

Westchester County Charter Revision Commission –

County & Local Government Relations Focus Group

Meeting Minutes – November 17, 2011

Meeting was called to order by Chairwoman Vinnie Restiano and Vice-Chair David Menken.

In attendance: Chairwoman Vinnie Restiano, Vice-Chair David Menken, Raymond Belair, Chris Crane, Julie Killian, Derickson Lawrence, Anne McAndrew, Paul Meissner, Jane Morgenstern, Randy Sellier, Matt Thomas, Dr. Ronald Volino, Gary Zuckerman

At the beginning of the meeting focus group member introductions were made and meeting agenda was circulated.

Chair Restiano opened the meeting by asking the members what should be the mandate of the focus group?

There were the following responses:

Gary Zuckerman – Mandate should be wide open and include a review of the relationship/ dynamics of school districts. Also the group should consider the concepts of shared services, status/future of County roads, health departments. In summary there are some things the County should be doing and some things the County should not be doing.

David Menken – David asked the question “what kind of consolidation should there be (beyond shared services?)

Julie Killian – Julie asked the question of how the focus group can be educated on exactly what are the municipalities of Westchester with the idea in mind that with home rule there is a fair amount of confusion about town, village and city jurisdictions.

Julie also inquired if there was an inventory of in-force IMA (inter-municipal agreements) between the County and local municipalities to review.

Randy Sellier – Randy stated that he strongly supported investigating the efficacy of the County Charter involving itself development powers with various local municipalities. He raised a key point of whether the County Planning Board should have advisory powers / legal authority over cross-jurisdictional development projects. He drew a deep contrast between this question and developing provisions within the County Charter addressing powers to oversee municipality mergers (something he would be in support.)

Derickson Lawrence – Derickson’s general response to the question of what the focus group’s mandate was to keep an open mind and keep everything on the table as the group is so early in the process. David Menken reiterated the same sentiments.

Anne McAndrews – Anne pointed to the recent storm water management legislation / efforts as an example to look to for County/local municipalities working together. But also noted that this was not the first example. She pointed to current County-wide waste management and sewer district policies and infrastructure as other examples.

Vinnie Restiano – Vinnie posed a second question to the group on whether or not the as a basic premise should the focus group look at the relationships of small municipalities to the County and the relationships of the large municipalities under different lenses? Are the relationships unique enough to be study separately?

She used the issue of the County's AAA Rating and how each Westchester-based municipality is responsible for paying the property tax bill in full whether or not their local residents had made the individual municipalities whole by paying their taxes in full and on time. Is it fair for small and/or large municipalities to have to pay the carry cost of the unpaid property tax?

Derickson Lawrence – Derickson suggested further that the group may want to look at reasonable combinations but cautioned the group to appreciate the difference between “shared services” and municipal mergers.

Julie Killian – Julie asked a logistical question of which County Depts. Directly touch the local municipalities on a regular basis.

Vinnie Restiano - Vinnie suggested that the group do a study of existing local municipality relationships for mutual aid, shared services, etc...

The idea was raised to do a robust study with a cross-section of town managers to speak before the group about the nature / efficiency of the status of shared services, mutual aid and related issues in the municipalities. This concept quickly morphed into doing a “field study” with prepared questions with a variety of identified town managers / supervisors (Derickson Lawrence, Ray Belair and Vinnie Restiano)

Gary Zuckerman suggested the basic premise of the questions attempt to answer the simple questions – How does the County “help” your municipality? How does the County “hurt” your municipality? He also suggested reviewing the website <http://westchester2025.westchestergov.com/>

Paul Meisner – Paul suggested reaching out to Drew Fixell and Anne Janiak from the Westchester Municipal Officials Association.

Meeting “Take-aways”

Randy Sellier was assigned the responsibility to collate possible field research questions. Randy's email address is bsellier@vanfeliu.com.

The next meeting was set for December 15, 2011 at 8am at David Menken's office - McCarthy Fingar LLP 11 Martine Avenue, 12th Floor White Plains, NY 10606-1934.