

**WESTCHESTER COUNTY CHARTER REVISION COMMISSION  
MINUTES  
September 27, 2011**

Members in Attendance: Richard Wishnie, Herman Geist, Julie Killian, John Mattis, Matthew Thomas, Gary Zuckerman, Jeff Binder, Paul Windels, Ronald Volino, Anne McAndrews, Vincenza Restiano, Raymond Belair, Anita Delgado, Florence McCue, Guy Parisi, Jane Morgenstern, Paul Meissner, Derickson Lawrence, Steve Mayo, Bertrand Sellier, David Menken

Absent Members: Sam Zerka, Al Gatta

County Staff in Attendance: George Oros, Katy Delgado, Bill Mooney, Rob Alberti, Ann Marie Berg, Larry Soule, Jim Castro-Blanco, Stacey Dolgin-Kmetz, Chris Crane, Melanie Montalto

**MINUTES**

With a quorum present, Chairman Wishnie called the meeting to order at 7:16 PM.

With a motion by Florence McCue and seconded by Gary Zuckerman the minutes of July 13, 2011 were approved with a vote of 21-0.

With a motion by Paul Windels and seconded by Gary Zuckerman the minutes of the September 22, 2011 facility tour were approved with a vote of 21-0.

Ann Marie Berg, Director of the Finance Department gave an overview of her Department and the work involved in managing the County finances. She stated that she has 49 employees. Ms. Berg explained to the Commission that the County currently has \$900 million in outstanding bonds. \$48 million was refunded in August giving us a net savings of \$2.1 million for next year.

Ms. Berg stated that the bond series slated for the end of the year is approximately \$200 million. She said \$100 million is short term which was converted into long term, \$75 million for new projects, and \$22 million sought through legislation for the early retirement incentive at a lower rate than the state was offering.

A discussion ensued regarding tax assessments and the details of where the County's money is kept.

Larry Soule, Director of the Budget Department provided a description of the work of the Department and explained his role as being equally responsible to the County Executive and the Board of Legislators. He stated that the County has a \$1.786 billion budget with 4,300 employees in the operating budget. He stated that the Budget Department begins

balancing the budget for the following year on the first day each year. He described state and federal mandates, how some are funded, some partially funded where we receive 70 cents on each dollar, and some which are not funded at all. He stated that the Budget Department has 12 employees, and together they prepare the county, water and sewer districts, airport, community college, and capital projects budgets.

Mr. Soule explained that the budget is a year long process. He said the capital budget requests for the following year are due by May 1<sup>st</sup> from all of the departments, operating budget requests are due by September 1<sup>st</sup>, the budget is submitted to the Board of Legislators November 15<sup>th</sup>, and revisions to the budget and additions by the Board of Legislators are released to the public on December 1<sup>st</sup>. The final budget must be approved by December 27<sup>th</sup>. A discussion ensued regarding the budget process, additions and deletions, and the public hearings.

The Commission discussed the possibility of an independent controller facilitating the budget process and agreed to discuss it again in the future.

Mr. Soule explained that we receive 70 cents for each dollar spent in Social Services back from State and Federal aid, however our Medicaid obligation is \$220 million and is an unfunded mandate meaning it is funded with 100% tax levy dollars. He continued to say that the Department of Corrections has very little State and Federal aid and is almost 100% tax levy dollars, and in Public Safety our costs continue to rise to patrol state roads while the aid from the State continues to drop.

Mr. Soule explained that the budget is funded by the following breakdown:

31% of revenue is from sales tax

26% of revenue is from the tax levy

26% of revenue from state and federal aid

He discussed the need for serious state mandate relief.

He stated that last year we borrowed \$17 million from the stabilization program which is essentially a loan from the comptroller to pay our pension payments.

A lengthy detailed discussion ensued regarding the sales tax, property taxes, the reserve fund, and unfunded mandates. Mr. Zuckerman suggested that if Medicaid was not an unfunded mandate, as it isn't in any other state, maybe we wouldn't be the highest taxed county in the country.

Ms. Berg stated that she will provide the Commission with a document called the official statement which may be very helpful to the Commission. Chairman Wishnie stated that we will put it in our dropbox for the members to access.

Mr. Binder informed the Committee of the things he found most impressive about the tour of the Department of Public Safety and the Department of Emergency Services. He was particularly impressed with the fire training facility. Jane Morgenstern agreed with Mr. Binder and wondered how duplication of services is occurring. Mr. Menken commented that he does not know how the response to the recent hurricane would have

been different if the 20% cut to the budget was not restored by the Board of Legislators last year. He continued to say that this bears the question as to what the role of the Commission is with these types of issues. Mr. Zuckerman was amazed at the amount of service is provided and the resources that the County has, that it makes him wonder why we have to have local municipal police departments. Mr. Zuckerman stated that there is some duplication in the two departments, particularly with each having a hazmat team. He said he understands that there was a proposal to merge the two departments and maybe the Commission should take a look at that.

Chairman Wishnie asked for nominations for the Vice Chairman and Secretary. Several members expressed that they would like to wait until they know each other better to vote for a Vice Chairman. The Commission agreed to wait on the vote for Vice Chairman, but Chairman Wishnie asked that we vote on Secretary as only one member has expressed an interest and he is highly qualified and would be a great help at this point. The Commission agreed that Herman Geist should be the Secretary of the Commission.

With a motion by Mr. Zuckerman and a second by Mr. Parisi, the Commission voted with unanimous consent, 21-0 to make Herman Geist the Secretary of the Commission.

Chairman Wishnie explained how he would like to proceed moving forward with the focus groups. He stated that the Steering Committee will be made up of the three officers and the Chairs & Vice-Chairs of the focus groups. He stated that he will meet with the Chairs and Vice-Chairs to discuss the structure and operations of the focus groups and will report back to the Commission with the decisions on how things will work going forward.

Chairman Wishnie announced the Chairs and Vice-Chairs of the focus groups except for the Budget & Finance group which he has not yet decided. The Chairs and Vice-Chairs are:

Executive/Legislative relationship focus group- Chair Al Gatta; Vice-Chair Gary Zuckerman

Local Government/County Government Relationship focus group- Chair Vincenza Restiano; Vice-Chair David Menken

Charter & Codes focus group- Chair Guy Parisi; Vice-Chair- Florence McCue.

Chairman Wishnie stated that he will happily appoint members who have expressed interest in participating in each focus group as members.

Chairman Wishnie asked that we request the DSS Commissioner to give a presentation at the next meeting.

Chairman Wishnie asked that the Commission staff reach out to Chairs and Vice-Chairs to schedule a steering committee meeting.

Secretary Geist stated that he would like to reach out to possible sponsor(s) to provide funding for the Commission. The Commission expressed some concern and questioned

whether we would want non-governmental involvement. They agreed to discuss it further in the future.

Mr. Castro-Blanco stated that he will look into the open meetings law as well as using a sponsor for funding.

Ms. McCue asked Mr. Castro-Blanco about the Pace Law interns. Mr. Castro-Blanco stated that he reached out to Pace but internships were already in place, but now that we have a better structure and can outline an internship structure we will have a better chance.

With a motion by McCue, seconded by Dr. Volino the Westchester County Charter Revision Commission adjourned at 8:51 pm.