

**WESTCHESTER COUNTY BOARD OF LEGISLATORS
COMMITTEE ON BUDGET & APPROPRIATIONS MEETING
MINUTES NOVEMBER 20, 2009**

MEMBERS B&A: Chair: Jose Alvarado, Legislators:
Jenkins, Myers, Harckham, Kaplowitz,
Abinanti, Rogowsky, Burton, Ryan

OTHER LEGISLATORS: Pinto, Burrows, Bronz

IN ATTENDANCE: **Health:** Patsy Yang, Josh Lipsman; **Budget:** Arthur Vietro, Anne Reasoner, Angie Owens, John Delaney, Joy Maltiae; **EZKR:** Stephen Pados, Peter Brown; **Mental Health:** Melissa Staats, Grant Mitchell, Robert Kopenhaver, **ODMD:** Rob Cordiro, Susan Barossi; **Pace Women's Justice Center:** Karen Commeret, Jane Aoyama Martin; **CBAC:** Bill Kay; **JVCC:** Jacqueline Irwin; **CEO's:** Bill Randolph, Andrew Neuman; **WCA:** Cora Greenberg; **Student Advocacy:** Karen Blumenthal, **Seniors:** Mae Carpenter; Lillian Staffetti, Alfreda Williams, Don Stamford

Chair Alvarado called the Budget and Appropriations Committee to order at 10:15 a.m.

The Health Department was the first department to discuss their budget. The mission of the department is to focus on the health of the community whereas the doctors of the community focus on the health of individuals. The number of positions remain the same, 370, and grants have increased to seven. The tax levy has increased to \$1.5 million which is a net increase of \$3.8 million due to an increase in the contributions to the retirement system and health insurance. Dr. Lipsman went into detail on his budget – going over it page by page and explaining its content. The legislators started questioning the various lines in the budget. Legislator Abinanti wanted to know if the County had ever done a census on children with disabilities to

determine what the disabilities were and the number of children that fall into each category. Dr. Lipsman said they use the figures that are available nationwide. Dr. Lipsman had two concerns - increasing the prices at Labs and Research and combining Mental Health and the Health Department. The Health Department is one of Labs largest customers. They rely on them for speed and high quality. If the prices go up, they will price themselves out of the market.

Commercial labs are not as heavily regulated and the Health Department will not only not have the service but in many instances will have to retest. With combining the two departments, they were just told about this last week. There has been no advance planning or discussion. The Commissioner was asked about the five day furlough and if it would affect his department. He was just notified a few days ago and he does not know. He was also asked about consolidating various departments and he suggested that the Deputy County Executive or the County Executive be asked about consolidation. There were questions about the neighborhood health centers. They receive \$2.8 million. They are the Mt. Vernon, Open Door and the Hudson River Centers. They submit bills and are reimbursed by the Health Department. The Department receives very little federal aid and the budget does show an increase in state aid.

Community Mental Health was the next department. There are 152 employees, the budget is \$18 million and they receive \$51 million in grants with a tax levy of \$8.1 million. When Dr. Mitchell arrived they reviewed the department for six months and now two years have elapsed and they have completed the review. There were two things that they were interested in -innovation and fiscal responsibility. In 2009 they are expecting a savings of over \$1 million. In 2010 they are reducing their staff by 5 individuals and there will be a 1.5 percent reduction in the tax levy. They are expanding the Care Coordination Program which address the needs of individuals using D.S.S. services – medical, psychiatric, and incarcerated. They have 48 slots in the program and will be looking at a savings of \$1.5 million. The

cost of the program is \$176,000. They have made cuts in other departments to fund another 24 slots because it has been so successful. They have mental health clinics which were a mess insofar as staffing and income were concerned. They did an overhaul of the clinics and reduced the staff and they now will bring in \$1.5 million in revenue. Now the concern is where do they go from here in the future. Looking at the core mission, some services they perform that if they did not, no one would do them but there are some that could be done by the private sector or not for profit groups. The Department is interested in moving some of the services not mandated by the federal, state or local governments into the private sector. Should this happen, there are three criteria:

1. The community agency needs to be willing to provide the service
2. The agencies need to deliver the services efficiently and effectively
3. Performance measures need to be built into the contracts so the services they provide are of equal quality to the ones offered by Mental Health.

The Department offers a program called Treatment Alternatives for Safer Communities. This program saves about \$30 to \$35 million a year. It costs the department \$1.3 million. They work with inmates and individuals arrested for DWI. The cases continue to rise as there are more DWI. The state aid of \$330,000 has been cut so they had to cut positions. As a result by reducing expenses and staff, there now is a back log and the courts are complaining. This is not a mandated service but it is essential to the courts and judges and is probably one of the services that could be given to a community agency. Of the mental clinics, there are two losing a lot of money and there are community agencies that are interested in taking them over. Early Step Forward program people were told that Mental Health needs data to show if it is effective and cost effective. Dr. Mitchell has a summary of the outcome. This year there are 732

children enrolled and next year they expect more than 1000 children. It is a program that has early screening and intervention of kids in day care centers. They administer a survey in September and again in the spring and have seen a significant change in the children. There are fewer social and emotional problems. To keep this program whole, they will need an additional \$545,000. If Mental Health and the Department of Health were to merge, it should do so to improve services and to be efficient. A study would need to be done to see if this is feasible and that would take from 6 months to a year to come up with a plan.

The last department is Senior Programs & Services. They are part of the national network and are interested in maintaining the independence and dignity of the aging and allowing them to remain in their community. They are interested in working with volunteers and trying to have more people volunteer and work with the aging. Their staffing is down to 43 from 47. Most of their budget is from grants with the County paying 20 per cent of their budget. Legislator Harckham asked about cuts in legal services to seniors and in contract services. These services were based on money received from the federal government which was a one-time discretionary money. He also asked about the furlough and as to whether people would work and not get paid or just not work. The Budget Director said it is still evolving as to what the original intent was.

On the motion of Legislator Harckham, seconded by Legislator Ryan, Budget & Appropriation was adjourned at 1:26 p.m.