

LEGISLATIVE AND RESEARCH COMMITTEE MINUTES

FEBRUARY 7, 2008 – 3:00 P.M.

Present: Chairman Sausville; Supervisors M. Johnson, Rowland, Yepsen and Veitch; David Wickerham, County Administrator; Ed Tremblay, Paul Lent, Emergency Services; Press.

Chairman Sausville called the meeting to order and welcomed all in attendance.

The minutes were approved from the October 9, 2007 meeting as distributed.

Chairman Sausville appointed Mr. Grattidge as the Committee Vice-Chairman.

Mr. Sausville requested authorization from the committee to act on their behalf on matters where time is of the essence.

A motion was made by Mrs. Johnson, seconded by Ms. Yepsen to authorize the Committee Chairman to act on behalf of the Legislative and Research Committee on matters where time is of the essence. Unanimous.

Mr. Sausville said vans will leave the county complex at approximately 1:30 p.m., on March 5th, to meet with State Legislators in Albany at 3:00 p.m. in the Legislative Office Building.

Mr. Wickerham said the Governor's proposed State budget would increase mandated county costs without offsetting revenues. Unfunded mandates are still the biggest concern, with the Counties three largest unfunded mandates consuming 90% of the property taxes.

The Governor did make mandate relief a priority in capping the increases in the programs to provide additional educational opportunities for preschool handicapped children.

The burden has been increased in the Social Services budget calling for the County to carry more of the burden than the State is actually carrying. In most States in the Country there is no Social Services burden on the counties, it is born by the State in all but three States. In New York State the counties have the largest burden with approximately 50% of most of the Social Service costs. The current State budget is calling for counties to take a larger portion of the costs. Currently the county is paying half of the cost of incarcerating young people in a secured detention, and the current State budget proposal is for the counties to pay the total cost. This programs current costs are approximately \$400,000.

The county currently pays 50% of the non-federal share of the TANIF program and the Safety Net Program. The Governor is proposing that the county take 52% of the share. Local governments will loose \$76 million to the increased mandates in TANIF and the Safety Net Program.

The three biggest mandates that the county has no control over are; Social Services, Community College Tuition, and Education to Preschool Handicapped Children, totaling approximately \$40 million, and representing 90% of the county property tax levy.

The Governor has proposed eliminating VLT revenues to the City of Saratoga Springs and the County representing a \$1.3 million loss. This would be eliminated in the 2009 budget, but remain as is for 2008.

Mr. Wickerham said a major change in the budget was the decision to eliminate funding for the rebasing of nursing homes. In the counties 2007 budget it was projected that the county would receive approximately \$750,000.

Ms. Yepsen said that at the NYSAC meeting held last week they spent a lot of time discussing the issue of rebasing of nursing homes. They have agreed to set up a meeting in Albany with other nursing homes that are experiencing the same as Saratoga County at the Governor's office, to give an opportunity to let the legislature know how this will affect each county.

The Legislative and Research committee will be addressing the following issues at their meeting with State Legislators on March 5th.

1. Rejecting the provisions in the Governor's 2008 budget that would eliminate assistance to Saratoga Springs and Saratoga County.
2. Opposing the Department of Corrections proposal to close the Minimum Security Prison Camp at Mount McGregor.
3. Supporting a seamless change of the racing franchise that will allow the Saratoga Racecourse to remain the premier racing facility in the nation.
4. Calling on the State to address the short term and long term fiscal stability of County operated nursing homes.
5. Supporting a constitutional amendment barring the imposition of unfunded mandates on local government.
6. Requesting special member items for local emergency service organizations to acquire equipment compatible with the new County Radio System.
7. Supporting Saratoga County municipalities in their requests for special State Assistance.

A motion was made by Ms. Yepsen, seconded by Mrs. Johnson to approve the above 2008 Legislative Program. Unanimous.

Mr. Sausville said the Town of Malta advanced last year, with the help from Assemblyman McDonald, a bill that would enable the town of Malta to exempt volunteers from paying an emergency services tax. If the volunteers did not have to pay

that tax the amount of money would be redistributed to people who don't volunteer services and would result in an increase in taxes paid by them. This will provide a way to add incentive to people who would like to participate in the volunteer fire and emergency corp. This would enable a municipality or town to provide the exemption if they so choose.

Mrs. Johnson requested the County Attorney to draft a resolution to present to the committee for their review.

Mr. Sausville said the Community Preservation Act has been advocated for a number of years and little by little counties are being included in the program, i.e. Long Island, Hudson River Greenway, etc. This was introduced within the Assembly in 2006 by Assemblyman McDonald and supported by the Association of Towns.

Each town would have the option to decide whether they would want a real estate transfer tax and then could choose from a percentile from ½% to 2%. Any house below the median price range would be exempt from the real estate transfer tax.

Mrs. Yepsen said efforts should continue to find future funding for land preservation and open space. She expressed her support and highlighted the need to look forward to future growth.

Mrs. Johnson said she could not support this motion until she had more definitive information.

A motion was made by Ms. Yepsen, seconded by Mr. Rowland to approve a resolution in support of Assembly Bill A-0733, which would allow towns and cities to impose a real estate transfer tax and create community preservation funds. Ayes – Yepsen, Rowland, Sausville – M. Johnson – Abstained. Motion passed

Ms. Yepsen said she received an e-mail from the Governor's office with regard to policy conference calls with the Governor's office. Several topics were outlined with Healthcare being one of them. Times and days have been set up for the conference calls with one person appointed to be the moderator of each call. Additional topics include; Energy and the Environment, Education, Public Safety, Economic Development, and Housing. The calls will take place February 11th through February 15th.

On a motion made by Ms. Yepsen, seconded by Mr. Rowland the meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,
Chris Sansom