

**SUFFOLK COUNTY LEGISLATURE**

**PUBLIC HEARING**

**ON THE**

**2009 OPERATING BUDGET**

A Public Hearing on the 2009 Operating Budget was held at Riverhead Town Hall, 200 Howell Avenue, Riverhead, New York, on October 10, 2008 at 10:00 a.m.

**PRESENT:**

Presiding Officer William J. Lindsay  
Legislator Edward P. Romaine - First Legislative District  
Terry Pearsall - Aide to Presiding Officer Lindsay.  
Tim Laube - Clerk of the Legislature

**ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:**

Bonnie Beck, Ombudsperson for John J. Foley Skilled Nursing Facility  
Wallace Broege, Director of Suffolk County Historical Society

**MINUTES TAKEN BY:**

Lucia Braaten, Court Stenographer

***[THE PUBLIC HEARING WAS OPEN AT 10:20 A.M.]***

**P.O. LINDSAY:**

Good morning everybody. We're going to open the Public Hearing. If everybody could rise for the Pledge of Allegiance, led by Legislator Romaine.

***(\*Salutation\*)***

**P.O. LINDSAY:**

Everybody please be seated. Do we have any cards or are we --

**MR. LAUBE:**

We have two speakers.

**P.O. LINDSAY:**

Okay.

**MR. LAUBE:**

And I would just like to comment, the affidavits of publication are in order for this meeting.

**P.O. LINDSAY:**

Thank you very much.

**MR. LAUBE:**

You're welcome.

**P.O. LINDSAY:**

I didn't even ask that. I appreciate that, Tim. We have two speakers.

**LEG. ROMAINE:**

Bonnie Beck.

**MS. BECK:**

Yes.

**P.O. LINDSAY:**

Come forward, Ms. Beck. No. Right there is fine.

**MS. BECK:**

Good morning. My name is Bonnie Beck and I'm a State certified -- New York State Certified Ombudsperson, presently serving at John J. Foley, and I'm here to speak about -- I'm here to speak about Mr. Levy's proposal regarding John J. Foley.

I have served as an advocate for the residents and their families and, and as Liaison to the staff and the Administration at John J. for the past five years. I know the residents very well, as I am in the facility, on average, once every week, informing them of their rights and helping to resolve their problems and concerns.

The population at John J. Foley, as I'm sure you know, is as varied as it is unique. There are those who are physically and mentally, or both, impaired, some severely so. Many of the residents require specialized care, which may not be available anywhere else. We have 12 beds for HIV, AIDS-HIV positive residents. No other nursing homes in Suffolk County are certified to care for these residents. Some are disabled as well and require highly skilled training -- skilled nursing.

At least 50% of the residents at John J. are under 65 years of age. Many facilities in Suffolk and Nassau Counties often refuse to admit residents who are younger than 65 or residents who are on

Medicaid. Almost 100% of the residents at John J. Foley are on Medicaid, and this change in the population has been within the past five years and we expect it to continue.

It is especially important to the health and well-being of younger residents to form friendships in their own age group. Foley encourages this through a variety of activities. Their friends at John J. Foley become their families and support groups. Splitting them up and moving them to other facilities would be detrimental to their health.

John J. Foley has one complete floor devoted to residents with advanced dementia and Alzheimer's Disease. Many of these 80 or more residents, who are most vulnerable, would find a move to another facility extremely difficult, sometimes impossible, suffering trauma, which would -- from the transfer, and some would decline rapidly, some would die. Moving away from familiar surroundings, staff, and without access to friends and family will be detrimental, extremely so to these vulnerable elderly individuals.

One family member has both of her parents there. The parents have Alzheimer's at John J., and her husband is also there, who is severely disabled, requiring highly skilled nursing care. Joan is doing everything she can for them. She is in the facility seven days a week, helping to feed and care for them. A move for these families and these people would be devastating. The staff, the nurses, the CNAs, the administrators are dedicated to the residents and provide the very best care possible. I observe them going about their daily routines, caring for the frail, the elderly, the most vulnerable members of Suffolk County. Even under the stress that they've been experiencing with the understanding of the confusion and what may happen to John J. Foley, these nurses and the CNAs continue to provide this service to the residents.

Suffolk is a great County. However, I feel if Suffolk fails to continue to provide the much-needed services at John J. Foley, the County itself will be diminished in stature. I do believe it is part of the mission of the County. John J. Foley has been the nursing home of last resort for most residents that are living there previously and currently. Please, don't turn your back on these residents. I urge the Legislature to do all it has in its power to keep the Nursing Home open. I urge you to say no to Mr. Foley's (sic) proposal to close John J. Foley, and to give it a chance to become more efficient, so John J. Foley can continue to serve the least among us in Suffolk County. Thank you very much.

**P.O. LINDSAY:**

Bonnie, before you go, if you don't mind, first of all, it isn't Mr. Foley trying to close it, it's Mr. Levy.

**MS. BECK:**

Mr. Levy, I'm sorry.

**P.O. LINDSAY:**

That's all right.

**MS. BECK:**

I had Levy here and I said Foley.

**P.O. LINDSAY:**

I know, I know.

**MS. BECK:**

I'm sorry.

**P.O. LINDSAY:**

How many -- I missed in the beginning of your presentation, how many years have you worked there?

**MS. BECK:**

Five, I've been there five years.

**P.O. LINDSAY:**

And you believe that the staff and the facility does an excellent job?

**MS. BECK:**

They are doing the best they can under the circumstances provided them; yes, I do. I mean, I see them on each floor every time I'm there, which is every week. I watch them. I go to the rooms, I'm with the staff, I talk with the nurses and the CNAs, I observe them. And I believe that if John J. Foley were run more efficiently, if there were to be an opportunity with a new Administrator that's there, who is trying -- the John J. Foley is a wonderful facility. The Physical Rehabilitation area has been rehabbed. That brings in money for short-term rehab on Medicare. We have fantastic care with regard to the Alzheimer-Dementia, one whole floor is dedicated to it. That population is a very vulnerable population. My mother just had two years -- Mother just died in June. Mother had Alzheimer's, and I know what change and what kind of care is required on an intimate level, not just at John J. Foley. So, yes, I do see the facility in action.

**P.O. LINDSAY:**

There has been a couple of developments with the facility just this week. For one, there was a newspaper article the other day, and I talked to Congressman Bishop about it yesterday, that the Federal Government, TriCare, the Federal Government insurer, now we've applied to them and they've accepted us so that we can put returning soldiers or veterans in the facility. What's your opinion on that?

**MS. BECK:**

My opinion on that is that they will get the very best care that they can get with the rehabbing of the Physical Therapy Unit, with the Physical Therapists that are on board. I don't know what else will be done to accommodate the -- but just as John J. is, I believe that they will get the best care that they can get, and I think the County facility will serve them well. This is my first hearing about this, but I would say this: I'm speaking to the senior citizen group, the Friendship Club, on the 29th of October and I encourage them to take a look at Foley.

**P.O. LINDSAY:**

See what we would -- you know, because Foley is a facility that's geared towards more of a younger population, I applauded the Congressman for this effort, because I think -- I think it's a good fit. I have a young man in my District that was severely wounded in Iraq and is in Walter Reed now, and I talked to his mom yesterday about -- he's not ready yet, but a little bit further along in his rehabilitation, you know, they should really come and take a look at Foley, because he would be close, they could see him, you know, more frequently than they are now. The young man lost both his legs and his arms, so, you know, he's being fit with prostheses and that's a long process, and it's also a long rehab process. So I think that our Physical Therapy Unit there is well-equipped to help in some of these situations.

And the other thing is, because of our experience with the mentally disabled in the facility, a lot of the young men that are returning from Iraq have serious problems as far as their mental state, and that's the other part that I think would really be a good fit.

So I hope that this works, because I think it would be something that would enhance the facility and enhance the mission that we provide to our citizens here in Suffolk County.

**MS. BECK:**

I certainly hope that that will continue, because when I see the young people that are coming into the facility, many of them are physically handicapped, they're wheelchair bound. They've had diving accidents, spinal cord injuries, brain injuries, and they're a support system for each other. And the way in which they will accommodate an influx of a population such as you're describing I think would

be welcome.

**P.O. LINDSAY:**

And again, and I don't -- it's just that I'm glad you're here, because, you know, it gives me an opportunity to bounce some things off of a person that's very familiar with the facility and there every week.

The other development just came out last night, and I had asked our Budget Review Office, our independent Budget Review Office, which is nonpartisan and usually does a great job, to do an independent analysis of the facility, because I was disturbed about the number, the size of the deficit. It seems to change with every newspaper article, and I wanted to pin it down a little bit better and get their impression on the overall operation. And, you know, surprise, they pin the deficit as it exists now at 9 million dollars, not 15 million dollars. And some of the other analyses they did was shocking to me. And one number that hit me was in just eight years, we're going to need 80% more nursing home beds in Suffolk County, just eight years. I mean, that isn't very far away at all. And that, in spite of what's being said, we have less nursing home beds in Suffolk County than is recommended by the Berger Commission, which is cited over and over again. So we don't have an abundance of nursing home beds, and the future need is going to accelerate dramatically.

So I thank you for your work, and I thank you for coming out and talking to us about your knowledge of the facility.

**MS. BECK:**

Thank you for having me.

**P.O. LINDSAY:**

You're welcome.

**MS. BECK:**

I appreciate it. And I thank you for previous support.

**LEG. ROMAINE:**

Wally Broege from the Suffolk County Historical Society.

**MR. BROEGE:**

Good morning. My name is Wallace Broege. I'm the Director of the Suffolk County Historical Society, and I'm here to speak about the impact of the County Executive's recommended budget on the Historical Society.

The County Executive's recommended budget for 2009 sets funding for the Historical Society of \$185,000. That's 34% less than we received in 2008, or a loss of \$95,000, and 115,000 less than our requested level. If this budget is put in place and funding for the Historical Society is set at \$185,000, the impact will be nothing short of devastating for us. It will mean, briefly, the loss of eight part-time staff members. That will leave the two full-time people there as a core. The Historical Society won't have to close its doors, but it will certainly hurt us to lose those eight staff members. We'll close the museum three days a week, which will mean we'll be open two days, we'll close the Research Library, we'll close the Weathervane Gift Shop, we'll eliminate our publications and our Public Relations Program. Unfortunately, most of the new programs and improvements that we've been able to put in place in 2007 and 2008 will be lost.

I want to tell you that the Legislature has always been very supportive of the Historical Society, and this we're very grateful for. We're grateful for your continued interest and your support. By increasing the support for the Organization in 2007 and 2008, you've enabled it to concentrate on a very simple three-pronged approach, to increase the number of temporary exhibitions we do and programs, to publicize the organization so that people know that we're there and what we do, and to

increase the hours that the Museum and Library are open to the public, and we've been able to do that over these two years. By strengthening the Suffolk County Historical Society, you've made it possible for the Society to build on the solid foundation of artifacts and documentary materials that we've been collecting since the Society was founded in 1886.

The material I've left with you today explains our accomplishments over the 2007/2008 year, and also some of our plans for 2009, so I don't see any reason for me to belabor that at this point. I urge you to, please, consider restoring the funds that the County Executive has removed from our budget and set the new funding level at -- for 2009 at \$300,000.

I want to thank you for giving me this opportunity. I apologize. This is pretty much the same presentation I gave in Hauppauge earlier this week, but it's just so important that I get out and meet as many of you as I can during this time of year, and October goes by very quickly. It isn't possible for me to visit you all, so I really feel it's more for me to come to these meetings and make these presentations. If you have any questions, I'd be happy to answer them.

**P.O. LINDSAY:**

Well, first of all, Wally, I don't think you can state enough what the problem is. You know, whether you gave the same presentation in Hauppauge as you're giving here is really immaterial. I would encourage you to tell as many people, as many Legislators about the problems if the existing budget goes through.

The other thing, and forgive me, I don't have my glasses, it might be in here, what did your attendance look like last year, and how is it doing this year?

**MR. BROEGE:**

Well our attendance was about 16,000 last year. Now, the attendance at special events has gone up, because we're doing more, we're opening more exhibits. We're opening up a new exhibit this evening, so I expect we'll probably have 100 to 150 people, so that's been good. It's going to be a slow process. I haven't seen a big difference in the overall gate and average visitation on a weekday, but because we're -- these special events, because we're able to publicize them, we're able to bring people out. And we've also been trying a new strategy where we're offering public programs, programs for adults and families that focus on the themes of these exhibits, so it gives us an opportunity to keep the idea of the exhibit alive in the newspapers.

It's tough. It's always easy -- well, I shouldn't say easy, but we're able to get a press release and a notice in the newspaper when we open up a new exhibit. But if the exhibits open up a couple of months, once it becomes history, it's hard to get it back into the newspaper again so we can revive the interest.

So I would say attendance is up, simply because we're offering four or five exhibit openings a year. In December, we'll be opening up a new exhibit and we'll be working with the Suffolk County Department of Public -- of Social Services. We do a mitten tree, and that was a wonderful idea that the gal that's curating our exhibit, the art exhibit this year, came up with last year. We involved school children, we involved volunteers. So, yes, it has had an impact. I wish I could tell you the public was knocking down the door, but now that we've got the building opened up five days a week, it's making a difference, too, we're more accessible.

**P.O. LINDSAY:**

And the amount of money that was put in the budget for the Historical Society by the County Executive, how does that compare to what he put in last year?

**MR. BROEGE:**

It's about -- I don't have all the figures with me, but, basically, the County Executive takes, as you probably know, takes the funding that the Legislature --

**P.O. LINDSAY:**

That's what I'm getting at.

**MR. BROEGE:**

This is about 2% higher than what he recommended for last year.

**P.O. LINDSAY:**

Yeah. So anything that we add in the omnibus budget he takes out the following year --

**MR. BROEGE:**

Exactly.

**P.O. LINDSAY:**

-- and then says he increased your budget line by 2%.

**MR. BROEGE:**

With a small percentage, yeah.

**P.O. LINDSAY:**

How does that compare to what the budget line for the Historical Society was say three or four years ago?

**MR. BROEGE:**

Well, for four years, we were -- from the County, we received \$191,000, and in 2007 we went up to \$255,000. The Legislature helped us with a deficit we were facing and helped us balance our budget. And then in 2008, we went to \$280,000, so we've had a steady increase. And we asked for a small increase, basically, because the cost of energy and just the cost -- the sheer cost of operating the place is going through the roof. We're not planning on adding any staff. In fact, I believe that our total Operating Budget in 2009 will be a little bit smaller than 2008.

**P.O. LINDSAY:**

Okay.

**MR. BROEGE:**

And I might say that strengthening the institution has helped us. We sponsored a Bicycle Ride in conjunction with our Bicycle Exhibit, which was a fund-raiser, which did, I think, very well for a first time out, about \$10,000 now. About half of that was in-kind contributed services and we've been able -- I've got the staff now, we're applying for grants, too, for collections care.

**P.O. LINDSAY:**

Legislator Romaine wants to --

**LEG. ROMAINE:**

You have school age children that come on class trips that visit the Historical Museum. For people who don't know, this is a large building just to the west, right here on Main Street in Riverhead, which I pass every day. This is a large building that you have to maintain with all the historical records, collections, books, and your exhibits. How many school children do you have coming in class trips?

**MR. BROEGE:**

Well, I have to tell you, the number of school children we've been receiving at the Historical Society has declined, you know, I want to be honest about that. And I think there's a couple of things going on that -- in-school testing. School budgets have had a big impact on it. Our Education Coordinator retired last year, Susan Sanfillipo. Now, at our peek, we were seeing about 6,000 school children a year, but that began to wane. Last year we saw about 2,000. When Susan retired, we shifted gears

in 2007 and placed a greater emphasis on public programs and on exhibitions to see if we could boost our attendance and to build the infrastructure of the institution. In the meantime, we're talking to some other museums and people that have had successful programs that didn't lose the attendance that we did, and we're trying to reinvent that program.

**LEG. ROMAINE:**

Thank you.

**MR. BROEGE:**

Thank you.

**P.O. LINDSAY:**

Thank you, Wallace, for coming in.

**MR. BROEGE:**

Thank you.

**P.O. LINDSAY:**

We don't have anybody else who's registered to speak. Is there anyone else in the audience that would like to speak to us? Seeing none, this Hearing stands adjourned.

***[THE HEARING WAS ADJOURNED AT 10:42 A.M.]***