



Westchester County Legislator
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Proudly Serving the 8th District



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RESPONDING TO THE COVID-19 CRISIS

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused deep personal loss, economic instability and dislocation across the County. At the Board of Legislators, we continue to work daily to respond to the crisis.

Westchester was one of the country's first COVID-19 hotspots. Working together with County Executive George Latimer, our County health department, and federal, state, local officials, the County was able to scale up testing, expand hospital capacity, make safety changes to our bus system, provide personal protective equipment to medical personnel, and enforce health and safety measures such as requiring masks and social distancing.

To help mitigate the financial impact

to taxpayers, we moved quickly to enact a range of property tax relief measures -- extending the deadlines for taxpayers facing COVID-19 related hardship and slashing late payment penalties for every other property taxpayer during this crisis.

Because of our budget discipline last year, we had leeway in this emergency to respond rapidly to the dramatic loss of County revenue resulting from the pandemic -- including reallocating \$10 million that had been earmarked for the County's rainy day fund, and reducing spending by at least \$11 million by bonding for certiorari repayments and annual pension contribution costs.

At the Board, our investments in up-

graded information technology have allowed us to work continuously without interruption for the people of this County. We have not missed a single Board meeting.

But our work is not done.

Public health and mental health services remain crucially important. We need to continue to support programs to provide for residents facing food insecurity. We must prepare for challenges Westchester families and businesses will face when moratoriums on evictions are lifted. We remain committed to ensuring that we provide the support that Westchester residents and businesses need with the fiscal responsibility that Westchester taxpayers deserve. ■

Westchester County Board of Legislators NEWS

Voice of the People of Westchester County for over 300 years

Fall 2020 Newsletter



Alfreda A. Williams

District 8 ~ Sleepy Hollow, Tarrytown,
Elmsford, Greenburgh



Dear Friends and Neighbors,

It is again my honor and privilege to serve as your legislator in Westchester County's 8th Legislative District, which includes a part of Sleepy Hollow, Tarrytown, Elmsford, Greenburgh and a part of White Plains.

I continue as Vice Chair of the Democratic majority of the Board of Legislators with responsibility to assist in initiating and guiding Legislation through the various committees for an ultimate vote by the Board of Legislators.

As a reminder, I serve on the following committees: Budget and Appropriations, Labor and Housing, Legislation, Rules, Social Services, and Seniors, Youth and Intergenerational Services. These committee memberships allow me to continue to work for responsible financial choices that maintain necessary social services and essential programs.

This year has been an extremely difficult one due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which drastically changed our lives in March 2020. I want to extend my deepest sympathy to all those who suffered a loss of family and/or friends due to the virus. Please take the necessary important precautions of wearing a face mask, frequent handwashing, and social distancing. These precautions have proven effective in limiting the spread of COVID-19. I pray all of you stay safe and well.

Please share your concerns or ideas by contacting me using any of the methods listed on the cover page.

Sincerely,



PICTURED: Photo #1 — Leadership Committee From the left Legislator Christopher Johnson, Legislator Mary Jane Shimsky Vice Chairwoman Alfreda Williams, Chairman Ben Boykin and County Executive George Latimer; **Photo #2** — February 27, 2020: BOL Celebrates Black History Month, pictured in center is Rev. Dr. Gregory Robeson Smith, Mt. Hope AME Zion Church in White Plains, NY and Dr. Brenda L. Galloway Smith surrounded by Board Chairman Ben Boykin, Vice Chair Alfreda Williams, other Legislators, and friends and supporters; **Photo #3** — Board of Legislators members

PROTECTING OUR ELECTIONS

This year's elections were conducted under unprecedented conditions as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. A series of emergency Executive Orders from the Governor changed election dates and deadlines multiple times. Newly instituted procedures for absentee balloting meant an historic number of absentee ballots were being cast. Polling places that might normally be available, for example at nursing homes and senior facilities, were not available this year.

Although the Board of Legislators

does not have authority over how the Board of Elections conducts elections, we wanted to make sure we were providing as much assistance as possible so that Westchester voters had confidence that they will be able to vote and that their votes were properly counted.

Our new Election Information Gathering Task Force, convened after voting issues during the June 23 primary elections gathered information from more than 150 public comments and from committee meetings with voter advocates and the

Westchester County Board of Elections Commissioners.

The Task Force report, issued in August, recommended that the Board of Elections pursue a range of improvements including: expanded early voting hours; a multimedia campaign to encourage early voting; multi-lingual video instructions for how to vote absentee; changes in procedures to increase the number of available workers; drop boxes for returning absentee ballots; and information-sharing partnerships with community organizations. ■

PROTECTING OUR ENVIRONMENT

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

Food Scrap Recycling: This year we approved plans for a dramatic, expanded food scrap recycling program for Westchester County. Food scraps are one of the biggest components of the material sent to landfills. Instead of discarding them, by recycling them into useful compost, or converting them to energy, we can reduce greenhouse gases and saving money on trash disposal for our local municipalities.

Municipalities are now able to join in a new County-sponsored program, which will collect and transport food scraps to our private partner for composting. The

procedure is designed to minimize the number of truck trips, reducing the environmental cost of the program.

The project also includes construction of a food scrap recovery and information center at the County's Household Material Recovery Facility in Valhalla.

With this exciting new program, I hope Westchester will be able to lead the way for other counties in New York and across the nation.

Electric Vehicles: We've also worked this year to encourage the use of electric vehicles and to prepare our mass transit system for a cleaner, electric future.

We approved a plan to

replace more than 100 Bee-Line diesel buses with new, hybrid electric ones.

We also approved the installation of a new charging station and two all-electric buses as we prepare for a move to even cleaner bus fleet.

And for residents driving electric vehicles, we approved the installation of public-use electric vehicle charging stations in County parking facilities. ■



SUPPORTING POLICE REFORM

The first half of 2020 saw us dealing with another crisis -- responding to the calls for police reform sparked by the killing of George Floyd by a police officer in Minnesota.

At the Board of Legislature, we felt we had a moral imperative to raise our voices. In a letter to officials in Minneapolis, I was proud to sign along with all of my colleagues, we urged justice for Mr. Floyd.

When our State Legislators began consideration of police reform bills in Al-

bany, I also 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 also convened a Westchester County Police Reform and Reimagining Task Force to examine police practices and training in Westchester County. Attor-

ney Mayo Bartlett of Greenburgh, a long time advocate for police reform, co-chairs this important Task Force. 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 of Legislators for our review and for public comment and approval by the beginning of the new year. ■

UPDATE ON AFFORDABLE SENIOR HOUSING

Mount Hope AME Zion Church 65 Lake Street in White Plains – 56 units. The County closed in September on the purchase of this property and filed a deed restriction on the property. The church is to get their NYS financing in place, they are working on their NYS application now, for filing before the end of this year.

WestHelp/Mayfair – One WestHelp Drive in Greenburgh – 74 units. The developer states that they are on schedule to begin their marketing this fall and the first of the buildings will be ready for occupancy in February 2021.

Greenburgh Housing Authority – 48 Man-

battan Avenue in Greenburgh – 70 units. The developer is in need of County funds. They are closing on their NYS financing

and they are submitting the project to the Board of Legislators before the end of the year. ■



PROBING STORM RESPONSE BY UTILITY COMPANIES

Local power and telecommunications companies faced the challenge of dealing with a major weather event, when Tropical Storm Isaias ripped through Westchester in August. Unfortunately, preparations and response by the companies once again proved inadequate.

In September, we brought representatives of Con Edison, New York State

Electric and Gas and Altice before us in appearances before meetings of the Committee of the Whole. Verizon declined to attend, citing a pending investigation by the New York State Public Service Commission. We found the company's response inadequate and will be working to bring them before us to face the concerns of their customers.

Continuing problems include the over-reliance on mutual assistance, inadequate in-house resources and personnel, and woeful communications. The companies seem to treat large state fines after the fact as merely the cost of doing business.

Things must change and we will continue to press the companies, and the New York State Public Service Commission. ■

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 want to thank our Parks Department staff for the amazing job they've done, keeping our parks and beaches and pools open and operating safely.

Over the past few years, the Board of Legislators has stepped up our commitment to the County parks – investing in major improvements and upgrades. That commitment has continued in 2020.

1. This year we've approved final plans to complete the restoration of Memorial Field in Mount Vernon, which will restore a vital countywide resource for track and field and other events.

2. We have allocated \$5 million for ma-

jor improvements to our well-traveled North and South County Trailways.

3. Although Playland was not able to open this season because of the pandemic, our commitment to its repair and restoration continues. We approve around \$6 million worth of crucial structural renovation to the tower, the buildings that house the food

concessions to ensure a bright future for this historic jewel in the crown of Westchester's park system.

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 investment in Westchester's future. ■

