

WESTCHESTER COUNTY CHARTER REVISION COMMISSION
MINUTES
JUNE 28, 2012

Members in Attendance: Richard Wishnie, Alfred Gatta, Derickson Lawrence, Steve Mayo, Anne McAndrews, Florence McCue, Paul Meissner, Jane Morgenstern, Guy Parisi, Vincenza Restiano, Paul Windels, Gary Zuckerman

Absent Members: Raymond Belair, Jeff Binder, Herman Geist, Julie Killian, John Mattis, David Menken, Bertrand Sellier, Matthew Thomas, Ronald Volino, Sam Zerka

County Staff in Attendance: Justin Adin, Chris Crane, Kerriann Stout, Melanie Montalto

Commission Counsel: Lester Steinman

Guests: Thomas Lauro, Joe Stout

MINUTES

Chairman Wishnie called the meeting to order at 7:00 PM.

With a motion by Paul Meissner, seconded by Gary Zuckerman the minutes of March 24th, 2012 were approved with a vote of 12-0.

Chairman Wishnie introduced the first guest speaker, Commissioner Thomas Lauro, Department of Environmental Facilities.

Commissioner Lauro presented a power point, which is available for your review.

Commissioner Lauro stated the department of environmental facilities deals with wastewater, water and solid waste. These are special district functions, which are not part of the county budget. Funds stay within district. The wastewater division is the largest division.

Commissioner Lauro stated there are 13 sewer districts, 7 WWTPS, 43 Pump stations, 200 miles of sewers. He presented a slide on the 2011 performance, which showed that Yonkers deals with the most waste.

The commission asked whether Yonkers was the biggest part by design. Commissioner Lauro stated it is by topography – it naturally made more sense to give the most to Yonkers.

Commissioner Lauro stated that his department does not treat the whole county. He stated other districts have private or well water . He said they serve 600,000 people and if you are not part of a sewer district than you are not taxed.

Commissioner Lauro presented a slide on the wastewater-operating budget that stated:

- Operating costs are consolidated for 13 special districts
- 183 MDG total design capacity
- Treated 59,551,2000,000 gallon treated in 2011
- 0.00015/gallon – less than a penny per flush

Commissioner Lauro further stated that non-profits pay sewer tax and that the sewer tax is deductible on your taxes.

A discussion ensued on capital projects. A slide labeled capital projects delineates how much money is spent on capital projects.

Commissioner Lauro stated that there are two County Water Districts – CWD #1 and CWD #3 and that ultraviolet light disinfection is required now at water treatment plants.

The Commission asked for a history as to why the sewer district is so small. A discussion ensued.

The Commission asked if there is any concern that we might run out or short of water. Commissioner Lauro said not unless there is a draught which is possible. He further stated the city of NY and Westchester County keeps trying to educate the population on water conservation and that water meters reduced water use by approximately one third.

Commissioner Lauro stated they need to build a large pumping system because all the water has to be UV treated. A discussion on this ensued.

Commissioner Lauro informed he Commission that the Solid Waste Management Refuse Disposal District No. 1 only contains some of the municipalities.

Lester Steinman gave out the template for information gathering for the focus groups in order to create their final report. He further handed out a list of target dates for deadlines on the reports. Copies are available.

Chairman Wishnie introduced former Parks Commissioner Joe Stout; currently he is the director of Friends of Parks.

Mr. Stout stated that he is representing himself as the former parks commissioner. He showed a short video that is available for your review.

Mr. Stout talked about starting a Parks district – similar to that of the sewer district. He thinks it is a long term way to protect what is clearly one of the defining elements of Westchester County, physically.

Mr. Stout stated the board of friends of parks just recently commissioned an economic impact study and the parks generate 183 million dollars a year in economic impact. He further stated the parks bring tax revenue because of the investments in it. He continued by saying that parks are a valuable asset that bring social and economic interest.

Mr. Stout informed the commission that entire parks budget is about \$70 million. \$52 million is the operating budget and \$19 million is the misc budget. Stout stated that of that, only \$34 million comes from taxes, the rest comes from fees, charges, licenses, permits, etc. The \$34 million represents employee benefits and debt services, 15 parks, 18,000 acres of open space, 6 golf courses, and Playland.

The Commission asked what the advantage of having a Parks District would be. Mr. Stout said he believes it will take the parks department out of the general fund fight. He states 75% of people in the county use the parks.

Mr. Stout recommended that the district be under the taxing power of the county and that it work exactly like the sewer system.

A discussion ensues about the advantage and disadvantages to having a park district.

The Commission asked why parks should get a parks district as opposed to other departments. Mr. Stout stated that Parks brings in a lot of private sector business.

Mr. Stout said he is not talking about consolidation just about breaking out of the general fund. Mr. Stout said he has examples of other parks districts he can provide.

Chairman Wishnie stated that the next meeting would be on July 26th, 2012.

Mr. Gatta stated that the Executive/Legislative Relationship Focus group will meet on September 27th at 6pm.

With a motion by Paul Meissner seconded by Gary Zuckerman the Charter Revision Commission adjourned at 8:10 pm.