

Legislative & Research Committee Minutes
February 11, 2020 – 2:30 p.m.

Present: Chairman Kinowski; Committee Members Phil Barrett, Tara Gaston, Jean Raymond, Tom Richardson, Matt Veitch; Supervisor Mike Smith and Chairman of the Preston Allen; Spencer Hellwig, Chad Cooke, County Administrator; Steve Dorsey, County Attorney; Craig Hayner, County Clerk.

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

On a motion made by Ms. Gaston, seconded by Mr. Veitch, the minutes of the May 15, 2019 meeting were approved unanimously.

Mr. Kinowski announced the appointment of Mr. Veitch as committee vice chair.

A motion was made by Mr. Barrett, seconded by Mr. Richardson, to adopt the 2020 Legislative Agenda. The motion passed. Ms. Gaston was opposed.

Mr. Kinowski said that copies of the proposed legislative agenda were emailed out to all Supervisors and a meeting was recently held to discuss the items with the legislatures. A copy of the agenda is attached to these minutes. Mr. Kinowski said it was decided that a reduced agenda be forwarded this year as there are only so many initiatives they can push for. Mr. Kinowski opened the discussion regarding the items on the agenda and any additional that may be requested to be added. Mr. Barrett said that there were some lengthy discussions on several items at the meeting. They also discussed marijuana and whether the County stance would be to not support the legalization of marijuana. Mr. Barrett said that he would like to see this back on the list, the County in principle oppose the legislation of marijuana. There are several reasons why Mr. Barrett believes it should be opposed. The effects that the expansion of the drug culture has is wide, vast and negative. The effects of mental health and health in general. There is not much doubt that it is a gateway drug. AAA has done a study of the State of Washington which has had legalized marijuana for some time. Mr. Barrett said that the facts state that a state which legalizes marijuana over a period of time, has a large increase in traffic accidents and deaths that they can attribute to THC in peoples' system. Mr. Barrett said that when you see the evidence mount, you know what the result is going to be, and he keeps hearing about money. Mr. Barrett said the money is never enough to cover the social ills that the legislation creates. The additional costs to local governments is going to be exponential. They don't know yet how the costs will be covered locally. He personally believes that it is bad policy to continue to expand the drug culture. Mr. Barrett said however, that if it does become legal, and there is an opportunity for farmers to grow it, he would be open to farmers having the option. Ms. Gaston said that she has a different view of the science and policy about it. Her suggestion is to not add this to the legislative agenda because they don't know what the legislation is going to look like. If it is put in, she suggests recommending that any legalization comes with an ability for a County to opt out. As of right now, the proposals put forth allows the County to opt out of growth, processing, distribution and manufacturing. It does not allow to opt out of use and possession. Ms. Gaston said that it will still be purchased in neighboring counties or MA, and will still be used in Saratoga County. The

question is does the County want to opt out of the tax structure. At this point the tax structure is not fully known but would be slightly higher than sales taxes. Mr. Barrett said that it seems to him that when you see these programs start, there is a local share on revenue, and somewhere down the road they are always fighting to keep the revenue that is either lost in the budget or taken away. Mr. Kinowski said that he has no issues adding this item however it was not placed on the agenda due to the fact that the legislatures did not seem to think anything would become of it this year. Mrs. Raymond said that she has mixed feelings and agrees with Mr. Barrett on one hand and Ms. Gaston on the other. In the rural areas, it's difficult to be against something that people who want it can, and are currently growing in their basements, back yard, woods etc. Mrs. Raymond said that she believes from an effectiveness standpoint, they should zero in on items they have half a chance of getting rather than opposing items. She believes that it's better to hold off until they know what it entails and what law enforcement have to say about it prior to putting a lot of effort in opposing it, and being able to zero in on exactly why it's being opposed. Mr. Richardson agreed with Mrs. Raymond. Mr. Barrett said that he would like to be on the record of opposing it without reservation, and from a personal standpoint representing the people of Clifton Park he believes it is important. Mrs. Raymond said that from a legislative program prospective, it is more effective to ask for less items. In fact, the VLT item could stand alone, it means a lot and there would be a better chance of getting back. Mr. Veitch said that the Racing Committee meeting will be discussing this item at the next meeting. Mr. Kinowski said that a separate resolution will be presented for Senator Tedisco's bill. Mrs. Gaston said that she supports this however, does not support item # 6 as a whole.

A motion was made by Mr. Barrett, seconded by Mr. Richardson, to support Senator Tedisco's S.7280 bill that extends privacy protections to emergency first responders to address some of the inadequacies with recent discovery law reform. Unanimous.

Mr. Barrett said that they passed this resolution in Clifton Park recently and if anyone has any questions to let him know.

Mr. Kinowski said that he was contacted recently by Senator Jordan's office regarding a request for towns being designated as purple heart communities. Mr. Kinowski said that he forwarded the resolution which was passed designating the entire Saratoga County, however he said that they would still like to see resolutions from individual townships. Mr. Barrett suggested additional signage being added to major routes within the county. There are already some signs in Malta and Halfmoon. It was suggested that this be brought up at the next Public Works meeting.

Mr. Barrett asked if the County had taken a position on the 5 cent plastic bag issue. Mr. Barrett has said that in his opinion the 5 cent charge is a regressive tax on residents, completely unnecessary and does not further any of the cause which has been stated. Mr. Dorsey said that you have to vote to impose the tax. Ms. Gaston said that Saratoga Today published a story recently that completely misconstrued the position of Saratoga County. Ms. Gaston and Mr. Veitch both wrote to the paper to correct them.

On a motion made by Mr. Barrett, seconded by Mr. Richardson, the meeting was adjourned unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,
Therese Connolly
Deputy Clerk of the Board

Saratoga County 2020 Legislative Program

State

- 1. Urging the Governor to Restore VLT Aid.** The County of Saratoga and City of Saratoga Springs jointly cover costs associated with public safety services in order to provide a venue for video lottery terminals. The County and City rely on VLT aid to offset these costs together with the growing list of unfunded mandates while the State continues to reap the benefits that these venues provide.
- 2. Restore Early Voting Funding.** As many counties suspected, early voting is turning into another unfunded mandate with the elimination of state support. The State did provide limited support to the County in 2019 that totaled a little over \$300,000 for equipment and soft costs. Of the \$300,000, approximately \$150,000 was used to purchase equipment and the rest is being utilized to cover soft costs. These soft costs will continue year after year to fund cellular connection charges, polling place charges and increased election inspector fees. Eliminating funding amounts to another unfunded mandate.
- 3. Supporting the Creation of a Funding Program for Infrastructure Improvements for Water Supply, Sanitary Sewer, and Stormwater Projects.** The CHIPS Program or Consolidated Highway Improvement Program is a program administered by NYSDOT since 1991 which provides funding to local municipalities for highway improvement projects. The County supports the creation of a similar fund for the purpose of improving locally controlled public utilities including water supply, sanitary sewer and stormwater related projects in order to address aging infrastructure, provide redundancy, and prepare for catastrophic events.
- 4. Restore Community College Funding.** The State's reduction in community college tuition is driven by enrollment but what the equation fails to consider are the rising costs of tuition. The original equation was 1/3 Student, 1/3 State, and 1/3 County. With the reduction in state funding to community colleges through the years, the formula has shifted to place a greater burden on the student and the County. The proposed reduction is estimated to cost the county an additional \$400,000 in 2020.
- 5. Opposing Medicaid Reforms.** Based on a review of the County's 2019 Medicaid growth compared to 2018, the amount that exceeds the proposed 3% growth cap would require a refund back to the State in the amount of over \$2.0 million. Over the past 5 years, the total is a staggering \$8.6 million. The fact is the County isn't party to the agreements between the providers and the State and we are required to follow federal and state eligibility rules so we have no way of controlling any of these costs. In addition, the reforms call for a connection between staying under the tax cap and maintaining Medicaid shares based on the State's growth cap. Together, these reforms would force the County to significantly cut other programs and services to its residents in order to maintain a structurally balanced budget.
- 6. Supporting an Overhaul of Recent Criminal Justice Reforms.** Saratoga County supports Senator Tedisco's S.6849 bill to repeal bail and discovery reform laws. These recent reforms have caused widespread concern for public safety and are placing additional unfunded burdens on law enforcement agencies, District Attorney's Office and Public Defenders Offices across the State. As a stop-gap measure, Saratoga County also supports Senator Tedisco's S.7280 bill to protect emergency first responders and provide them with the same personal information disclosure protections that are afforded to law enforcement personnel. The County also supports the bi-partisan bill proposed by Senator Tedisco and Assemblyman Santabarbara, S.6861, that provides courts with more discretion when addressing felony convictions.