



Budget & Appropriations

BOL Meeting Minutes - Final

Committee Chair: Catherine Borgia

800 Michaelan Office Bldg.
148 Martine Avenue, 8th Floor
White Plains, NY 10601
www.westchesterlegislators.com

Wednesday, December 1, 2021

10:00 AM

Committee Room

CALL TO ORDER

The County Board will meet pursuant to Chapter 417 of New York State Laws of 2021, allowing public bodies to meet and take action without permitting in-person public access to meetings and authorizes such meetings and public hearings to be held remotely by conference call or similar service, provided the public has the ability to view or listen and that such meetings are recorded and later transcribed. To access the meeting, please visit: <https://westchestercountyny.legistar.com>

With a quorum present, Chair Borgia called the meeting to order at 10:13 AM.

Others in Attendance: BOL: Kitley Covill, Alessandra Restiano, Anand Singh BOL Remote: MaryJane Shimsky, Jose Alvarado, Melanie Montalto, James Silverberg, Greg Casciato LEG ELECT: James Nolan, Jewel Williams Johnson (Remote), Erika Pierce (Remote) BUDGET Remote: Larry Soule, Gideon Grande, Lorraine Mazzola, Mark Medwid CBAC Remote: Beth Smayda, Diana Quast, Judy Stern Rosen, Julie Stern, John McGarr, Mark Lewis, Rodman Reef, Jon Mark, L. William Kay BOE Remote: Doug Colety, Reggie LaFayette, Dotty Dipaola, Tajian Nelson, Lucy Mastrogiacomo, Joe Vittoria, Phil Gille, Fran Corvino DOH Remote: Sharlita Amler, Renee Recchia, Marina Yogel, Joseph Mathews, Delroy Taylor

Present: Committee Chair Borgia, Legislator Boykin, Committee Vice-Chair Gashi, Legislator Maher and Legislator Walter

Absent: Legislator Johnson

Remote: Legislator Barr, Legislator Cunzio, Legislator Parker, Legislator Tubiolo, Legislator Williams and Legislator Woodson-Samuels

MINUTES APPROVAL

I. ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

10:00 AM - CBAC

Guests: Members of the Citizens Budget Advisory Board

11:00 AM -Board of Elections

Guests:Commissioner Reginald LaFayette & Commissioner Doug Colety

12:00 PM- Department of Health

Guests: Commissioner Dr. Sherlita Amler, First Deputy Commissioner Renee Recchia & Marina Yogel

Members of the Citizens Budget Advisory Committee, including co-chairs John McGarr and Julie Stern, and Mr. Rod Reef, appeared before the committee to present their report on the 2022 Executive Proposed Budget. They presented their findings and were generally supportive of the proposed budget as it meets most principles, reflected a positive development for county's finances, and most importantly was sustainable. Beyond their commentary on the proposed budget, they also spoke about the use of federal recovery funds, the increased appropriation in the capital plan budget, and planning for departmental head counts and optimizing workflow. Notably, they voiced concerns with the special districts budget after visiting several county facilities and speaking with department heads, along with potential consequences if not addressed. Chair Borgia appreciated the feedback, noting that financial conditions due in part, to the pandemic, have created challenges, but agreed with their recommendations to look at multi-year budgeting and said they would continue as planned with the sewer district consolidation next year.

Legislator Walter asked how much a typical homeowner paid for their share and how it related to spending and Mr. Reef said that it depends on a number of factors including location and property value, ranging anywhere from several hundred to several thousand dollars. Chair Borgia asked if switching to per home useage has ever been looked at. Legislator Walter clarified her previous question by asking what the relationship between someone's sewer tax bill and property tax bill was, and if there was an average number related to their property tax bill for an average resident. Mr. Reef said the sewer portion represents roughly 20% of the total tax levy. Legislator Walter spoke about the benefits of possibly switching to a usage based system and Mr. McGarr cautioned that the potential savings for residents would result in lost revenue for the County that would need to be made up elsewhere. Mr. Reef agreed that while it would be a good practice in the long term, it would need to be planned for as rental units would be affected, along with institutions with tax exempt statuses. Ms. Stern spoke about the significant need for capital improvements in this area reiterating their concerns if it wasn't planned for carefully.

Legislator Maher asked about metering, how one would meter sewage from commercial operations, to which Mr. spoke about the devices used for this, again reiterating the importance of multiyear capital planning since it helped to contain expenses and do more with less. Mr. Reef commented on the relatively flat headcount in the Department of Environmental Facilities, suggesting it may be able to be scaled down. Chair Borgia clarified that this technically wasn't true because of vacancies but she understood what he meant from a budgeting perspective.

Members of the Board of Elections addressed the committee next, including Commissioners Reginald Lafayette and Douglas Colety, presenting their budget and speaking about the department's responsibilities, numerous challenges with recent elections as a result of the pandemic, and statistics from said elections. 2021 numbers were significantly down as there were no federal or gubernatorial races on the ballots.

Chair Borgia asked how many vacancies they had in their position count to which Commissioner Lafayette said they will get back to us on that, due mainly to needing to have an equal number of staff from both parties to stay balanced. Chair Borgia asked if any changes were noticed at early voting sites due to the increased number of sites from 17 to 23 resulting in a lower number of voters per sit. Commissioner Lafayette said that it's difficult to track that due to the number due to a number of factors, notably the pandemic, but stated that

the number of long lines were lower. Commissioner Colety said that while early voting as a whole decreased this year, election day turnout was nearly doubled going from 43% to 82%. Chair Borgia asked how efforts were going in recruiting poll workers for sites and Commissioner Colety stated that they picked up 300 this year as a result of mailers, and Commissioner Lafayette agreed it was generally going well.

Legislator Maher raised several concerns with the department, including difficult to reach polling sites, COVID-19 policies related to vaccinations, and mailings from the department to the public. Commissioner Lafayette responded that the Board of Elections cant mandate institutions to let them use their locations as a polling place, with a number of previously used places declining due to COVID-19 concerns. Requiring staff to be vaccinated only exacerbates the strain to find qualified worker for the locations, but they did have protocols in place to let voters with COVID-19 vote. He finally said that their department does at least one mailing annually, possibly two in accordance with election law but many of the issues stem from the Post Office. Commissioner Colety said they find out the dates of the mailings they've done and get back to the committee. A discussion ensued between Legislator Maher and Commissioner Lafayette on various other concerns. Legislator Alvarado agreed with there being a number of challenges for the department, some of which were a result of unfunded mandates by New York State.

Legislator Walter asked about projected statistics for 2022 along with outreach and registration efforts. Commissioner Lafayette confirmed that they make a concerted effort to inform the public about the elections and register voters. Legislator Walter asked if they had the percentage of registrations at the Department of Motor Vehicles versus paper applications annually, to which Mr. Lafayette said they don't have that information readily available but highlighted potential issues that could arise from registrations done at the DMV. Legislator Walter asked if the cybersecurity initiatives they are undertaking are being done in-house or by consultants. Commissioner Colety confirmed they have their own Information Technology staff but work with, and regularly defer to, the County IT Department.

Legislator Boykin asked about any information they had regarding the redistricting process and plans they had to address this, to which Commissioner Lafayette said they will need to see it first before determining where, if any, changes would need to be made. Commissioner Colety agreed that a lot was in flux right now, but believed the proposed districts would be presented to the NYS legislature in early January, excluding potential lawsuits that might follow. Legislator Boykin asked if the primary election in June would be affected by the redistricting process and Commissioner Colety said it was possible.

Legislator Barr asked if the voting machines being used for early voting were the newer ones that were purchased within the past few years and if those were being used consistently, to which Commissioner Lafayette confirmed they were. Legislator Barr asked if the older machines were being used for election day and Commissioner Lafayette confirmed they were before discussing the specifics of how the machines were allocated.

The Department of Health, led by Commissioner Dr. Sherlita Amler and Deputy Commissioner Renee Recchia, presented their budget and spoke about their numerous and varied responsibilities, which have been predominated by the COVID-19 pandemic, but also include various inspections, public education, testing for various diseases and hazardous substances,

combatting the opioid epidemic, and promoting the general health and wellbeing of county residents. She then spoke about the positions being requested in the budget and the numerous challenges they've faced along with aid they've received that has helped them manage throughout the pandemic.

Chair Borgia asked if there was any additional funding as a result of the federal American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 to which Dr. Amler said there was six million appropriated for community contracts as part of the eighty three million dollars they received. Chair Borgia asked how the pandemic has changed how we've dealt with the opioid epidemic and other areas of concern, mentioning recent tuberculosis cases that have popped up. Dr. Amler said they have continued addressing these areas and that this has been an ongoing effort, although they have been scaled back as a result of the pandemic. Nationally there have been increased TB-related deaths since people are generally visiting their healthcare providers less frequently due to fears about contracting COVID-19

Legislator Covill pointed out that a lot of their funding stems from the pandemic and asked what will happen to employees when the pandemic is over, commenting on the reduced ability of the department to handle other duties such as inspections, and asked how have they been able to the time lags. Dr. Amler said staffing in general has been extremely challenging, commenting that they only have one group of sanitarians who are deployed wherever the most pressing need is, but they've supplemented staffing with contracts, hourly employees, even bringing on former nurses to help fill the void. Deputy Commissioner Recchia added that a lot of work is done on a per diem basis, and pointed out that the grant funding from the NYS Department of Health doesn't constrain them to only use it for pandemic related expenses. Legislator Covill asked if the sanitarians were a civil service position, to which Deputy Commissioner Recchia confirmed they were. Legislator Covill pointed out that the backlog was costing businesses throughout the county money and Dr. Amler again discussed the staffing issues, pointing out their HR department consisted of three individuals, with only one active right now, and that they have struggled to onboard as many people as possible due to a lack of resources, with Deputy Commissioner Recchia commented on some recent successes. Legislator Covill said they wanted to help however they could before asking about the process for testing for and remediating lead, and if they were required to test proactively for lead. A discussion ensued on the process and Deputy Commissioner Recchia stated that the Department of Planning does proactive testing. Legislator Covill asked how many vacancies they currently have and Dr. Amler stated that they have seven vacancies.

Vice-Chairwoman Alfreda Williams echoed the comments of other legislators praising the department's efforts throughout the pandemic and said she is looking forward to getting them the help they need, to which Dr. Amler thanked her and, in turn, thanked her staff.

Legislator Walter asked if there have been any rabies cases in the County in 2021, to which Dr. Amler said there were and could get back to the committee with those figures. Legislator Walter asked if there was any potential funding from the recently passed federal bipartisan bill for lead abatement for homeowners, to which Deputy Commissioner Recchia spoke about the LeadSafe program run by the County Department of Planning but hoped NYS would help on that front, especially if they decided to lower the safe threshold for kids. Legislator Walter asked for more information on the Healthy Moms, Healthy Kids initiative to which Dr. Amler said the administration has put up one million dollars for this but its very new and still being planned.

Legislator Shimsky asked how many vacancies for engineers and sanitarians the department

had. Dr. Amler confirmed they had eight vacant sanitarian positions and zero vacant engineering positions.

Legislator Alvarado asked if they would be able to discuss the one million in funding for the department's telemedicine program and Dr. Amler said that it still needs to be fleshed out but that it would greatly benefit staff as it would allow for virtual interactions. Legislator Alvarado spoke about the program St. Joseph's Hospital in Yonkers was running and discussed other corollary benefits of telemedicine.

Legislator Barr asked them to speak more about the HR challenges and a discussion ensued on measures they are taking, but said that the County's HR department has been very helpful. Legislator Barr asked if there were any outside agencies that might be able to help and Dr. Amler said at one point they did use hourly nurses.

II. OTHER BUSINESS

III. RECEIVE & FILE

ADJOURNMENT

Moved by Legislator Walter, seconded by Legislator Williams, the Committee adjourned at 1:24 PM.