

**WESTCHESTER COUNTY BOARD OF LEGISLATORS
COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS
MEETING MINUTES: MARCH 11, 2008**

In Attendance:

Committee Members: Legislators Kenneth Jenkins, Chair; Lois Bronz, William Burton, Peter Harckham, Judy Myers, Vito Pinto, Martin Rogowsky; Non-legislator Advisory Member: Thomas McGrath.

Committee Coordinator: Barbara Arrington Dodds

Planning Department: Jerry Mulligan, Commissioner, Norma Drummond, Deputy Commissioner, Deborah DeLong, Director of Housing, Dana Sanchez; Office of County Executive: Andrew Neuman, William Randolph; Westchester Residential Opportunities: Veronica Raphael, Velene Acquah; League of Women Voters of Westchester: Karen Schatzel, Jean Pollack; Westchester Community College Federation of Teachers: Anne D'Orazio; Citizens Budget Advisory Committee: Al Turnquest; Housing Land Trust: Rose Noonan, Rich Hobish.

Items for Discussion: Updates on

- Affordable housing projects
- Eviction prevention program
- Westchester Housing Land Trust

Guests: Norma Drummond, Deputy Commissioner of Planning, Deb DeLong, Dir. Of Housing

With a quorum present, Leg. Jenkins opened the meeting at 1:08 p.m. He welcomed guests Norma Drummond and Deb DeLong of the Planning Dept.

Eviction Prevention Program:

Ms. Drummond reviewed how funding for the eviction prevention program began when non-profit agencies came to the Board in 2006 to say they would run out of money by September. BOL added \$300,000 to the budget for eviction prevention services. From RFPs, five different agencies experienced in eviction prevention were awarded approximately \$185,000. A summary of the agencies' expenditures for 2007 was presented showing a balance of \$6,520.15 unspent. The Coalition for Hungry and Homeless acts as the clearing house and has a data base accessed by all agencies that allows them to make sure families are not assisted more than once every twelve months and to access funds from each other. Families have to show that there is some issue that caused them to fall behind in their rent and that they have the ability to pay their rent going forward.

Also presented was the draft RFP for this year's BOL funding of \$300,000 cash assistance and \$100,000 for legal services. Ms. Drummond asked for guidance from the legislators as to whether the cash assistance included funds for administrative expenses or not. The agencies want to be able to immediately tap into all of the money available rather than wait until the period that they had originally requested which was to be at the end of the year. She asked if the funds should be available all year round or only in the second half.

Leg. Pinto commented that somebody who has a need in March or April should be able to get the help. Ms. Drummond replied that there are other sources of funds available. The agencies originally asked for funding for the winter months however, some families whose landlords are being foreclosed on for their multiple dwellings are forcing tenants into an eviction situation at any time of year.

Leg. Rogowsky expressed concern about the ability of the agencies to help without administrative costs covered. Perhaps it would be better if only one or two sought administrative costs rather than all five. He also asked if there was a computer clearinghouse that would prevent individual applications to multiple agencies. Ms. Drummond said to prevent multiple awards the information on each request first goes into the Coalition clearinghouse data base which would show if another request or award was made. Leg. Jenkins asked if the Coalition has administrative costs that are funded from some other source. Last year the Coalition did ask for additional funds for part time use of one of their full-time staffers recognizing that they would have additional work. Leg. Harckham asked how much is usually given for

administrative expenses. Planning does not pay administrative costs Ms. Drummond said but in the ESG program, agencies are allowed 15% to 20%. There were no administrative funds in the awards last year. They are now saying they might need more staff.

Legislators Bronz and Myers ran up against this question last year. The original intent last year was to get cash into the hands of landlords so that tenants would not become homeless. Leg. Myers said she thought it would be difficult for the agencies without funding for administrative help in order to administer the extra money. This year we tried to make it clear in the 2008 budget, \$300,000 was allotted as cash and another \$100,000 was for legal assistance.

Leg. Jenkins asked what is the success rate. Ms. Drummond said in the ESG program, on an annual basis 118 families were helped in 2007 with essential services and eviction prevention. \$70,000 for homeless prevention subsidies and about \$90,000 staffing cost. But do we know how many were helped successfully? Dana Sanchez, administrator for ESG, said we don't know that really but only maybe one person came back for additional help in a four-month period. They might go to a different agency for funds if they need assistance again but we don't have any figures. Leg. Rogowsky commented that wasn't the clearinghouse supposed to prevent that? Ms. Drummond said yes, that in 2007 money did not go out the door until October & November and that maybe now we might go back and ask about the results. Leg. Jenkins asked are we using the money in the most appropriate way—maybe we need to be doing something differently which is why this year we had the additional \$100,000 put in because we thought there were other things that needed to be done in addition to the one month's rent.

Leg. Jenkins asked the members of the committee if there was something they want to see happen with the program. Leg. Burton said he would prefer to back fill the existing operation rather than start an early grant program. To put anything in except a safety net at the end will give us a major problem.

Mr. McGrath asked how this program is different from the ESG program. Ms. Drummond said ESG funds are limited to consortium communities and can't be used in Yonkers, Mt. Vernon, New Rochelle and White Plains. This program is for anywhere. There is also grant funding through United Way that usually comes early in the year. Most of the funds from United Way are distributed outside of the consortium but only at certain times or they run out of those funds. Leg. Myers added that the reason agencies came to the Board was for end of the year money. Leg. Jenkins noted that there was an additional concern that \$115,000 was available for legal services but never spent. Agencies told the committee that Planning had withheld the funds.

Other comments: Ms. Drummond said last year legal services was included as an eligible activity in the grant RFP. This year the Board specifically added \$100,000 for legal services related to eviction prevention. \$300,000 has been allocated regularly for eviction prevention. Need to look at results to see if there is some other thing we need to do. Leg. Rogowsky—landlords are trying to get people out to raise rents. Harkham—have we budgeted enough to address all the families who may need assistance? Only \$25,000 a month was being used for eviction prevention assistance. The agencies would have to let us know. Legislators Maisano and Pinto: These funds should be used as a resource or safety net with no administrative costs to established programs. All agreed. Not looking to add new programs. Motion made by Leg. Pinto and seconded by Leg. Myers, all members voted aye to help existing eviction prevention agencies with the \$300,000 grant would not include administrative expenses.

Leg. Jenkins—would like to see a separate RFP for eviction prevention legal services.

Leg. Burton—don't we already have legal services going on for this purpose? Money is already in the budget for legal services. Current grant \$370,000 is a 12 month budget for legal services. Leg. Pinto made the motion to put out the RFP for legal services now, seconded by Leg. Burton. Leg. Rogowsky asked if DSS got involved in eviction prevention cases. Leg. Myers said the law has changed and it is not necessary to notify DSS. The allocation for immigrant services (\$50,000) needs clarification. Legislators asked what is it for and does it include legal services and eviction services? Do the other grants include immigration services? Clarification will be pursued. Motion on the legal RFP was unanimously approved by members.

Update on Affordable Housing Projects was presented by Deb DeLong. Active developments as of 3/5/08 sorted by legislative districts. Funding is sorted into HOME, HIF, NHLA, and CDBG programs and activity divided into categories of pre-application, underwriting, approvals (Planning Board, A&C, BOL), in contract, and under construction. The chart also showed expiring projects—almost 200 units between 2015 and 2019.

Westchester Housing Land Trust: Based on the losses of Mitchell Lama and expiring County sponsored losses, the County needed to find a way to keep affordable housing units. What could the County do to keep affordable housing units longer. Ms. Drummond presented the rationale for creating a not for profit legal entity in Westchester County for creating affordable housing in perpetuity. Three directors were named in the certificate of incorporation filed with the state in April 2007: Richard Hobish, Esq. of the ProBono Partnership and Rosemarie Noonan, Esq. of the Housing Action Council and Deborah DeLong of the Westchester County Planning Dept. Extended discussion ensued regarding other aspects of the concept of housing land trusts. Also discussion on the question of the role of the Board of Legislators. Leg. Jenkins suggested next steps would be for Planning: for the up-coming Committee of the Whole meeting, to bring answers to questions posed in the Chairman's letter and to provide an initial set of by-laws for WHLT instead of the model.

Motion to adjourn made by Leg. Pinto, seconded by Leg. Burton. All in favor.