

HEALTH, SOCIAL, EDUCATIONAL & ENVIRONMENTAL COMMITTEE MEETING
Held in Room 318
Putnam County Office Building
Carmel, New York 10512

(Chairman Oliverio, Legislators Othmer & Tamana)

Tuesday

April 10, 2012

6:30 P.M.

The meeting was called to order at 6:30 P.M. by Chairman Oliverio who requested Legislator Othmer lead in the Pledge of Allegiance. Upon roll call, Legislators Othmer, Tamagna and Chairman Oliverio were present.

Item #3 – Approval of Minutes – March 13, 2012. The minutes were approved as submitted.

Item #4 – Update/Housing for Sex Offenders/Commissioner of Social Services
Chairman Oliverio stated that he had received numerous phone calls after the situation was reported on the television news.

County Executive Odell stated that it is a State mandate to house sex offenders who are released from prison and are homeless. The County has two now and a third one will be released the end of April. The Administration has been identifying sites owned by the County to place the trailer. The private venues have been exhausted. The Child Safety Law further restricts the County's ability to find suitable housing.

Commissioner of Social Services, Michael Piazza, stated that there had been previous discussion about limiting the number of paroles housed in local motels. Now with all the media attention, local motels owners will no longer rent to the County. There are currently three parolee sex offenders that are DSS cases. There are 56 sex offenders in the County. They are using the trailer on an emergency basis. Certain County owned properties are too isolated.

Chairman Oliverio stated that with all the media alarm, the County must do its due diligence.

Capt. McNamara, from the Sheriff's Department, stated that additional Sheriff's patrols and Carmel Police Department patrols have been added for Donald B. Smith campus now that the trailer is there. The Sheriff has default responsibility. It is the local police department, in this case the Carmel Police Department that has jurisdiction by State statute.

Legislator LoBue questioned if they could use a tracking device on the parolee. There is a karate school located near the Donald B. Smith campus and some parents had raised concerns.

Capt. McNamara stated that would be up to the Parole Board to determine if he qualified for a monitoring device.

Legislator Birmingham stated that he had concerns regarding designating a County site for the trailer. That could have a clustering effect just like what happened in the past at the Henry Van Motel. He questioned if the County is statutorily required to keep parolees in Putnam County.

Commissioner Piazza stated that guidance requires that if the person lived in the County and if the crime was committed in Putnam County they must be housed in Putnam County.

Legislator Birmingham questioned if it is in the "guidance" or the "statute".

Commissioner Piazza stated that it is in an Administrative Memo that serves as a statute for DSS.

Legislator Birmingham stated that the Legislature cannot approve or deny where the Administration places the trailer. His concern was that temporary turns into permanent if a trailer becomes readily available. Housing them in a hotel is more expensive but it is a more optimum solution. It is temporary. He urged the Administration not to cross that threshold.

County Executive Odell stated that the Administration is hoping that this will not be a permanent arrangement. After the end of April, there are no offenders in the system. This is to be a short term arrangement but the County must follow New York State law.

Chairman Oliverio stated that he would rather have the trailer in an isolated location. There is a safety issue.

Director of Probation, Gene Funicelli, stated that the parolee is a probationer as well. There must be a plan for the future. The difference between the Board of Parole and the Probation Department is that the parole is done by the State and probation is County run.

County Executive Odell stated that they need to have a dialogue with the State. This is another unfunded State mandate. In addition, she questioned why so many sex offenders were returned to society when there is no possibility of rehabilitation.

Chairman Oliverio stated that he would be willing to send a letter with the County Executive to the State regarding this matter as it pertains to Level 3 Sex Offenders.

Item #5 – Approval/Consolidation/Department of Social Services/Mental Health/Youth Bureau was next. Chairman Oliverio stated that it makes sense to incorporate the Youth Bureau into the Department of Social Services.

Item #6 – Approval/Budgetary Amendment/commissioner of Finance/Reorganize Your Bureau/DSS

Commissioner Piazza stated that Mr. DeMarzo has really acted as his Deputy. As discussed at past Health Committee meetings, the State is phasing out funding for the Youth Bureau. The County values the Youth Bureau programs and has picked up the funding that the State no longer provides. To keep the Youth Bureau viable, it must be incorporated into DSS/Mental Health. There are precedents for this merger. Mr. DeMarzo will be able to assist the DSS staff. The total integration of these departments will save \$44,000.

County Executive Odell stated that this merger is capturing revenues.

Legislator Tamagna made a motion to approve Agenda Items 5 &6 Consolidation of the Department of Social Services /Mental Health and the Youth Bureau & the Budgetary Amendment/Commissioner of Finance/Reorganize Youth Bureau/DSS; Seconded by Legislator Othmer. All in favor.

Legislative Counsel VanRoss questioned if a Charter Change needed to be done to consolidate the DSS/Mental Health Department with the Youth Bureau Department.

Personnel Director Eldridge stated there is no need for a Charter Change. He stated he was informed of that by his contacts at the State level.

Chair of the Legislature Conklin requested that Personnel Director Eldridge please get in writing from New York State that there is no need for a Charter Change in this matter.

Personnel Director Eldridge confirmed that he would get a letter from the State that would explain and confirm that there is no need for a Charter Change and that it is the purview of the Commissioner of DSS/Mental Health to appoint a Deputy Commissioner.

Item #7 Support for Utilizing Valuable Resources Provided by People with Disabilities/Senior Citizens/Veterans/Returning War Heroes/Discussion

County Executive Odell stated that when trying to bring our Veterans back into our communities, Seniors have so much to offer them. She stated also some of our Seniors are looking to get back into the work force. She stated that this is a give and take for all involved. She stated that October 17th is the scheduled date for the mentoring program.

Chair Oliverio stated that the Council for People with Disabilities is in complete support of this proposal. He stated that in prior history there has never been a County Executive who has designated a day targeting the disabled for a mentoring program. He stated Steve Unger, the Chair of the Council requested that he bring their sincere appreciation for the establishment of this program.

Legislator Othmer made a motion to approve the creation of a memorialization in support of the mentoring day for the disabled/Senior Citizens/Veterans/Returning War Heroes; Seconded by Legislator Tamagna. All in favor.

Director of Veterans Affairs Rohde stated that he supports the idea of the mentoring program and he will encourage the Veterans to get involved. He stated that he and his fellow Veterans are very concerned about the push at the national level to have Veterans Affairs give funding back in an attempt to balance the budget. There are Veterans today who are returning home with catastrophic injuries and while the VA is offering them a lot of services they cannot offer them everything they need. He stated he and his fellow Veterans are working to prevent the Veterans Affairs Organization and certain parts of the Department of Defense from being included as an organization that needs to return funding. One of the areas that is being targeted to cut, to save money, is health care for retired Veterans. He stated the domino effect of the cuts at the State Level is that the local level Veteran Affairs Office will feel the need to try to provide for the Veterans. He stated as an example currently the cost of for Aid Dogs are not supported by the New York State Veterans Affairs Organization. He stated that approximately it cost \$40,000 to train an Aid Dog who would work with a disabled Service Member. He stated that locally they have been working to raise the funding.

Legislator Othmer stated that he recently had a conversation with a man who had done 4 tours of duty in the Marines and seventeen (17) years of active duty. He stated that the man informed him that what is happening in the military today, men and women, like himself, are being pushed out and not being given their medical benefits. He stated that he does not support the government going after our Veterans and taking away medical benefits and such to try to balance the budget.

County Executive Odell stated as a point of reference the deadline submission for new legislation at the State Level is on or about April 17th. Therefore if there is something that this Committee would like to recommend with the Administration lets further this dialogue. She also said that there is a film available that is a documentary that follows returning soldiers with Traumatic Brain Injuries (TBI). She stated that she would like the Legislature to work with Director of Veterans Affairs Rhode to get a copy of the documentary and have it played at the Emergency Operations Center and make it available to the public to view.

Chair Oliverio stated that he is in full support of educating the public on all of these matters.

Office For the Aging Director Patricia Sheehy stated that she is in full support of this memorialization.

Item #8 Support for "Safe House"/Women & Children of Putnam County/Victims of Domestic Violence/In Need of Immediate Housing/Discussion

Chair Oliverio stated that there is a tax lien parcel of property that is available. He stated that it could be used as a Safe House location. He stated that there is a level of confidentiality that must be adhered to in this conversation to respect the safety and confidentiality that is practiced and required within the Women's' Resource Center. He stated that he would like to say publicly that the work that is done by the Women's' Resource Center is phenomenal.

Executive Director Ann Ellsworth stated firstly she would like to express her gratitude. This will be a tremendous asset to their purpose. She stated that their mission is to provide a supportive and empowering environment for their clients. To have a location that is like a home and not an institution adds to the value of their mission. She stated that the support received from the County is tremendous.

Legislator Birmingham stated that in the resolution, which is a public document, it will need to state who the parcel is being deeded over to.

County Executive Odell stated that there is a system in place which they have vetted through all of the confidentiality requirements as well as providing the required information.

Legislator Birmingham stated that he recommends that this transaction be done in accordance with Chapter 31 Article 1, of the Putnam County Code, which deals with just general County Property that is not from a tax lien. He stated that Article 1A of Chapter 31 talks about tax lien property. He stated that tax lien property is not property that the County has authority to give away. He stated also there would need to be a reversionary clause included.

County Executive Odell stated that the reversionary clause has been discussed in her communications pertaining to this matter.

Legislator Tamagna made a motion to approve County Executive Odell's proposal to transfer, when identified, an appropriate dwelling acquired by the County in tax foreclosure proceedings to the Putnam –Northern Westchester Women's Resource Center, to be used to expand its licensed emergency safe haven shelter program; Seconded by Legislator Othmer. All in favor.

Item #9. Other Business – None

Item #10. Adjournment

There being no further business, at 7:30P.M., Legislator Tamagna made a motion to adjourn; seconded by Legislator Othmer. All in favor.

Respectfully submitted by Diane Trabulsy, Administrative Assistant