

GOVERNMENT REVIEW & EFFICIENCY

Transcript 3-4-2021

SPEAKERS

Jean Raymond, Steve Bulger, Andrew Jarosh, Tara Gaston, Audra Hedden, Michael Hartnett, Jonathan Schopf, Matt Veitch, Joe Grasso, Kevin Tollisen, Several Supervisors, Eric Connolly

Matt Veitch

Good afternoon, everyone. Welcome to the Government Review and Efficiency Committee for March 4. Attendance has been taken. And first on the agenda is approval of the minutes of the February 4 2021 meeting. I'll ask for a motion.

Jean Raymond

I move that.

Matt Veitch

So moved by Supervisor Raymond. Is there a second?

Joe Grasso

Second

Matt Veitch

Supervisor Grasso. Any discussion? All in favor say aye.

Several Supervisors

Aye.

Matt Veitch

Any opposed? All right, carried.

Matt Veitch

All right, thank you. Yeah, I think the battery was dying on my microphone there. So first on the agenda, this should not take too long. It's just a quick discussion on the local laws. At the last meeting, we talked about going through that and trying to determine what were active and what were not active and trying to figure out what we had out there. So one of the things that I did learn was that the keeper of the local laws for Saratoga County is the Clerk of the Board of Supervisors. They're actually located in the vault here in our office nearby. And I've been given access to them, and taking a look at them and started going through them to find what we have. So they start way back with local law number one of 1950, with a couple of earlier ones that are listed, but not in the packet from 1949. And interestingly, the first

local law we have that's fully in that book is the budget process. And it talks about what her budget process is, and who is the budget officer and how the dates and things are supposed to go with that. Now, whether or not that's fully still active or not been amended since then, I don't know yet. It does still get referenced though in our budget resolution. I noticed that last year, when we were doing our budget, that is still references local law number 1 of 1950, which I think is interesting.

Jean Raymond

I have a question, Matt. If they can only go back to 1950, where are all the laws from 1800 to 1950. Did they just not get codified.

Matt Veitch

There at least not, they're not saved. They're not kept in the book. I mean, if we went earlier than that.

Jean Raymond

I think that we had those laws codified many years ago, and I can't remember, I know we discussed it. And I suspect that maybe we might have decided at that point to just do 1950 forward.

Matt Veitch

That's possible. Very possible.

Jean Raymond

Because I know there's old laws. I mean, you have laws,

Matt Veitch

We have the old spitting on the sidewalk laws, probably

Jean Raymond

Bounties on wolves.

Matt Veitch

Bounties on wolves. Okay.

Jean Raymond

I mean, there's a lot of stuff out there be interesting to see. When we did the old proceedings.

Jean Raymond

Right. So, this almost kind of ties into the number 6 that we have on our agenda as well, which is the County Code. And again, this is just all part of my learning process as well. But what I am doing just to kind of take it back, because I agree, maybe there's some value in looking at some of the older stuff. But what I'm doing right now is I'm basically taking those books, I'm going through them, I'm putting them into a spreadsheet, and I'm trying to follow along what we've done with them since then, many, many, many of the local laws we have are like compensation schedules and things, that I'm not really going to follow those because those are old. But there are certain ones that we still kind of would use. And I'm going to keep track of those and try to bring them in, hopefully to the next meeting. If I have

enough time to put them all together. And we can just start taking a look at that. They start with that one, I've run into the one where we established the weighted voting at the County back in the late 1960s. So there's some interesting stuff there that we still kind of have out there. We were kind of doing a star exemption for people before they had star exemptions. And so I don't know if that was allowed or not. But we wrote, and following that along. So I just wanted to let you know that that those are, that's one of our things we are to look at in this in this Committee. So I'm kind of taking that on as my own, at least at this point. Before I turn it over to the County Attorney who will then figure out what we do with it.

Jean Raymond

You may want to also bring Lauren Roberts in and see what she's got as far as the older stuff. What she, I don't know if she's ever done any research on it. But she, I think historians like to look at the really old stuff. You may find we've got laws we want to get rid of too.

Matt Veitch

Yes, and I think that's part of it too, repealing stuff that just is makes no sense. And just get it off the books so that we don't have it around. I mean, just makes sense to do that. The other part of this is to really is that the fact that you know, the Clerk of the Board keeps them in paper form and notebooks in the vault. Newer stuff, when it gets sent to the Department of State gets put into a website. And I do have that link, I think Mike Hartnett sent that to us, our Assistant Attorney, and basically, I think I can share that with everybody, but they only go back to about 1998 or so. So it's not like the whole back tracking to like the beginning part of where we started keeping those records. So and the other thing would be about what do we do with those old ones going forward? Therese and I have talked a little bit about, having it done on the laserfiche system and having them scanned in so that they can be accessed online and or at least on our intranet. And also about potentially talking to the County Clerk about holding on to those kinds of records, they keep all kinds of records, which leads into some of our other stuff here for today. And having those records also be part of the County Clerk's stash of documents that they have. So that's kind of all I have on that. I guess I would ask if there's any other comments or questions about that? I think it'll be interesting to see and follow along, what's happened since 1950 once I'm done with it, so I'll keep going. Anything else? Anybody else?

Tara Gaston

Supervisor Gaston. What are the laws regarding keeping copies of the local laws and access because one of my major concerns is access to the public? I mean, if we can't even figure out where they are, and what binders, it's going to be hard for anybody else. Um, I think it looks like attorney Hartnett may be about to respond. But I think that's something that we need to consider is where we put them in when we put them, we also need to make sure that we're meeting any requirements that may have changed since 18..... On where they need to be as well.

Matt Veitch

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Michael Hartnett

It is a great question Supervisor Gaston and what my response to it would be, over the years, it's probably evolved, that process, depending on the media that it's recorded on, probably was hand

written at one point. And those records sometimes get lost over time, when especially we're going back, potentially centuries. But I would say at least for anything recent with the municipal law, requiring filing with the Department of State, most of the recent stuff, at least back to the 60s seems to have been filed with the State. So there's at least have a secondary record that the State keeps with us, but it's changed over time. And I'm not aware of any specific retention mechanism for the County. But that's certainly a great question and something that we can look into.

Jonathan Schopf

Maybe Jean knows any of this stuff at the jail and our records vault?

Jean Raymond

I don't recall specifically what was in the jail or the records vault. But I will tell you that I am fairly familiar with the records retention requirements at a Town level. And my guess is that laws and things like that are permanent records that must be retained forever. And they're probably up there in one of those cells somewhere. They're would also be in the proceedings books.

Matt Veitch

Right. And yeah, I think you're absolutely right about that. So it is interesting that our local law record, at least here in the Board offices only goes back to the 1950s or 1949. There's, they're listed, but the actual laws isn't there. I think you're right. I mean, if it was 1875, and we had a law, we're supposed to still have it, unless we repeal it or amend it. So that's interesting. I think that's going to be interesting to find out. And you're right, it maybe they're in that jail vault. Maybe Lauren has them. Maybe the County Clerk has them, we're not really sure yet to get there, but I'll do that research and try to find out for you.

Joe Grasso

Matt in terms of our end game, where are we trying to get to with our local laws is that like, electronic repository of them and then going through getting them updated to see what overlaps and repeals and...

Matt Veitch

Yeah, I think that's both of those things, right. When I think of it, I think of it as like we should just have current laws on the books that are appropriate. Right? Again, like Jean said, I did find one not in the old old ones. But it was about protection of deer or something like that.

Jean Raymond

And that's important.

Matt Veitch

Well, no, that is important. But it had something to do with like dogs.

Jean Raymond

It had to do with letting dogs run loose at certain times of the year.

Matt Veitch

She was there when that went happened, I think.

Jean Raymond

No, but I'll tell you, we've had complaints right in my Town over the years from time to time.

Matt Veitch

And that one's in the county code.

Jean Raymond

People's dogs running deer, people are well aware that law exists.

Matt Veitch

And in my City, that's just not an issue.

Jean Raymond

You ran all the deer over to Edinburg.

Matt Veitch

Right. So whether again, that's one that we say is, what's appropriate for that one, and what should we do with it? Right? We have it on the books, but I don't think there's any penalties or any enforcement part to it, it just says we're not going to let dogs run loose and during deer season. So, once we get into that, that's the kind of stuff that we'll be looking at. And then there's other ones that are probably just expired, we don't do it anymore. Those should be repealed. And then there's some that probably need updating, again, like the one we just did at Buildings and Grounds with parking, they talked about the old infirmary, Maplewood Manor, other locations, buildings, we used to own that we don't own anymore, properties we had. And it's all been sitting on the books for 30 years, and we haven't really taken a look at it. So that's kind of the idea. Another one that came my way was the recycling law. And that's another one that we just have let go since probably the late 1980s, or 90s. And we're not doing it that way anymore. It doesn't talk about single stream recycling, but that's what we do. And so, that's one that I think a couple of committees are going to probably look at. That's part of the resiliency, I think, as well as the Public Works, that have to look at that. And our Solid Waste Management Plan, I think is coming up in a year or two. Chad and I have already kind of discussed that a little bit from the DPW perspective. But there's a lot, what we do here covers a lot of different ground, and maybe even other committees, though. So that's where we're at on that. So I think it's a good discussion. Has anybody got anything else?

Tara Gaston

I think step one is just compiling it. We don't even know what we have much less what we need to do with it. And I think that's going to benefit both us as Supervisors in making decisions. But also, I know that I've asked questions from some of our Departments and staff, and it takes much longer than needed to figure out what the answer is because they're having to go on a treasure hunt to figure it out. I think it'll just be much more efficient. And, and then we don't have to look through, you know, maybe once all this is done, we're not going to still need to wear N95 masks in order to look at our laws to figure out what they say, because they're so old and they're in the jail.

Jean Raymond

I think you ought to probably also ask the Sheriff's input. Since they're the people that enforce a lot of these laws, right? And make sure that they have some input into it.

Matt Veitch

Absolutely.

Tara Gaston

Can we just like have a drop box for laws? Like just ask every Department, do you have any laws hanging around?

Matt Veitch

They might, they might?

Tara Gaston

Because like you're saying Supervisor Raymond, like we don't we don't know what is where. So that might be one of the most efficient ways to figure it out. I mean, you're obviously welcome to spend your time digging, but that might help you a little bit.

Matt Veitch

I like doing that. But yeah, and the Board proceedings. I'm sorry, I missed that Supervisor Schopf?

Jonathan Schopf

I said, I'll go up to the jail with you someday. I love looking through old stuff.

Matt Veitch

All right. I'll take you up on that one.

Jean Raymond

I have a field trip.

Matt Veitch

Yes. All right. With that being said, I guess we'll move on to the next item, which is number 4. Alright, so the first one is on the ethics policy, and I'm actually going to turn it over to our Attorney, Mr. Hartnett, to give a little explanation. He did a review of this recently and came back with some really good information. I haven't shared it all yet with the Committee, but I will. And it's really kind of interesting to hear where we're at in terms of our Ethics policy here at Saratoga County

Michael Hartnett

Thank you Supervisor. So, Supervisor Veitch reached out and asked me a couple of questions about the ethics policies and the various Boards that are currently appointed. And what I was able to locate is, most of the guidance and requirements comes from General Municipal Law article 18. It's kind of the guiding principle, and specifically, section 806 and 808. 806 is the statute that enables or directs the

governing body of each County, etc., etc. to may by local law, ordinance, or resolution adopt a code of ethics, setting forth the guidance of its officers and employees on the standards of conduct reasonably expected of them. 808 talks about a Board of Ethics, and that's a permissive statute that the County does. And keep in mind, the State has a totally different set of rules that is under the Public Officers Law. Our code, which was adopted in 1998, great year, but has not as I can tell, then specifically updated since. So it's two and a half decades old. And it goes through all the requirements of ethics for County officers and employees. One thing of specific note in here, and it's pretty comprehensive statute, but it has an attachment, it's got attachment 1 is the code of ethics attestation, that employees and officers are supposed to say that they reviewed this policy and sign it and submit it. It also has a financial disclosure statement, which I believe everybody in this room is probably familiar with, every year we do that. It's filed. Actually, Lisa Cramer in the County Attorney's office coordinates the collection of those documents. And then the other attachment lists all the individuals that are responsible to submit that. As far as I can tell, that list has not been updated since 1998. That list is probably extensive. The version that was online, the bottom right corner hasn't a November 1 2010 date on it, which suggests to me that it was informally updated in 2010. But I can't tell where this law was amended to include an updated attachment A. So that's kind of the back, the legal backdrop.

Tara Gaston

Chairman, can I ask for clarification? What is informally updated?

Michael Hartnett

I'm assuming somebody swapped out the attachment on the....

Tara Gaston

Okay, so even, you can't adopt to change that way.

Michael Hartnett

Exactly. It's not a formal attachment, but it was a practical updating of the list. Because the list has I mean, some of them are not even positions anymore. I mean, it has the Maplewood Manor Director, things like that. So I'm assuming what happened in 2010 is somebody was like, kind of had the same thought that this group is having, this list hasn't been updated in a really long time, let's update it and then swap it out. That's an assumption on my part, I wasn't here in 2010. But I think it would be a worthwhile endeavor to take a look at this code of ethics and spruce it up as needed. And attachment A is a good place to start to interface with HR on what these titles actually are now. So with that, I'll turn it back to Supervisor Veitch.

Matt Veitch

So I actually have another question for you that you had mentioned as well, which is the Board of Ethics. And what you had mentioned about what goes on kind of at that level. So my confusion is the fact that we have to have two committees here. And so I'm not sure what their roles and responsibilities are and what the difference is. So do we need two, and should we have one? I guess this is a question that's going to come up when we talk about the next step here. But you had said something about policies and procedures that we may or may not have.

Michael Hartnett

Yeah. So one of your questions was for the Board of Ethics and the Ethics Advisory Council, are there any guidelines or bylaws that they're operating under? There's none that I'm aware of, or that I found. Somebody made a comment before about a treasure hunt and that really resonates with me, in the County Attorney's office, specifically, tracking these older laws, and resolutions can be incredibly difficult, especially as we're getting into a technological age. They're a bit piecemeal, in parts, especially as you go back further and further. So I applaud the effort to digitize this information in a uniform way, you have an ally in me to champion that cause, because it would make my life a lot easier. If there was one place that I could go to and just as an aside or a digression, The county laws that are online, the e-codes, my understanding is that we do not subscribe to that anymore, so they have not been updated recently. So buyer beware when researching using that. Going back to the Ethics Advisory Council and Board of Ethics. I'm not aware of any bylaws or specific rules that those committees or boards are operating under. That's perhaps something to explore. I think that again, this is a presumption on my point, or on my part is that they're operating within the code of ethics that was established by the statute. So certainly an area to look at and explore for this committee.

Matt Veitch

All right. Thank you for that. And it shows you where we're at with this, it hasn't really been looked at, I would say at the County. So I think what I'd like to do in this case is to appoint a subcommittee to kind of look at this aspect of things. I know that, and I think I'd like I'd like to Chair that subcommittee. So I'll be the first member and I would look for two to three others to join as a subcommittee. So I don't know if anybody has any interest in that. I did ask Supervisor Grasso, he said he'd be interested. And I did I think talk to Supervisor Gaston about that. I don't know if she's interested. But if you are come on board, and we'll kind of tackle this one.

Tara Gaston

Yes, I am interested.

Joe Grasso

And I am as well. Thanks.

Joe Grasso

Okay, I think that that works. So thank you very much for that. Alright. Anybody have any other questions on this? I mean, I don't know if we have questions, because we really don't know.

Tara Gaston

Can we get copies of all that we do have sent to the Committee as a whole, or the subcommittee. But I think the Committee it would be useful to have whatever ethics pieces you are currently looking at.

Michael Hartnett

Certainly, and if there is a request for somebody from our office to help with that committee and provide any input from our perspective, I'd be more than happy to either do it myself, or I'm sure we have some ethics gurus in the office with some State experience that would, I'm sure would be chomping at the bit to participate if you're interested.

Tara Gaston

I'm not sure of this Committee or the subcommittee, but I can say yes, please, thank you.

Matt Veitch

I was going to say yes, I think our I guess honestly call it our staff support for this subcommittee would be, would be the County Attorney's office absolutely. So thank you for that offer. And we're good there. So alright, so we'll move on to the next one. And the next one is, I'm calling it records retention but it's really more of an overall records management program. And we've talked about this, and it was brought up at our first meeting and Supervisor Raymond had mentioned it. And I know that our Treasurer Jarosh has talked to me about this at length. And we've talked about today about our documents that we have at the jail and other things and stuff that's all over the place. So I would like to also do the same here and appoint a subcommittee to look at this, and try to see what we have, generally, in terms of rules and regulations and laws, and then also physically when it comes to our physical space. So I know, Attorney Hartnett looked at this a little bit. So I'll have you speak first, and then I'll go ahead and set up the subcommittee if, as we go forward.

Michael Hartnett

Sure. So from my perspective, the County retentions policy is prominently promulgated. It's directed by the New York State Department of Education and the New York State Archives. And they publish the rules, they recently redid them, it has to be adopted by resolution at the County level. It used to be that they split it up between local government and County government, and they combined those recently, and it's now a 411 page document that covers every type of record you could ever think of. And the Board of Supervisors adopted that in December as County policy. So that's kind of your guidepost as you jump into it. I'm very interested with what you find in practical application, because every Department is so different and unique and I wish the subcommittee luck, I guess I would say because that's a big task and records retention is a big deal. It has as serious implications across the board. So again, to whatever extent our office or the County Attorney's office can assist as a support staff in that endeavor. We're kind of going through a similar exercise, we have with the transition in our office, of looking at the records and how we're storing them and how to most efficiently do that.

Matt Veitch

Great. So for this one, I did talk to Supervisor Raymond and she has graciously I hope accepted to Chair the subcommittee for the records policy and I know that I think the first part is really going to be a lot of fact finding and things. So it's going to take a little while to get done. But I hope you're still willing to do that.

Jean Raymond

I am based on what I communicated to you.

Matt Veitch

Absolutely.

Jean Raymond

And I think that, what I communicated was that I have some things that I have to wrap up in the next few months that I don't want to get too deep into it in the beginning. But I also think that there's an opportunity for people to see what's out there, what we control, what we don't control the records, retention for instance, we don't control. If the State tells you, you have to keep whatever it is forever, you've got to keep it forever. And everything that you keep, I have noticed over the years, what used to take one file folder now probably takes a drawer. Because they've made everything bigger and bulkier. So I think we're going to have to make some decisions as a County on how we want to keep our records, where, and under what circumstances they're to be accessed and kept track of who took what out and put what back, which we don't do now. I don't believe other than at the Department level. The other thing that I think is a big issue when it came up, when this whole records retention started to be an issue, I think it's got to be 20 years ago now. But there's a lot of space implications, like three cubic feet of records equals a file cabinet or something, I don't remember the exact number. And in some of our buildings, you'll find that people don't want to store records or destroy records. So they have 9,000 file cabinets instead. And that is an issue in terms of floor space, literally. So I think there's a lot of , a learning curve that we could all go through that would be very interesting and helpful. And with that in mind, I will start with learning for field trips.

Matt Veitch

All right, awesome. Thank you. So also, I another person who has really talked to me a lot about this issue over the past month or so has been the Treasurer Jarosh. So I've asked him to join this subcommittee as well. And hopefully you will accept the challenge to work on this.

Andrew Jarosh

Accept the challenge. Yes, I don't know if we can actually meet the challenge. But we'll get there. But that's one of the things I would suggest for this subcommittee and thank you, Supervisor Veitch, for asking me to be on the subcommittee. One of the things I would suggest that we do, Supervisor Raymond, I know some of our neighboring counties have some pretty advanced and modern records retention methods and facilities and practices. And maybe we ask if we can go on to professional field trip and just kind of take a glance of what they do and get some ideas.

Jean Raymond

I think when I opened my mouth at the first meeting, hence the reason I think I'm being asked to do this, I mentioned Warren County in particular. And I would be absolutely, I think that's one of the very, the second thing we should do. First, we should see what we have. And then we should go see Warren County and if you want to take a big field trip, if we're allowed field trips later on in the year, Tompkins County has an amazing setup. And I haven't been there in years. But last time I saw it, it's like all computerized and it's like going to a modern library almost. Yeah, I agree.

Steve Bulger

Yeah. Chairman, I spoke with Ryan Moore up in Warren County about this. Ryan Moore, County Administrator up there. He is looking forward to hosting us at his facility.

Andrew Jarosh

He just wants to rub it in.

Jean Raymond

And we will have to go shortly because (inaudible).

Audra Hedden

Chairman, I spoke with Lauren Roberts about this briefly. And she has advised me that she may have information on getting grants for records retention, and has information about the weight in buildings and the storage and things of that nature. So she may be an asset to your subcommittee for this information. Just a suggestion.

Jean Raymond

That's a very good suggestion. And the other person that has a lot of knowledge, if we could draw her out of retirement is our former County Clerk, Kathy Marchione. Kathy sat on the committee through, it's State Education Department, but it's the records committee for years, and was part of the decision making process for grants being handed out, and there were lots of grants that came here to this County and did a lot in the County Clerk's office and I'm sure in other offices, I don't know the specifics. We will draw in some of that some of that as well.

Matt Veitch

All right, great. And the third person I've asked is sitting right here to my left Supervisor Connolly, he just found out like 10 seconds ago. But he said he would accept. So I'm happy that you'll be joining as well, I think it's important to kind of spread it around here, we've only got seven people on this committee, and we're going to have three subcommittees by the end of the day here, so I appreciate you volunteering to help out with this.

Eric Connolly

I look forward to it.

Matt Veitch

Thank you

Jean Raymond

I look forward to working together.

Matt Veitch

All right. So thank you for that. And then the next one we have is the County budget. This one actually, we kind of want to start now. Because the budget process actually starts in three short months, kind of, the very beginnings of it start usually in the summertime. So in order to kind of get that process together. And look at the policies we have regarding that, again, going all the way back to local law number 1 of 1950. We can kind of take a look at that budget process. And I'm glad that we have our Law and Finance Chairman on our committee here, Supervisor Schopf. So I've asked him if he would be willing to, I don't know if he got my email today. But I did ask him if you'd be willing to Chair the subcommittee. So if you're just finding out now, I'm asking you now.

Jonathan Schopf

Never volunteer. I did get an email earlier from Mr. Hartnett with some budget information. I'm sorry I've been a little under the gun today on some things. So I did not get your email. But I think I think it probably be appropriate if I helped out with this.

Matt Veitch

Surprise. Well, I thank you for that, and again, as the Chair of that committee that will be doing the process, probably good project this year. It would be good to kind of create it and get it set up for yourself and the Law and Finance Committee to go forward. I will also serve on that as well. On that committee and I believe didn't really ask anybody else. So I don't know if there's anybody else who's interested? But we just need a third from the committee if they're interested.

Kevin Tollisen

Kevin Tollisen, I'll serve on that.

Matt Veitch

Kevin, thank you. Thank you, appreciate that. And I think in this case, it is probably most appropriate for our staff as the County Administrator's office to help us with this, because they are intimately involved in the budget process. And so I think that's the appropriate way to go here for help. I mean, we're probably going to need to help in other departments too. But that's how it kind of goes around here.

Jonathan Schopf

Mr. Chairman, the County Administrator had a Department head meeting last week, I believe, of the week before, and we were there. Just so that the committee knows, I did make the department heads aware that due to probably the issues with finances this year, and COVID, and everything that we are going to be looking to do an accelerated budget process. Everybody has the general realization that that's going to start ahead of time this year. And I kind of gave a verbal outline of a couple different legit options that I'd like to see so we can have a best case worst case worst case scenario going into the budget.

Matt Veitch

If I think another part to look at, I think is part of this is that there is a kind of a policy somewhat written through a combination of local laws, resolutions and policy, on how the budget process works. And it's a little disjointed. And at the end of the day that's the other part of it, and we just have to make sure we kind of straighten that to a way that works for us. Because it's kind of been a challenge. I mean, frankly, as a Supervisor, and I think Jean has said almost every year that I've been here at the county that, some years they don't put the past budgets in there some years, it's just this year's budget, some years the copy doesn't come on time, or it's like done in a certain way. So, again, it's just the way we've done it, and there's no criticism, but at the end of the day, we have an opportunity here to kind of tweak and make this work for everybody involved Supervisors, Department heads, the County Administrator and the budget officers and people that we have here. So hopefully we won't have to make that comment at our at the floor of the Board of supervisors anymore, that something isn't meeting our needs as Supervisors during the budget process. So that's my comment on that. So I appreciate your help and appreciate you going forward.

Jonathan Schopf

You're welcome. So, who, myself, Kevin Tollisen and who else volunteered?

Matt Veitch

Me.

Jonathan Schopf

Okay. Sounds great.

Matt Veitch

All right. Any other comments on budget? All right, appreciate that. Thank you very much. The last one here, the Board of Supervisors Department policy, I'm actually going to pull for the from the agenda today, I haven't had a chance to talk to Pam Wright about it at enough length to really kind of come up with anything here. So we will bring this up next month after I get some more background and things that we can go through. So we'll have that for next month. Alright, so next on our agenda is the County suggestion box. At the last meeting, we talked about having a suggestion box for ideas in terms of departmental efficiency. The IT department has been working on developing a suggestion box, call it web page, both internally on our County intranet that can be accessed by Departments. And also for those Departments that don't have access to the County intranet, a password protected web page outside page that they can go to put in their suggestions for improvements to County operations and policy. We did mention as Supervisor Schopf said before, we had a Department head meeting about a week and a half ago, and I did mention that that was going to be coming from us, when I spoke at that meeting, to say that suggestion box is going to happen. There was a few questions, I believe, that were raised after the meeting from the Department heads on this, and they were very good questions. I think the first one was trying to ensure that the suggestions that come through are relevant suggestions, and not complaining. Because the idea here is to work with policy and in governance and our operations, rather than you're not happy with your supervisor, or there's some problem with some issue you're seeing, and you're going to just complain. So there's other avenues that we have in the County of those kinds of issues that you should go through and not so much sending them to a suggestion box for government efficiency and review. And if we do see some of that we will accordingly work to make sure that that happens. The other question that we had was whether or not any of these suggestions are subject to the FOIL laws, and Attorney Hartnett is going to kind of look into that a little bit and let us know. I don't think they are because it's more of an internal County discussion that happens and some of that is not subject to FOIL, but I'll have him take a look. I don't if you want to say anything, but.

Michael Hartnett

As the ultimate implication of FOIL, I'll reserve before I look into it and do the research on it, I think it's certainly an issue that should be explored and fleshed out a little bit to make sure that when going into the suggestion box, process or, when it goes live, that we go in knowing what the implications are. So I'd be happy to take a look at that, or somebody in our office get assigned to do a deep dive on FOIL implications and get you an answer at least so you'll know the framework that we're working with.

Matt Veitch

Yeah, there's no expected date to go live just yet. I'm going to lean on Audra here, because she was kind of working on it. I don't know if they gave you any kind of date. I think it's kind of ready, we can kind of turn it on whenever we want to. But as of right now, there's no date. So I'm expecting in the next week or two?

Audra Hedden

It is ready to go.. We will wait on the FOIL response from the County Attorney's office.

Matt Veitch

Great. And I can send you guys a couple of mock ups that we've got of what it's going to look like just so the Committee can see what it's going to look like for our employees.

Joe Grasso

So this is being made available to all County employees, regardless of position or where they reside? Right?

Matt Veitch

Exactly.

Joe Grasso

I assume it's only going to be through online or internet or intranet based or

Matt Veitch

Yeah, we didn't go with any, like old school drop boxes or anything like that, because of the fact that somebody has to go around and collect them.

Joe Grasso

So it leads into my next question, the anonymous, I assume that staff will feel comfortable that even if they're doing it through internet or web based application that is going to be able to be anonymous?

Matt Veitch

Yeah. So I don't know, if you want to talk about that or not, we had it set up. So it should be okay with that. But go ahead.

Audra Hedden

The last I knew it was anonymous. It's been a couple of weeks since we've looked at it. So I'm a little fuzzy on it in all honesty, I would have to go back and look at it again. But as far as I'm aware, they have the choice of being anonymous or not, they would have the choice of it.

Matt Veitch

Thank you. Yeah. So again, that is an important part of this is to make sure that if you don't want to give your name that you don't have to. So very good. Thank you. Anything else on the County suggestion box? Anybody on the phone? Oh, Supervisor Gaston, sorry.

Tara Gaston

I guess my question from a tech perspective would be how anonymous, like you check the anonymous box? Or like, you're actually anonymous, because it needs to not collect things like ISPs and things if we want to make it actually anonymous. Because that can be tracked back to a person and I want to make sure that it is legitimately anonymous. To that end, who would have access to it? Or is that to be determined.

Audra Hedden

When the suggestions are made, it would go to an email dropbox that would come to my computer. There is an email dropbox that, it's like suggestion box email, that is set up on, that comes to my computer at this moment. It's not live so there's nothing on there.

Tara Gaston

Well that would just be my question is once it is live, who has access to that email? Or to that box? Whether it's.

Audra Hedden

Right now currently, only I do, and IT.

Tara Gaston

And IT.

Matt Veitch

Right, so they created like a County suggestion box, at saratogacountyny.gov, like an anonymous email doesn't have anybody's name on it, but has to go somewhere. Right?

Tara Gaston

Right, absolutely, but again, it needs to be kind of clear where it's going to end up in the end. If only because if you're going to make a complaint or make a suggestion, you need to know that someone's actually there as opposed to you, are emailing this address and we promise that someone is going to find it in the ether, I want to make sure that people know it's actually going to land with a human or an office or group of humans however that is. Thank you.

Jonathan Schopf

If I may, I'd maybe suggest, my one concern with it is since it is anonymous, I don't want it to turn into sort of an anonymous sound off column in a local newspaper, personal grievances against other employees and things like that. That is a concern. There's potentially privacy issues there, I suppose.

Matt Veitch

Yeah, and I think the idea is that, and I agree with you, and that was brought up at the Department head meeting that this could turn into a much more of a just griping, sounding board, kind of thing rather than a, constructive changes to government operation thing. And so I think, again, is it's kind of only monitored through the Administrator's office, we will know that when they start to come in, and if

it's truly anonymous, it's going to be difficult for us to know exactly where it's coming from. But, again, that's something that we're going to have to figure out. So

Audra Hedden

And we also have on there, legal disclaimers, that they have to read the, whoever is putting in the suggestion has to read and check the box that they have read the disclaimer, before clicking Submit. So the disclaimer has gone through HR and gone through Legal, and we are still working on the language to make sure that it is cleared through both Departments to make to check both of those boxes, to make sure that it's right. But we wanted to make sure that that is covered. So people know that it's not an HR, you can't go through this avenue to file a workplace violence complaint or something of that nature. There's other HR avenues to take to file those complaints.

Jonathan Schopf

Oh, great. Yeah, that was my one concern with it is what if somebody has a personal issue with another employee or make some allegation of criminal conduct or something with regards to an employee. How does that shake out for somebody on the receiving end of this suggestion in this case, you at the County Administrators office. And I don't want anybody to be in an uncomfortable or impossible situation because of it.

Steve Bulger

Mr. Chairman, I would recommend that the Committee, as this moves forward, we're going to have to set up a clear policy of when those emails land in Audra's box, what happens then, who reviews them? What's the process? If it's a complaint about or a suggestion? Hopefully a suggestion not a complaint, for a particular Department? Does that automatically get forwarded to the Department head? Does it come to this committee? We're going to be getting a lot of different types of communications here. And I would ask that the Committee consider developing a policy on how to handle it, just because I don't want to put Audra in a bad position or anyone else to Jon's point in? And where does it go from here and it's done correctly?

Matt Veitch

Okay. Yeah. No, I think it's a great suggestion and I'll probably be working with you to, to work on that.

Steve Bulger

Great, Thank you.

Matt Veitch

Any other questions or comments about this?

Joe Grasso

I assume that there's, when we when we launch this, that there's a framework and a set of guidelines for people to follow when they're providing, and that this is really about suggestions for companywide interdepartmental or intradepartmental recommendations for consideration by the committee?

Matt Veitch

I think that's going to be part of the part of the disclaimer, I believe. Again, I haven't your right, we haven't looked at this in a little bit. So maybe we will probably have to go back and review it.

Joe Grasso

But even before the disclaimer, it's the introduction, it's the way to get the word out to our staff to say, this is why we're doing this, and this is how we intend to use your suggestions. We are encouraging you to provide us suggestions, but.

Matt Veitch

Then one option would be to, in cooperation with rolling it out have a memo come either from me as Chairman of this Committee, or the Chairman of the Board, if he feels that he should communicate it through the departments. And a lot of times that happens as well, any initiatives we take, that happens from time to time or a memo goes out to everybody, we got this thing, here's how you're supposed to use it, the Department heads are aware, and we go from there. So Supervisor Gaston?

Tara Gaston

And that's part of the reason I asked who is going to be checking it and sort of what the policies are, we're not going to be able to prohibit people from sending snippy comments, or other things through there. In addition to that, I would also suggest that sometimes things that seem minor are actually indicative of much larger problems. So while I understand that this, people need to be very clear on what the process is, and what the general purpose is, I also think that there needs to be a process developed, and we need to make sure whoever accesses it can handle things appropriately. I agree, I don't want people holding information that they shouldn't, I don't want people to be harmed because someone sent something false or defamatory to an email. However, I do want to make sure that if there are individuals who have concerns that feel for whatever reason, they cannot follow the normal process, that we don't just delete it out of hand, or that we make sure that the people who are dealing with it have the correct understanding and also that it's minimal, who has access to it so that people do feel comfortable. So that's why I bring up the who has access to it because I don't want, I mean, not in any way suggesting anything. I'm not sending a defamatory email. But if there were complaints out of the Administrator's office and the Administrator was like, it would be very easy for that office to delete it, and not make anywhere else. Or if there was something that seemed personal, but then when it was discussed, it turned out that there were 8 or 10 of these similar concerns about a particular, the way something's handled. Those are big issues that might need to be things that this Committee or others deal with. So I just, I want to be very careful when we're doing that. Because when you put something out like that, that's you're going to get all sorts of things we can't, we can't go "are you being mean to someone else, click here" because it's not going to work, and it's also going to miss things that we might need to know about.

Jonathan Schopf

Right. Thanks Supervisor Schopf?

Jonathan Schopf

That's a great point, they probably should have two or three so that takes out that ability for someone to isolate a problem about themselves.

Matt Veitch

Yep. I think that makes a lot of sense. So let's talk about that a little more, about how we want to do that and go from there. All right?

Tara Gaston

Thank you for being willing to be my example, not implying anything.

Matt Veitch

I think those are great. And I think that I was going to say, that's a great example. That's terrible. But I think that's a good way to think about it. So I appreciate that. And we will make that happen. So not a problem. Alright, so as we move on here, just one last item to discuss is the County code. And it was mentioned a little bit earlier about how we haven't been keeping that up. And our subscription to the Ecode expired. Supervisor Schopf, I believe at the last meeting and mentioned this as something that we should look at. I briefly talked to Attorney Hartnett about this before the meeting, and I don't know if you want to talk about it, but I think we should maybe move forward with exploring getting back into that contract and getting that updated. So go ahead.

Michael Hartnett

Appreciate it. Supervisor. Mike Hartnett here from the County Attorney's office. From my perspective, at least refreshing the online version of our code would absolutely be something I would support and push. I don't have a pre resolution, or pre agenda item to bring forward. But I think it's absolutely worthy of discussion and consideration. Because as I think some people have already mentioned, and I have as well, the current location of, the actual going and finding the written laws can sometimes be very, very difficult. And it's just as you're looking at all of these laws, and then trying to figure out when the amendments were, and so on and so forth. I think it's something I appreciate the Committee is looking at that as, as a possibility. Thank you.

Matt Veitch

Yeah. So I mean, I think what I would ask is that, and I don't know if it's appropriate to put this out of the Attorney's office, but I guess, it's as good a start as anywhere, right? Is to look into finding, maybe contacting them. I don't know, this isn't something we would go like to bid on. I think there's only really just one company that does this? Maybe it's a State Contract.

Jonathan Schopf

I'm in the middle of going through this process with a municipal client, and it's surprisingly affordable. I don't want to speak for what they would charge for a County level project, but it's quite possible that it would be a minor contract. Definitely reach out to them, and I know provide you with a proposal pretty quickly. They've been great to work with. And we're doing the same. We're digitizing a place that has never been digitized. And I was really shocked at the base contract to bring it on board, and the annual maintenance was I thought very reasonable.

Matt Veitch

Supervisor Gaston?

Tara Gaston

It should be easily done, I would say where we can avoid a minor contract or where we can discuss things before the Board we should. I also think this is also a reasonable contract to bring before Law and Finance which is coming up soon. So perhaps we could put it on there as something coming out of Law and Finance, to do at least the updating of the or re upping. I believe the Chair maybe on the phone of Law and Finance. I just, we could also do it at the Board meeting from the floor as well, either way, but I think it's a reasonable thing, and ideally, we would bring it forward before the full Board.

Jonathan Schopf

No, I agree. My only reason for saying we can do it as a minor contract was to give an idea of the amount.

Matt Veitch

And I think it depends on how fast we can get an answer from them. It sounds like there may be some urgency or I don't want to say urgency, but we should do it soon. And if we can get into this month's kind of flow, then that would be great. I know that the Law and Finance agenda, I believe is due tomorrow per the rules. So that might be difficult to get through the traditional rules of getting it on that agenda. But of course every Committee has other business and there's other ways to get things through to the Board floor. So if we know something then maybe there's a way we can get it there this month, if possible.

Jonathan Schopf

I don't think it hurts to have Mike Hartnett take a look, give them a call and have them put together a proposal. And at least we'll have that for next month at any event, and we'll have an idea of the base cost of it.

Matt Veitch

Okay. Yeah, no, I think we should do that. So I appreciate that. I thank you for that.

Jonathan Schopf

I can send over all the contact information for the lady that I dealt with there.

Matt Veitch

Oh, awesome. Thank you. Thank you. Anything else on County code? All right, hearing none, is there any other business to come before the committee today? All right, hearing none, I'll ask for a motion to adjourn.

Jean Raymond

So moved.

Matt Veitch

So moved. Is there a second?

Joe Grasso

Second.

Matt Veitch

All right. We're adjourned. Thank you all very much. Great meeting. Have a really good day.