



Chairman of the Board
& Legislator, District 5
BEN BOYKIN
Addressing the Needs of District 5



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Social Justice Rally in White Plains



Visit to West Harrison Veterans Memorial Park




Mask delivery to White Plains



Mask delivery to Scarsdale Village




Food distribution at Union Baptist Church




Westchester County Board of Legislators NEWS

Voice of the People of Westchester County for over 300 years



Fall 2020 Newsletter



Chairman Ben Boykin

Legislator, District 5 ~ White Plains, Scarsdale, Harrison

Happy 50th Anniversary, Board of Legislators

This year marks the 50th anniversary of the Board of Legislators. While we have delayed our in-person celebration of this golden milestone until 2021, a small virtual ceremony was held during the Board meeting on October 19.



Westchester County's governing body was established in 1703 as the Board of Supervisors. It remained as such until the court ruled in 1965 that the Board of Supervisors did not adhere to one person, one vote representation. The court established a County Board with seventeen legislative districts of equal size represented by a single Legislator. At its first meeting on January 5, 1970, the body was renamed the Board of Legislators. For over 300 years, these two bodies have represented and protected the people of Westchester County.

I am honored to serve as Chairman of the Board of Legislators during this 50th anniversary year, and I'm blessed by the continuing friendship of the first ever-Chairman of the Board, Herman Geist. I'm so happy that Herman is with us to mark this historic occasion.

For links to our special commemorative history book and video please visit <https://westchesterlegislators.com/latest-news/3135-board-of-legislators-marks-its-50th-anniversary>. ■



Dear Friends and Neighbors,

This has been a difficult and unprecedented year for our County and our nation. The Board of Legislators has worked hard and tirelessly to meet the challenges.

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused deep personal loss, economic instability and dislocation across the County. Throughout this health and economic crisis, the Board has never stopped working for the people of Westchester. Working with County Executive George Latimer and his staff, the entire County government responded quickly, cooperatively and decisively to contain the spread of this virus and to begin the task of reopening. We have worked with our federal, state and local officials to adhere to changing guidelines and protocols to protect the health and safety of our residents.

Sadly this disease has claimed the lives of more than 1,400 Westchester residents—our family members, friends, and neighbors. So many more have lost jobs or have made huge personal sacrifices as essential workers. Students and teachers have had to quickly reimagine the learning process. And we've all had to forgo the traditional ceremonies marking the milestones in our lives that give us strength and unity.

Our office remained open with staggered staffing schedules and best practices for health and safety. Investments at the Board in new internet and videoconferencing technology over the past two years kept us ahead of the curve, enabling us to continue to conduct business under the State's Open Meetings Law and a range of changing Executive Orders from Governor Cuomo. Through our E-News, we have been able to provide information and resources to the public. This Board has not missed a single meeting, and has continued to take the necessary legislative actions to provide essential services for the people of Westchester at a time when those services are most important.

While the pandemic prevented us from meeting in-person, I'm gratified to have been able to continue to serve White Plains, Scarsdale and West Harrison, and to meet virtually with you to discuss issues. Please continue to reach out and let me know how I can better serve you and all the people in Westchester County.

Sincerely,

Ben Boykin

IMPROVING OUR PARKS

Our award-winning County park system has proven more valuable than ever this year. With so many people working from home and attending school remotely, our parks have been an essential resource for the mental and physical health of County residents. I thank County Executive George Latimer and our Parks Department staff for the amazing job they've done, keeping our parks, beaches and pools open and operating safely.

This year as well as over the past few years, the Board of Legislators has increased the investment in our County parks – approving bonding for major improvements and upgrades. The Parks department expects the portion of the Bronx River Trail that runs through Scarsdale and White Plains to be completed in Spring 2021. Our County trails are the most utilized assets in the Parks System. ■



PROBING STORM RESPONSE BY UTILITY COMPANIES

Local power and telecommunications companies were once again challenged, when Tropical Storm Isaias ripped through Westchester in August.

We found the utility companies' storm preparation and response were inadequate and insufficient, and Westchester residents suffered unduly. I convened a Committee of the Whole (COW) meeting in September for our Legislators to hear from representatives of Con Edison,

New York State Electric and Gas and Altice. Verizon declined to attend, citing a pending investigation by the New York State Public Service Commission.

Since we held the last round of such meetings – after winter storms Riley and Quinn in 2018 – we have seen some areas of improvement, but too many of the same problems remain. Leaving people without power, internet and phone service for days is not acceptable. Continuing

problems include the over-reliance on mutual assistance, inadequate in-house resources and personnel, and woeful communications.

Things must change and we will continue to press the companies, and the New York State Public Service Commission, which has regulatory authority over the companies, until things DO change. These companies failed us when we needed them the most. ■

FOOD INSECURITY

The pandemic has highlighted the food insecurity of many of our neighbors. I want to thank County Executive George Latimer for committing some of the federal CARES money to support various feeding programs in the County. At the Board, we have modified some of the contracts with our community-based organizations to address food insecurity. I have continued my work with food distribution programs as we help our residents through a difficult time.

If you need help, or you know someone who does, please reach out to some of these local resources: Lifting Up Westchester Grace's Kitchen, White Plains (914-949-3098); God in Action - Food Alliance, Grace Church, White Plains (914-949-2874); Ecumenical Emergency Food Pantry of White Plains (914-428-5770); Meals-on-Wheels of White Plains (914-946-6878); Feeding Westchester Mobile Food Pantry (914-923-1100). ■

RESTORING OUR ROADS AND BRIDGES

The Board has continued the work of restoring roads and bridges throughout the County after years of neglect. Although Westchester faces difficult financial circumstances due to the COVID-19 pandemic, making capital improvements now, when interest rates are historically low, is a smart infrastructure investment in Westchester's future.

Several roads in White Plains and Harrison have been approved for rehabilitation including Westchester Avenue, Union Avenue and Mamaroneck Avenue. ■

PROTECTING OUR ELECTIONS

The pandemic presented unforeseen challenges to this year's voting process. After the June 23rd Primary, I established an Election Information Gathering Task Force that convened in July and received input from more than 150 concerned voters as well as voter advocates and the Westchester County Board of Elections. The Task Force issued its report in August with recommended improvements. The full report with recommendations is available on the Board's website at [westchesterlegislators.com/election-information-gathering-task-force](https://www.westchesterlegislators.com/election-information-gathering-task-force). ■

POLICE REFORM

The first half of 2020 saw us responding to the calls for police reform sparked by the killing of George Floyd by a police officer in Minnesota. In a letter signed by all Legislators to officials in Minneapolis, we urged justice for Mr. Floyd.

When our State Legislators began consideration of police reform bills, I joined 15 of my colleagues in a letter, urging changes to a law that shielded police disciplinary records from public scrutiny. The repeal of that law and other police reform measures were passed by our State Legislators and signed into law by Governor Cuomo in June.



County Executive George Latimer has convened a Westchester County Police Reform and Reimagining Task Force, which includes four Legislators, to examine police practices and training in Westchester County. The Task Force will develop a plan to reinvent and modernize police strategies and programs based on community input, in accordance with an Executive Order from Governor Cuomo. Recommendations from the Task Force are expected to be before the Board for our review and public comment with approval expected in early 2021 to meet the deadline required by Governor Cuomo's Executive Order. ■

PROTECTING OUR ENVIRONMENT

During the year we've made major advances in creating a sustainable environment for Westchester's future.

Food Scrap Recycling: In October, we approved plans for a dramatically expanded food scrap recycling program



which includes construction of a food scrap recovery and information center at the Household Material Recovery Facility in Valhalla. Food scraps are one of the biggest components of material sent to landfills. By recycling them into useful compost, or converting them to energy, we can reduce greenhouse gases and save money on trash disposal for our local municipalities.

Scarsdale was the first community in Westchester to implement food recycling and helped to pave the way for this expanded County-sponsored effort. Municipalities can join the program, which will collect and transport food scraps to our private partner for composting. Municipalities looking to begin food scrap collection can receive

grants from the State Department of Environmental Conservation that will cover up to 50% of the cost of sealed bins that prevent leakage for households wishing to participate in this exciting new program.

Electric Vehicles: The Board approved a plan to replace more than 100 Bee-Line diesel buses with new hybrid-electric ones and acquire two all-electric buses. The Board approved bonding for the installation of charging stations in various County-owned facilities and parking lots. This will make for a cleaner and greener environment. ■

