budget is •• any line that's not changed by the Legislature automatically becomes an adopted line in the budget. So, I believe this was sort of, you could call it a back doorway to get the County Executive's resolution adopted without the Legislature probably taking a direct action on the resolution itself.

Secondly, the resolution is defective, I might as well point this out now since we're talking about it, because it speaks to appropriations and positions, and every page of the budget document is labeled Exhibit, except the position pages are not labeled Exhibit. So, if we adopted the County Executive's resolution, you could infer, or maybe do more than just infer,

that the positions are not adopted as part of the budget, because they're not labeled as Exhibit A in the budget document.

D.P.O. CARPENTER:

And would be subject to being eliminated?

MR. SPERO:

Possibly. That would be an interesting legal question, but ••

D.P.O. CARPENTER:

And I'm going to ask Counsel, if you could before Monday, to give me an answer, or us an answer, on what happens if we choose to ignore this I.R. and just take the budget as it's been presented in the past and follow that same set of procedures that, you know, this body has followed forever?

MR. SPERO:

I believe •• I believe the Legislature needs to take some action on the •• this resolution, either defeat it ••

MS. KNAPP:

Yes.

MR. SPERO:

•• and pass your own, or make some reference to it in whatever resolution the Legislature ultimately adopts to amend the budget.

LEG. CARPENTER:

Okay. Thank you. He certainly has sent over another interesting challenge to the Legislature.

LEG. NOWICK:

This goes to committee, right?

MS. KNAPP:

Yes.

LEG. NOWICK:

Won't this go to committee first? Okay. We have another card here, Pat Nauta.

MS. NAUTA:

Good morning. I'm Pat Nauta. I'm H.R. Manager with Lanco Corporation, and I just want to take a few moments of your time to let you know of our recent experiences with the Suffolk County Community College Corporate Training Center. In 2002, I contacted Maureen David in the Corporate Training and Economic Development Center ••

LEG. NOWICK:

Just speak into the microphone.

MS. NAUTA:

•• for information on offering an English as Second Language Program at Lanco.

Lanco employs over 200 Spanish•speaking employees in an effort to create an opportunity for advancement and to reduce the turnover rate. We offered these valued employees a 60•hour program to learn the English language, which would open the door to better opportunities within the company.

Under Maureen David's direction, ESL classes were offered according to seniority for two skill levels, and taken advantage of by more than 75 employees. The classes were for three hours on Saturdays for a period of ten weeks. The attendance was remarkable throughout the entire ten week. The feedback was so positive that we offered an additional course that ran over the summer. In 2003, Maureen was instrumental in applying for and receiving a workforce grant of \$15,000 in order for us to continue offering our employees this valuable training. Through the collective efforts of Maureen David, Director Bill Desimini and their devoted trainers, this program has created a company•wide positive reinforcement of Lanco's dedication to employee morale and development.

As a result of the Lanco Corporate Training Center relationship, we have significantly reduced turnover in our production operation. We've seen a noticeable sense of enthusiasm in the department, and have the Suffolk County Community College Training and Economic Development Center to thank for bringing us to the next level. Thank you.

LEG. NOWICK:

Thank you. Is there anybody else that wishes to be heard in this public hearing? Maybe I could ask you. I've heard some testimony about the English as a Second Language and the program. They must be talking about a certain amount of money that they're looking for in the budget. What are we •• what are they talking about here? Is it an increase they're looking for, or how much, or what is the dollar and cents?

MR. SPERO:

I'm not exactly sure what the speakers are referring to specifically. English as a Second Language is not a separate line item in the budget, it's part of the overall appropriations of the College. Generally, the level of appropriation recommended by the County Executive is what the College requested. There are some changes. The County Executive did include the ten new faculty positions, as requested by the College, and salaries were adjusted accordingly. Now, we're going to get behind the numbers and see just how well funded these positions are. But I'm not quite sure if the speakers see a problem with the ESL Program. And George Gatta ••

LEG. NOWICK:

George.

MR. SPERO:

•• is raising his hand.

MR. GATTA:

The speakers here representing businesses that the Corporate Training Center has been working with over the years and continues to work with are really not here requesting additional funds for ESL. The contracts through our Corporate Training Center are either paid directly by the company through a contractual arrangement to the Corporate Training Center to cover the cost of the instruction and some additional funds to cover instructional materials and overhead.

There is an ESL Program within the College itself, which is funded through the academic side of the College, but that's not the program of which they are speaking today. Those funds are included within the budget, and what's been requested has been provided within the document. So, we're not really at this point looking for anything additional beyond what's built

into the budget document.

LEG. NOWICK:

Oh, okay. I just wanted to understand, because there were a few speakers. Thank you, George. Is there anybody else? Well, then I will adjourn the meeting.

MS. KNAPP:

Close the hearing.

LEG. NOWICK:

Okay. I formally close the public hearing.

D.P.O. CARPENTER:

Before you do.

LEG. NOWICK:

Oh, wait, I formally don't.

D.P.O. CARPENTER:

Before you do, I think there's just one other point that we need to note. I know there was something in Newsday the other day, and I just see the Newsday reporter leaving, unfortunately, but the County Executive is proposing that they have the new positions, and, yet, there be no tax increase. And I'm just speaking to Budget Review and I'm saying, "But how is that possible," and he is recommending that they move 1.6 million dollars plus from the fund balance. And there are guidelines that SUNY recommends for what should be maintained in a fund balance, and, certainly, if we were to employ this kind of financial tactic, I think there was a term that the previous Budget Review Office Director had for that kind of fiscal gimmickry with one-shot revenues, and it would be a structural imbalance? Wasn't that something we used to hear all of the time when the County Executive tried to do that?

So, I think that's something, too, that we need to keep in mind, that it all sounds good and •• but we heed to do what's right, and I think what's right is to increase the County contribution, and I know under the leadership of the Chair of this committee, I think we're going to see that

happening.

(Applause)

LEG. NOWICK:

Boy, that feels really good. You want try it again?

(Applause)

Okay. I am going to make a motion to close the public portion.

D.P.O. CARPENTER:

Second.

LEG. NOWICK:

Second by Legislator Carpenter. All in favor? All opposed? Motion approved. And I guess this concludes this public hearing. Thank you.

[THE PUBLIC HEARING WAS CONCLUDED AT 10:40 A.M.]