

**PUTNAM COUNTY LEGISLATURE
PUBLIC HEARING
ON THE
2016 TENTATIVE BUDGET
AND
REPORT OF THE BUDGET & FINANCE COMMITTEE
TO BE HELD IN THE
HISTORIC COURTHOUSE
CARMEL, NEW YORK 10512**

Monday October 26, 2015 7:00 P.M.

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 P.M. by Chairman Albano who requested Legislator Castellano lead in the Pledge of Allegiance. Upon roll call, Legislators Scuccimarra, Gouldman, Addonizio, Nacerino, Gross, Castellano, LoBue, Wright and Chairman Albano were present. Also present was Legislative Counsel Van Ross.

Chairman Albano requested that the Clerk read the Public Notice (attached).

Chairman Albano stated that this Public Hearing gives the Legislature the opportunity to hear from you, the public, about your views of the proposed 2016 Tentative Budget. Your concerns are very important to us and it is our responsibility to approve a fiscally responsible budget that provides for the health, safety and quality of life for our residents, while also not exceeding the tax cap. I would ask that anyone wishing to speak regarding the proposed 2016 Tentative Budget should come up to the microphone, state their name and the town in which they reside. Please keep in mind that there is no comment period for the Legislators and therefore no cross discussion. If you do have a question, please leave your name and contact information with the Clerk and we will get back to you promptly. This Public Hearing will assist the Legislature in making informative decisions during our Legislative meeting on Wednesday evening, October 28, 2015 when we will Adopt the Budget.

Glen Blackman, Labor Relations Specialist for CSEA Members, distributed packets to the Legislators. He stated there were rumors that the Civil Service Employees Association ("CSEA") Union Leadership was contacted to participate in the negotiations and discuss the proposed changes to retiree health insurance; this statement is not true. He stated he heard that the County made proposals to CSEA in the last bargaining agreement about retiree health insurance; this statement is unequivocally far from the truth as well. He stated in looking at the information he provided to the Legislature, there has been a steady decline in pension costs since 1989. He stated the current pension rates are anticipated to decrease approximately 2% in 2017. He stated the CSEA is opposed to basing retiree health insurance costs off pensions due to the disadvantages, such as outside employment. He stated people plan for retirement, therefore a drastic increase in health insurance contribution does not allow those affected to plan and budget accordingly. He stated he requests that the Legislature not approve of the proposed retiree health insurance increase to allow the CSEA and the Administration to vet out all of the elements in the proposal.

Mike Semo, retiree, stated he is a former legislator and served for 23 consecutive years on the Legislature. He stated he believes some of the Legislators misunderstand the role they play on this particular issue because they are unaware of the history of this matter.

He stated County employees receive less pay compared to the private sector. He stated as a Legislator when there was a proposal to increase the retiree health insurance, former County Executive David Bruen expressed how retired employees should not pay more than what they already had contributed to. He stated a small group of people such as County retirees should not be underestimated; this can be seen in the County's history with the Mr. Alexanderson versus Mr. Bondi election. He urged the Legislature to not punish the small group of former employees. He stated a huge financial burden will be imposed on the retirees.

Chris York, Retired Chief Assistant District Attorney, stated before becoming a Putnam County employee he spoke to former personnel employee Ed McAvoy and asked if his benefits from Westchester County would be the same as his future Putnam County benefits. He stated he was told his benefits would absolutely be the same as they were in Westchester County. He stated in 2006, the Blue Ribbon Panel discussed a proposal for employees contributing to healthcare; he supported this notion. He stated he stresses for the Legislature to not support a proposal that will affect retirees or those who are about to retire. He stated he is also advocating for the management employees as they are the workers who do not receive overtime and have inferior health plans. He stated the proposal appears to be more like "punishment" because the longer you have worked for the County the more money you will have to pay towards health insurance. He stated in terms of attorneys working for the County, they make less income than those who work in the private sector but they would receive a pension and health care when they retire. He stated this proposal is immoral.

Patricia Perez, Town of Carmel Resident & County Employee, stated she is concerned and disheartened by this proposal. She stated County employees are aware that there are mandates that need funding, but to put the burden of County expenditures on the backs of employees and those who have retired is not right. She stated in ten (10) years she plans to retire but will not be able to afford to live in the County when she retires. She stated as a taxpayer she is concerned with the expenditures brought forth by the current Administration. She questioned if Tilly Foster Farm is more important than the workforce.

Jim Ciulla, Town of Carmel Resident & County Employee, stated he currently holds the position of Emergency Systems Planning Administrator, which is a civil service tested position. He stated he was recently informed that at the end of the year he will no longer be employed due to the elimination of that job position; despite County Executive Odell indicating in the County Address there would not be any layoffs. He stated he would like to publically thank Legislators Gross, LoBue, Wright, and Addonizio for their support in attempting to save his position. He stated he challenges the Legislators to put politics aside and support emergency services and public safety by not eliminating his job position.

Pat Gorman, County Employee, stated she has been employed as a nurse in the County Health Department for 11 years. She stated this proposal is unfair and ill thought out. She stated this proposal has been poorly presented and also done in an undemocratic way. She questioned what the purpose of having a Blue Ribbon Panel is, if the Legislature does not take their work into consideration. She stated there has been unnecessary spending at the Putnam County Golf Course, Tilly Foster Farm, renovations in the County Executive's Office and so forth. She questioned if it is truly necessary for

the County Executive to have a bodyguard/driver. She stated this proposal is attacking the poor and those who cannot fight back; this is not good government.

Karen Delduco, County Employee, stated she works for the Bureau of Emergency Services. She stated she has been a County employee for 33 years. She stated she is looking forward to retirement with having a pension and health insurance. She stated she feels that she is being bullied. She stated employees are being punished for their longevity of employment.

Alexandra Ballentine, Brewster Resident, stated she proposes to save \$200,000 in next year's budget by defunding the Visitor's Bureau because there is no proof that they help raise revenue for the County. She stated in her opinion the Visitor's Bureau Staff puts minimal effort in attracting tourists to our community and it is a triplication of other services that the State provides. She stated the Director of the Visitor's Bureau only has this position because of political connections. She stated defunding their budget will provide wiggle room that is needed for the County Budget.

Jane Muenier-Gorman, CSEA Local 840 President & County Employee, stated she has worked for the County for 23 years. She stated she was promised retiree health insurance benefits at an affordable cost. She stated she believes about 90% of the individuals present tonight are fearful of speaking their minds in what they see occurring in the County government. She stated CSEA learned about this proposal at the "11th Hour." She stated the Legislature is part of the checks and balances of government. She stated she implores the Legislature to table this item to provide time for the CSEA, Legislature and the Administration to fully vet out all of the concerns. She stated she would also like to speak on the behalf of Mr. James Ciulla; he is more qualified than anyone working at the Bureau of Emergency Services and should remain in his current position.

Carol Donick, Kent Library Employee, stated she thanks the Legislature in providing funding the Library.

Chris Marrone, Member of the Kent Library Board, stated she would like to thank the Legislature for the continued support they provide to the libraries especially being faced with an economically challenging budget this year. She stated the libraries in the County compliment many services offered in our community; for instance when neighborhoods lose power during a storm. She stated 51,890 residents in Putnam County have a library card.

Emily Lockhard, Patterson Resident, stated she considers the Patterson Library as a second home. She stated the Patterson Library provides many services and support to the community.

Philip Capaldo, Town of Patterson Highway Employee, stated future retirees have the same concerns as the current retirees. He questioned what will happen to current employees when they are ready to retire. He stated the Town of Patterson Board is having a similar discussion regarding healthcare for retirees. He stated he believes that it is important to consider that Town Boards look to the Legislature as an example. He stated there are other ways to save money other than increasing healthcare costs for retirees. He stated the Union is willing to work with the Legislature and is reaching out to State Senator Murphy to receive funding for the County. He stated there needs to be a

way to develop revenue for the County because that will offset the burden placed on the residents. He stated he would like for this matter to be tabled tonight.

Caroline Graf, County Retiree, stated the Union has worked with the County for many years. She stated an example of both entities working together is two (2) years ago the Union supported the increase in sales tax. She stated she worked for the County for 38 years. She stated she is upset about this proposal because she worked longer for the County in order to have a high pension. However, under this proposal she will have to pay a higher amount for her health insurance because of her longevity. She stated she asks for the Legislature to rethink this proposal. She stated she is also speaking on behalf of Anita Somers, Brewster resident and retiree, who was unable to attend tonight. Ms. Somers was very distraught with the proposed increase to retiree health insurance.

Bill Huestis, County Retiree, stated he commends the libraries in Putnam County. He stated libraries such as Kent Library, Patterson Library, Putnam Valley Library and others have been very cooperative with the Office for the Aging Nutrition Program. He stated he hopes the Legislature will continue to support the libraries in Putnam County. He stated he was the Director of the Office for the Aging, now known as Office for Senior Resources, for 33 years. He stated Mr. Ciulla was always there for assistance if there was an emergency. He stated every effort should be made to assist Mr. Ciulla out. He stated in regards to health insurance, he requests for the Legislature to rethink this proposal. He stated he believes this proposal was rushed to be implemented and it is confusing. He stated he is concerned with what will occur with management employees. He stated the community and the County should work together to keep Putnam County strong.

Cliff Ferraro, Resident of Patterson, stated County Employees give up a lot to serve the County. He stated the County retirees do not deserve to be treated like this.

Chairman Albano stated the Legislature appreciates the comments made tonight.

Deputy County Executive Bruce Walker stated there have been a number of comments made as to why this proposal was brought forth. He stated he and the County Executive represent nearly 100,000 people in the County. He stated in order to balance the Budget some services had to be diminished. He stated the Administration is in charge of being fiscally responsible in staying under the 1% tax cap even with items escalating in cost such as pension costs. He stated the County also faces financial challenges with paying for Medicare. He stated this Budget is about surviving and moving forward, which results in people contributing. He stated the Administration is trying to ensure that five (5) years from now employees receive pensions. He stated tax payers put down \$15 million after 2008 to ensure the County employees had a pension. He stated retiree health insurance is not the only item to be adjusted financially; items such as license fees and probation user fees were adjusted as well.

There being no other member of the public who wished to speak, at 8:15 P.M., Chairman Albano made a motion to adjourn; seconded by Legislator Nacerino. All in favor.

Respectfully submitted by Lisa Sommers, Administrative Assistant.