

SUFFOLK COUNTY LEGISLATURE
PUBLIC HEARING
ON THE
2011 OPERATING BUDGET

A Public Hearing on the 2011 Operating Budget was held at the William H. Rogers Legislature Building in the Rose Y. Caracappa Legislative Auditorium, 725 Veterans Memorial Highway, Smithtown, New York on October 8, 2010.

Legislators Present:

Presiding Officer Bill Lindsay
Legislator Thomas Barraga

Also in Attendance:

Renee Ortiz, Chief Deputy Clerk, Suffolk County Legislature
Greg Moran, Legislative Aide to Legislator Lynne Nowick
Vito Minei, Executive Director, Cornell Cooperative Extension
Roseann Miceli, REACH CYA
Ellen Nardoza, Cornell Cooperative Extension 4H
Kevin Cantwell, Cornell Cooperative Extension
Cynthia Sourbeck, 4H

Minutes Taken By:

Lucia Braaten, Court Stenographer

Minutes Transcribed By:

Kim Castiglione, Legislative Secretary

(The Public Hearing was called to order at 10:04 a.m.)

P.O. LINDSAY:

Anybody that would like to speak at the public portion of hearings on the budget, please enter the auditorium. I apologize that I was downstairs in another meeting that we were a little tardy, but we'll officially open the public hearings on the budget. And first card is Vito Minei. Vito, if you want to sit at the table if you're more comfortable, feel free.

MR. MINEI:

You know what, I've got some things to show and tell. I think I will.

P.O. LINDSAY:

Okay.

MR. MINEI:

They invited us to breakfast, but I thought you'd take it out of our budget so I didn't partake.

LEG. BARRAGA:

We'll take it out anyway.

MR. MINEI:

Good morning, Presiding Officer Lindsay and member of the Legislature and those indulging in breakfast. I appreciate the time. My name is Vito Minei and I'm Executive Director of Cornell Cooperative Extension of Suffolk County. I'm here today to ask that the Legislature restore \$270,500 to the 2011 Operating Budget to support two very vital programs, Family Health and Wellness and 4-H Youth Development.

Cooperative Extension is a nonprofit organization and through our affiliation with Cornell University, we utilize scientific research based information to attain our goals of strengthening families and communities, preserving the environment and fostering economic development. This organization brochure in the information package you have highlights the functions, responsibilities and activities of our major programs, including the well-known agricultural program and the marine program and some of our camping activities, but this morning I want to focus on two programs that will really be decimated if the funding is not restored. Family Health and Wellness, our staff is really dedicated to some of the most pressing social and public health issues confronting America today. The 4-H Youth Development Program out at the County Farm in Yaphank enriches the lives, literally, of tens of thousands of youth in Suffolk County by teaching them, the children, to learn through doing. That's the motto of 4-H. It's hands on education outside the classroom. These two programs will be totally removed and certainly decimated by the lack of funding.

In the youth development brochure that's also in your information package we're proud to document that Cooperative Extension is the only organization in Suffolk County that provides a unique and comprehensive series of youth programs. And as the picture depicts on the front cover, we provide services for education for prenatal care, early childhood nutrition, youth and teenage programs. Again, if the funding for Family Health and Wellness and 4-H Youth Development is not restored, it will not allow us to fulfill our commitment to provide these human development services to Suffolk County.

And I would just like to invite your attention to the last item in your information package. It's a one page summary that really explains the situation. The title states clearly that we're asking for partial restoration of funding. In 2009 there was a major reduction of funding to Cooperative Extension. It totaled something on the order of 700,000. Several staff were lost. Last year the Legislature restored the \$270,000 we're asking for again, and that's just to keep us intact, keep us moving with

these programs.

If we can move a little bit down on the one page, again Family Health and Wellness confronts these very critical social and public health issues, things about parent education, nutrition. We had a great presentation at the Health Committee from some of the staff on cyber bullying and the dangers of energy drinks.

As we move further down I want to get into the math. The \$188,000 plus the 75,000 that Cornell matches really is utilized to secure more than 1.3 million dollars in grants, and I don't toss that number out cavalierly. We've been dealing with the Budget Review Office staff to, again, document these grants and the impact. If we lose the seven supervisory senior management and support staff that are supported with \$188,000, we lose the ability to fulfill these grants and even more importantly, long-term, we lose the ability to seek these kinds of grants in the future.

Moving down a little bit to 4-H Youth Development again, and I'm pleased that the two of you were there on the tours we had this summer with your grandchildren so you saw firsthand that these programs really are reaching out to children in every district, Mr. Barraga, and we're really pleased at the educational programs. And I'm pressing personally to make sure that the 4-H programs here in Suffolk really attain the goals that 4-H nationwide is setting, this idea of teaching kids about science, engineering and technology. So you'll see a transformation of our programs.

And in our County contract, again, I lifted these dollar figures right out of the County contract, that the \$82,000 we're asking for really leverages more than \$450,000. They're very successful with the 4-H programs to generate well over \$200,000 in revenue and we also provide considerable money from Cornell, so you're leveraging more than \$450,000 for the 4-H program.

Now, Legislator Lindsay, I know this is -- these are tough times, and we're fully cognizant of the fact of the economic situation, but we all know that these kinds of services are even more critical in these tough economic times. We're talking about the youth of Suffolk County, we're talking about the underserved populations of Suffolk County, poor families in Suffolk County who are trying to make decisions daily on buying kids clothing, paying for food, paying for medication. And the education that the staff from Family Health and Wellness and the 4-H really address these issues.

Now, last year the Legislature, in recognition of the value of these programs, restored the \$270,000. What I'm asking you for is to come to the same realization this year. I know you're going into these deliberations, I know about the Working Group on the Operating Budget and I fully appreciate it, but please keep in mind not only are these programs essential, but they really provide great value as shown by the money that's leveraged in both Family Health and Wellness and the 4-H.

And again, I want to thank you for your past support. We're asking for continued support from you, and I thank you all for your friendship. Thank you.

P.O. LINDSAY:

Vito, I just have one question. Did you make this appeal to the Executive Branch before you got this far?

MR. MINEI:

We actually deal through the Health Department and there was obviously the directive that came out from the County Executive that all his budget staff, not only working for him in the Dennison Building but in the agencies, were to utilize only his recommended budget. But, yes, we made it through the Health Department, but our access has been dramatically reduced. As a contract agency we used to have one of the hearings during the Operating Budget time with the County Exec's budget people, but we no longer have that access. We're dealing through the Health

Department. They appreciated our situation. They were trying to move it along, but, again, they also have to abide by their own directive. Yes, the people know about it. I think they're making tough economic decisions, but the fact is it was just a clear-cut budgetary directive to only use last year's recommended budget.

P.O. LINDSAY:

Thank you. Roseann Miceli.

MS. MICELI:

Good morning. My name is Roseann Miceli. I'm the Executive Director of Reach Community and Youth Agency, also known as and listed in the Suffolk County budget as the Youth Development Association of Commack. Reach CYA has provided social, recreational, cultural, educational and advocacy programs for children, youth and families of the Commack and Half Hollow Hills School Districts and communities for close to 40 years. Each year over 4500 youth participate in our programs, programs that include after school homework help, after school and evening social and recreational programs and enrichment workshops. Volunteer opportunities for youth and adults, peer mentoring and formal counseling for individuals in groups, peer leadership programs, school year and summer trips, parent resource center workshops, gang prevention, anti-bias and anti-bullying programs, and a Friday evening team community recreational center.

Why am I here first? I want to also say thank you. Last year our funding was unjustly and completely eliminated from the Suffolk County proposed budget and you supported the restoration of Suffolk County funding in the amount of \$31,042. And once again, we're calling on you for your much needed help. It has come to our attention that again 100% of our funding has been eliminated in the 2011 Suffolk County proposed budget. This unjustified reduction in funding represents close to 10% of our Operating Budget. This budget cut would cause a drastic reduction in over 1700 service hours, eliminating five part-time youth workers, which would lead to the elimination of valuable after school programs for Half Hollow Hills and Commack School District.

A close look at the Suffolk County proposed 2011 budget will reflect that the funding has been maintained or even increased for 17 youth development agencies that provide similar outstanding and much needed services for residents of their catchment areas, yet Reach CYA, the only agency providing these services for residents of Commack and Half Hollow Hills School Districts, encompassing Commack, Dix Hills, East Northport, Huntington, Smithtown and Wheatley Heights communities, was totally eliminated.

Each year the number of participants in our programs increases as well as the influx of participating students with special needs. Please help restore our funding. It's what's right, it's what's fair, it's what our youth and working families need. No other organization serving the communities of Commack and Half Hollow Hills provides the type of free or low cost in school, after school, evening and summer programming for youth and their families that Reach CYA provides. We ask that you support a resolution for a budget amendment to restore the single disbursement agency funding for the Youth Development Association of Commack. Please help us to continue helping others. Thank you.

P.O. LINDSAY:

Thank you. Ellen Nardozza.

LEG. BARRAGA:

Can I just ask her a question?

P.O. LINDSAY:

Wait a minute. Miss Miceli, Legislator Barraga has a question.

LEG. BARRAGA:

Just one quick question with reference to your comments. You had indicated that 17 other agencies had either maintained what they received last year or were increased. Do you have any idea in terms of those agencies that were increased in the Executive budget, from a funding perspective, what that total came to?

MS. MICELI:

The total amount of money?

LEG. BARRAGA:

Yeah.

MS. MICELI:

I don't.

LEG. BARRAGA:

Because the question is whether or not the Legislature, based on the fact that, you know, you were cut 31,000, maybe the Legislature should take a look at some of those agencies, other agencies that were increased, and maybe modify some of that increase and shift it over to your group in fairness.

MS. MICELI:

Right, yes. I certainly wouldn't advocate for people to lose their funding, but in their -- in fairness I don't see why --

LEG. BARRAGA:

I mean, if what you say is true, that there were "X" amount of agencies that actually got an increase, and maybe we should take a look at that and maybe shift some of that funding over. All right. Thank you.

P.O. LINDSAY:

Okay. Ellen.

MS. NARDOZZA:

Good morning. Do I have to hold this, is that what it is? It would be good if you read the directions. I'm Ellen Nardozza. I'm the Chairperson of the 4-H Program Advisory Committee. I'm also a volunteer for 4-H for 15 years. When we -- when my son was small, he had problems connecting to people, and we tried to find something that was good for him. What we found was 4-H. It was open, it was family, it involved all ages, all -- both male and female, so we could invite anyone and everyone to join us and to be a part of our group. It made -- it gave him friends, it gave him a base in which to use his smarts, because he was very smart, he just couldn't pretty much connect with people. He is now in college and doing very well and has a whole group of friends that come to my house constantly.

And 4-H is so different than anything else that's out there. It is a university based curriculum, so everything that they do has science background, has been vetted as an excellent curriculum. So I know that anything that we worked on had value and was up to date and was excellent. It also involved Cornell Cooperative Extension which also has all university based staff, up to date people, wonderful, magnificent people.

The program itself was cut completely two years ago. We had no one. We have one person that runs the office. We had two people, we had a secretary and we had a 4-H Coordinator and our Director. Our Director is between two -- was two places. She directs the entire Farm Program and the 4-H Youth Development, and has to share her time with it. Without the funding that we had,

her -- part of her salary was cut off too, and then we had no one in the office. Think about having your office, the people that you depend on to get your job done and having no one there. I mean, no one to answer your phone, having no one to take care of your of your mail, having no one to do anything with, and that's what we had, no one. That was the same thing with Family Health and Wellness, that everything was cut out for them, too.

The importance of this is that our children when they come to these programs, whether they're a school based program or whether we go family based program, is that they learn stewardship. They look at Suffolk County as a place to live, a place to be, a place to come back to, because they are getting the connection. They're getting the connection from the Marine Program, from the Ag Program, from the Farm Program, and from all other science and family programs that we do. That shows them that Suffolk County is the place to be, so when they go away to school and they learn other things, they want to come back and live here because they have that connection to the land. They also have a connection to families.

Our program also gives them Legislative background. We insist that they do community service. We insist that they learn how their laws and how their things are done. We also have programs that take them up to your Legislature and shadow you around for a day or two. It's a fabulous program. Without our staffing we cannot do that. We cannot bring our children up and do that program. We cannot have a staff person in charge that will take them to all of the national programs and the State programs that are available to the 4-H'ers.

We've been here 93 years, 4-H is over 100 years old. To decimate it completely is just totally unbelievable that we could let this go and not have it in Suffolk County. We are the largest County in New York State, and yet we have the smallest 4-H because we don't have the staff that goes out and does the work that needs to be done to get people involved in it. One person this year has helped us tremendously having that person back doing many programs. We have it in schools, we've done 4-H Club Program, we've done a lot of different programs that we couldn't do the year before because we didn't have any staff. You can only depend on volunteers so much because volunteers are volunteers. You need to have paid staff in order to run the program, in order to have a base in which to run from.

Also, we cannot get grants, we cannot get -- we don't -- there is no way that 4-H'ers can pay for anything because you don't pay for children, you pay out and you get children in, and you get adults in -- back to you. And the only way you can do that, you can't make money off of that. You can ask people for donations, you can ask people for grants, but they don't pay grants for a person to run the program. They pay grants for the program, but they don't pay grants to have your office staff.

We can't pay for postage, we can't pay for paper. All of that comes out of that measly little budget that we have. And we manage it, but we'd like to have it back because now we have nothing again. We have to start all over again. And every year we have to start all over again. It's almost like you hiring out every year new staff. You have to retrain them, redo them, remake your office all over again, and this is very, very disruptive to a child who has one year in which to do something, because next year they're moving on to the next thing. They are only in 5th grade one year, they are only in sixth grade one year. They only have that year in which to do what needs to be done. And every year we back up we lose that year.

On a personal note, Family Health and Wellness -- I'm a diabetic. I know I can pick up that phone call -- I can pick up the phone and I can make a phone call about my diabetes and ask a question and know that the person on the other end is going to have information for me that is needed. Even though I have health insurance and I can go and do what I need to do, but you can't always get the information you need from your doctor, from your health service, so I know that when I call

that number I get it.

P.O. LINDSAY:

Thank you very much. Kevin Cantwell.

MR. CANTWELL:

Good morning, Presiding Officer Lindsay. Can you hear me?

P.O. LINDSAY:

Hold the button.

MS. ORTIZ:

You have to hold it the whole time.

MR. CANTWELL:

Can you hear me now?

P.O. LINDSAY:

Yes.

MR. CANTWELL:

Thank you. Presiding Officer Lindsay, Legislator Barraga, thank you. I will not take a lot of time. My name is Kevin Cantwell. I am the current President of Cornell Cooperative Extension. I know that you have both been to our locations or some of our locations. We have had open invitations to all of the Legislature to come out and visit our sites at any time.

I am a volunteer. I've had an association with Cornell Cooperative Extension as a father, as a grandfather, as a business owner, for well over 25 years. Cornell Cooperative Extension put information in my hands that made me a better, more productive business owner. As a grandparent, I've taken advantage of many of the services that CC has provided in child care and child rearing, just information that they put into, quite simply, simple language that everyday people can understand and put into everyday use.

My purpose here today is to ask you to continue to make the investment that you've made in the past. It's an investment. Right now we're asking for a little over \$270,000, which was restored. It's a basic sustenance for these two individual programs. I'd like you to consider it as an investment in the future for the residents of Suffolk County, residents like myself, like Ellen and her family, and many of the other individuals that we reach in CCE.

I would also like to say thank you for your past support, and ask if you had any questions that I might be able to answer.

P.O. LINDSAY:

Thank you Kevin. No, I don't have any further questions.

MR. CANTWELL:

Thank you.

P.O. LINDSAY:

Cynthia Sourbeck.

MS. SOURBECK:

Can you hear me now?

P.O. LINDSAY:

Yeah.

MS. SOURBECK:

Good morning, gentlemen. I'm here to represent 4-H as well. My name is Cynthia Sourbeck and I have been involved with 4-H for about ten -- not quite ten years. I am an organizational leader for a club that has been in existence since 1996. The club has continued because people care about 4-H, and as children have graduated the siblings of the youth that have moved on have continued in the club and so have the parents continued to help.

Our club is unusual in that we are a cooperative club. All of the parents get involved to help teach the children. That's a lot of volunteers, that's a lot of people who care about the program, a program that gives back to the community. We do things -- It's Not Just Pigs and Pickles is a tee shirt that they put out recently, and I like it because it's not just agricultural, it's not just animal, it's not just dealing with livestock. 4-H does science and technology, public speaking, entrepreneurship, community service is big, and they link all of those things together.

Recently you guys honored someone -- someone who I work with, Laura Hirsch. She received the Lifetime Achievement Award. She's been doing this for over 25 years I believe. She did a program that she's been carrying on for years where they go into the woods, they strip the vines off the trees, helping the trees, finding material to make wreaths that they can then decorate and sell to raise funds to give back to the community. And within that they use those funds to teach children to shop wisely for the materials, to buy yarn and they teach the kids to crochet to make blankets for Warm Up America.

It just keeps going around and around and it's not just about the individual programs that they -- that God has put on their heart to share, but they're teaching kids to be good citizens. We do something similar. The children get involved, they raise funds by making their own products, doing an entrepreneurship program where they learn to do their cost accounting to see if it's actually a profitable program to raise funds, and then they choose every year a service that they want to give back to. And this year, this is something interesting that we haven't even shared with Cornell yet, they've chosen to give some of their profits back to 4-H because they don't want to see the program die. These are young kids working hard, doing everything they can and they just -- they know how much this program means to them.

The public speaking program, which I should take, the children have excelled in over the past couple of years. Last year we sent three children up to the State competition. This year we doubled it and sent six. Three of them came back with gold seals. These are skills children will use their entire life to give back to their community, to make them better citizens. They learn to be -- they learn to use skills for the rest of their lives in business and raising their families. These are all things that you can't -- you can't put a dollar value on. And they're all things that are being taught by volunteers. We have people in place to teach the children, but if the program doesn't exist, those volunteers don't have anyplace to go and offer their services.

Last night my children, we were visiting my father. He's 89 years old and the kids -- he was showing them work that he did. He was an art director for years. He was showing them things that he did over the years and the children said, "Grandpa can you teach this to the other children?" And he said, "Sure." Now, here is a man at 89 years old, and I have to tell you, he is well with it, willing to give his services, but if the program doesn't exist, he can't give those services.

So I just want to encourage you as well to reconsider what the program does, what it offers and the opportunity it offers for people just to give their services to help children. Thank you.

P.O. LINDSAY:

Thank you. I don't have any other cards. Is there anyone else in the audience that would like to address us? Seeing none, I thank you all for coming and adding your input and we stand adjourned.

(The meeting was adjourned at 10:34 a.m.)