

Legislative and Research Committee Minutes
March 7, 2011 – 3:30 p.m.

Present: Chairman Veitch; Supervisors Johnson, Raymond, Wright, Yepsen, Collyer, Southworth and Wood; Spencer Hellwig, Administrator; Ryan Moore, Mgmt. Analyst; John Penzer, Peter Whitten, Shelters of Saratoga; Press.

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

On a motion made by Mr. Wright, seconded by Ms. Raymond the minutes of the February 14, 2011 meeting were approved unanimously.

Mr. Veitch said every year there is a meeting with State Legislative leaders to talk about the Legislative program that is adopted each year. This year the meeting has been scheduled for Friday, March 25th at 11:00 a.m.

Ms. Raymond said she hoped when they are meeting with Senator McDonald that they invite him and other legislators to come to the next committee meeting.

Mr. Veitch said there is potential that Congressman Gibson may be in attendance at the April Legislative and Research Committee meeting.

Mr. Veitch introduced Mr. Penzer and Mr. Whitten from the Shelters of Saratoga to address an issue regarding NYS Funding for the Saratoga Neighborhood Preservation Program.

Mr. Penzer said the Shelters of Saratoga is a countywide shelter, and the only homeless shelter in Saratoga, Warren and Washington Counties, serving people not only in Saratoga Springs, but throughout the county. There are hundreds of homeless people in Saratoga County and the shelter sees this every day because all of their programs are always at or over capacity. In addition to the shelter there is a Neighborhood Preservation Program, and a Homeless Prevention and Rapid Re-housing Program, which is one of the larger programs. The Neighborhood Preservation Program is a mobile outreach to the chronically homeless people who do not traditionally attend the shelter, as well as transitional living with a plan that allows people to stay in the shelter for up to sixty days. Due to the high demand people are turned away every day, he said. A grant has been applied for from the State through the Office of Disability Assistance to help build another building that would contain eight self-contained efficiency apartments for a period of up to eighteen months.

Mr. Penzer said both the Rural Preservation Program and the Homeless Prevention and Rapid Re-housing Program are in peril because they are about to expire. There is some hope through the Homeless Emergency Assistance Re-housing Program, but the problem is timing, and even though the act was signed in 2009 they will likely not see any money until 2012 or 2013, he said.

Mr. Whitten said the Homeless Housing and the Homeless Prevention Rapid Re-housing Program is part of the Federal stimulus program. It was an eighteen-month program that involved three counties. The numbers, as provided by Family Services in the county indicate that they were spending approximately \$400/week on people who were in the category of needing assistance in housing. Those funds were only to provide some early funding for the rental amounts in an apartment. Shelters of Saratoga helped people find those apartments, and also in some cases to provide a security deposit for them as well. There were 1,100 households that were seen by the county during that same period of time. Mr. Whitten said they are taking people who would normally come back to the shelter if not assisted, and not encouraged, and work with them on financial management to be financially sound, to have a job and to pursue a program of personal wellness.

Mr. Penzer said there is a cost to the HPRP program and the Rural Preservation Program for a total of \$100,000. It appears, based on the Governors budget, and the fact that there was only \$50,000 on average for 256 Rural Preservation Companies throughout the State, that the number is being reduced by half.

Ms. Raymond said she was not clear on what was being asked for. Mr. Whitten said they were asking for help, advocacy and consideration of any way that there could be a bridge to allow these programs to continue to be funded.

Ms. Raymond asked if this was something that was threatened by the Governors budget? Mr. Whitten said, yes. Ms. Raymond asked if they were requesting that the committee support the reinstatement of the funding? Mr. Whitten said, yes.

Mr. Penzer said there is a cost to them for the two programs of \$100,000. As the HPRR program is a federal program funded through the stimulus, will also lose administrative funding at the end of June. Mr. Penzer said if the funding was available to them, they would be able to yield a savings to the county that would be significant.

Mr. Veitch explained to Mr. Penzer and Mr. Whitten what the charge of the Legislative and Research Committee was and expressed his support of a resolution from the committee opposing any cuts to the program.

Ms. Raymond said the problem is that they are going to be far from the only group of people coming to visit this committee with requests. She said she does not want to see the county, month after month request to restore many things, and on the other side say to the state, cut out the mandates, cutback and stop passing things down to the county because the taxpayers can't afford it.

Ms. Raymond said she would be in favor of a resolution in support of the programs that they run, and how important they are to the county. A she said she would not be comfortable going to the Legislature because "if the committee opens the door for them, we open it for everybody".

Ms. Yepsen proposed a motion that the committee support the program and send it down to the State and focus on the financial aspect. If the State cuts what they are proposing to cut, it is going to cost the taxpayers more money, she said.

Mrs. Raymond said she would support a resolution that would commend Shelters of Saratoga for the programs that they provide and that they continue those programs. She said she would not feel comfortable getting into the money aspect without inviting the Social Programs Committee and Commissioner Christopher to review it.

Mr. Johnson said he would be in agreement to support a resolution to support the efforts of Shelters of Saratoga and that we continue to support them in funding efforts at the State level.

Ms. Raymond said she would be agreeable in saying, “We hope that the services that they provide to the county will be able to be continued throughout the year”.

Ms. Raymond said she would like to give the Shelters of Saratoga the tool to go out into the community, to the other not-for-profits, and corporations that help support these kinds of programs that says, we are very supportive of what they do and we think it is important that they continue.

A motion was made by Ms. Yepsen, seconded by Ms. Raymond to approve a resolution supporting the Shelters of Saratoga through the Homeless Prevention and Rapid Re-housing Programs, which address transitional housing needs and homelessness prevention. Unanimous.

On a motion made by Ms. Raymond, seconded by Mr. Wright the meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,
Chris Sansom