

**SPECIAL MEETING
OF THE
PUTNAM COUNTY LEGISLATURE
CALLED BY THE CLERK AT THE REQUEST OF THE CHAIRMAN
TO BE HELD IN ROOM 318
PUTNAM COUNTY OFFICE BUILDING
CARMEL, NEW YORK 10512**

Tuesday November 14, 2023 6:00 P.M.

The meeting was called to order at 6:03 P.M. by Chairman Jonke who requested Legislator Castellano lead in the Pledge of Allegiance and Legislator Sayegh lead in the Legislative Prayer. Upon roll call, Legislators Addonizio, Nacerino, Ellner, Castellano, Sayegh and Chairman Jonke were present. Legislators Montgomery, Gouldman and Crowley were absent. Also present was Legislative Counsel Firriolo.

Item #4a – Reconsideration/ 2024 Budget Resolution #209 of 2023/ Board of Elections – Printing & Forms/ Vetoed by County Executive.

Chairman Jonke asked if there was a motion to move this forward.

There was no motion made to move this resolution forward to override the County Executive's veto.

RECONSIDERATION/ 2024 BUDGET RESOLUTION #209 OF 2023/ BOARD OF ELECTIONS – PRINTING & FORMS/ VETOED BY COUNTY EXECUTIVE

RESOLVED, that the County Executive's veto of Budget Resolution #209 of 2023 increasing the Board of Elections' Printing & Forms line #10145000 54311 from \$100,000 to \$150,000, after Legislative reconsideration, is hereby overridden.

Item #4b – Reconsideration/ 2024 Budget Resolution #213 of 2023/ Coroners 2.75% COLA Increase/ Vetoed by County Executive.

Chairman Jonke moved the following; seconded by Legislator Nacerino.

Legislator Nacerino stated that she wanted her comments to be entered into the record for all three (3) resolutions tonight pertaining to the Coroners, County Clerk and Sheriff. She stated that she was taken aback by the County Executive's vetoes for the Sheriff, County Clerk and Coroners which she believed was driven by politics. She believed that it was disingenuous and an insult to these elected officials. She stated that the County Executive stated in his three (3) identical veto messages, "I committed to the residents of Putnam County that, within my ability, I would not raise pay for elected officials. That is why the 2024 Tentative Budget had no merit increases or cost-of-living adjustments for the elected offices of County Executive, Sheriff, Clerk, District Attorney, or County Coroners." She stated that the County Executive secured a 3.5% COLA adjustment approved by the Legislature prior to taking office in 2023, totaling \$5,952, which was in the tentative budget. She believed that it was only right that he takes a freeze this year. She stated that by design he secured himself and then made a pledge not to give increases to other elected officials. She stated that he is the highest paid County

Executive in Putnam County history. She stated that the District Attorney's salary is dictated by New York State and the County Executive has no authority to set his salary. She stated that the County Executive states in his veto message, "This Administration recognizes the very real financial challenges many residents face as they struggle to support their families and navigate through sky-high inflation, record setting interest rates, and overall economic uncertainty. Due to many of these same challenges the cost of government has grown, and eliminating pay raises for elected officials demonstrates our awareness of that hardship and helps solidify the County's commitment to a fiscally sound budget." She believed that the County Executive was the one (1) growing government. She stated that his predecessor had a staff of three (3) for many years; herself, Chief of Staff, and secretary. She stated that there is now a staff of six (6). She stated that the County Executive vetoed the Legislature's amendment to restore COLA increases for these three (3) elected officials. She stated that the County Executive had no problem promising a \$24,000 increase for his Deputy County Executive at the beginning of this year, after securing the \$4,375 COLA increase. She stated that with the 2.75% COLA increase for 2024, the Deputy County Executive will receive another \$4,235 netting \$33,235 after being employed by the County for one (1) year. She stated the 2024 budget includes merit raises including additional 2.75% COLA increases. She stated that he gave his appointed County Attorney a \$2,950 merit increase in addition to a \$4,367 COLA increase totaling \$7,320. She stated that the County Executive's veto message also states, "it is unfair to include pay raises for elected officials while we are still actively negotiating contracts with various collective bargaining units." She stated that in accordance with the powers and duties of the County Executive referenced in the Putnam County Charter, Section 3.02(g) states: "make, sign, and implement all contracts on behalf of the County within authorized appropriations." She stated that there is no correlation between the cost-of-living increase and union contract negotiations. She stated that those non-elected employees who will be sitting at the negotiating table are the County Executive's appointed negotiation team who have received a cost-of-living increase. She believed that elected officials feel the inflation squeeze just like everyone else. She stated that the Sheriff, County Clerk, and Coroners are esteemed public servants. She stated that she was adamantly opposed and wholly disagreed with the County Executive's veto message.

Legislator Ellner stated that this was a difficult vote for him. He stated that he campaigned on no raises for elected officials. He stated that he came from the private sector and in his entire career never received a cost-of-living adjustment, so he never even factored that into the equation. He believed that it was wrong to isolate a few employees of the County. He stated that he understands that the County Executive is standing by his pledge, however he stated that he would have to break his and would be voting in favor of overriding the County Executive's veto.

Legislator Sayegh stated that while she appreciates the County Executive's commitment to fiscal discipline, she did not agree with the reasoning of the veto message. She stated that after her evaluation, she concluded that it had nothing to do with fiscal discipline. She stated that the first point of the County Executive's veto message recognizes, as pointed out by Legislator Nacerino, "the very real financial challenges many residents face as they struggle to support their families and navigate through sky-high inflation, record setting interest rates, and overall economic uncertainty." She stated that she agreed wholeheartedly. She stated that these were issues that all employees face including elected officials. She explained that elected officials were public servants hired by the people of Putnam County to carry out the business of the people. She

stated that each person being denied a cost-of-living adjustment, not a promotion or merit raise, lives in Putnam County. She explained that they do not commute from other areas, and they raise their families and pay their taxes here in Putnam County. She stated that they are subjected to the same financial challenges as all other employees. She stated that the next point in the veto messages states that the County Executive finds it, "unfair to include pay raises for elected officials while we are still actively negotiating contracts with various collective bargaining units." She questioned why we were tying the Coroners or County Clerk's salary into a union negotiation. She suggested doing the best we can for our employees and unions by negotiating a fair contract to begin with and not attaching any empty virtue signals to the negotiations. She found it "unfair" that these salaries would be tied to fair negotiations. She stated that we are talking about a total amount of \$11,405 for five (5) County employees. She stated that when the contracts are completed, those employees under the collective bargaining agreement will receive their full and fair compensations, while these five (5) employees will not. She stated that those in the Administration who will be involved in negotiating the contracts have all received, at least, the cost-of-living adjustment. She stated that some received merit raises over and above the COLA increase. She stated that the final point of the veto message she wanted to address was that according to the County Charter the County Executive does not set the pay of the Legislature and is therefore prevented from modifying Legislative salaries. She stated that even if the County Executive could set Legislative salaries, the total COLA adjustment for all nine (9) Legislators was \$11,905. Adding that to the five (5) other elected officials not getting a COLA adjustment would total \$23,366 for all 14 elected officials. She believed that the five (5) elected officials were not given COLA increases to make a political point. She stated that in the County Executive's first month of public office with the County, he provided a \$24,625 raise to his Deputy County Executive; an amount that exceeds all 14 elected official COLA adjustments combined. She stated that she voted against that increase. She stated that if he wanted to send a message to the collective bargaining units about fair negotiating, she believed that he should start with his own staff. She stated that she will be voting to override this veto. She believed that it was wrong to make an example of other people and their salaries to make a political point. She stated that each of these public servants were entitled to a cost-of-living adjustment, along with every other dedicated employee.

Legislator Addonizio stated that all managerial positions across the board in Putnam County received a modest 2.75% COLA increase. She stated that this is not a raise. She stated that a raise would be above and beyond the cost-of-living increase. She stated that in New York State, the Sheriff, County Clerk, and Coroners are required to be elected positions. She stated that these are the five (5) positions that the Administration believes should not be included in the cost-of-living increase. She questioned why they were being penalized for being in an elected position. She stated that she is totally against this veto and would be voting to override it this evening.

Legislator Castellano concurred with his colleagues. He stated that it was not a merit raise. It was a cost-of-living adjustment. He explained how inflation has affected everyone in the area. He explained that all the unions are currently under contract, except for one (1). He stated that he looked forward to the day where they could sit at the table and negotiate a contract as quickly as possible. He stated that the Sheriff, County Clerk, and Coroners are not part of those negotiations. He believed it was unfair that these five (5) individuals did not receive the COLA increase that was allowed for all management positions.

Legislator Ellner stated that he refused the 2.75% COLA increase for himself.

Chairman Jonke stated that he appreciated the fact that the County Executive submitted statements for the vetoes of the Legislature's budget changes. He believed it was a big mistake to make a campaign promise that limits the County Executive's ability to raise pay for elected officials. He explained that a cost-of-living adjustment keeps on pace with other position's salaries. He stated that we have seen that bigger problems can arise by not giving COLA raises to Department Heads. He stated that for the three (3) items we are going to discuss, we are talking about \$11,405. He stated that these salaries are in no way connected to the struggle and hardship families face that is mentioned in the veto message. He stated that the County Executive placed \$500,000 of discretionary funding in the budget for municipalities and special groups. He stated that was not recognizing "the very real financial challenges many residents face." He stated that a recent press release touted the reduction of the tax levy. He stated that it did not mention that it was the Legislature that took the \$500,000 out of the budget and gave it back to the taxpayers. He stated that the County Executive also stated that he finds it "unfair to include pay raises for elected officials while we are still actively negotiating contracts with various collective bargaining units." Chairman Jonke stated that he could not comprehend what the Sheriff, County Clerk and three (3) Coroners have to do with union negotiations. He questioned why the County Executive did not deny cost-of-living adjustments for all Department Heads. He stated that the Personnel Director, Commissioner of Finance, Deputy County Executive, and County Attorney all received a cost-of-living adjustment. He stated that the County Attorney also received a merit raise after being with the County for 10 months. He stated that these are the individuals that will be on the negotiating team. He believed it was not fair to single out the Sheriff, County Clerk and Coroners. He stated that the Coroners are on call 24/7, responding at all hours of the night at a salary of \$25,000 per year. He explained that without them, we would need a medical examiners office with a full-time physician which would increase our cost for that function by at least \$800,000. He stated that the County Clerk and Sheriff are Department Heads with great responsibility and have demonstrated their dedication to their jobs and this community. He stated that he would be voting to override this veto.

RESOLUTION #234

RECONSIDERATION/ 2024 BUDGET RESOLUTION #213 OF 2023/ CORONERS 2.75% COLA INCREASE/ VETOED BY COUNTY EXECUTIVE

RESOLVED, that the County Executive's veto of Budget Resolution #213 of 2023 providing a 2.75% COLA increase for the Coroners, after Legislative reconsideration, is hereby overridden.

BY ROLL CALL VOTE: SIX AYES. LEGISLATORS CROWLEY, GOULDMAN & MONTGOMERY WERE ABSENT. MOTION CARRIES.

Item #4c – Reconsideration/ 2024 Budget Resolution #214 of 2023/ County Clerk 2.75% COLA Increase/ Vetoed by County Executive.

Chairman Jonke moved the following; seconded by Legislator Castellano.

RESOLUTION #235

RECONSIDERATION/ 2024 BUDGET RESOLUTION #214 OF 2023/ COUNTY CLERK 2.75% COLA INCREASE/ VETOED BY COUNTY EXECUTIVE

RESOLVED, that the County Executive's veto of Budget Resolution #214 of 2023 providing a 2.75% COLA increase for the County Clerk, after Legislative reconsideration, is hereby overridden.

BY ROLL CALL VOTE: SIX AYES. LEGISLATORS CROWLEY, GOULDMAN & MONTGOMERY WERE ABSENT. MOTION CARRIES.

Item #4d – Reconsideration/ 2024 Budget Resolution #215 of 2023/ Putnam County Sheriff 2.75% COLA Increase/ Vetoed by County Executive.

Chairman Jonke moved the following; seconded by Legislators Addonizio and Sayegh.

RESOLUTION #236

RECONSIDERATION/ 2024 BUDGET RESOLUTION #215 OF 2023/ PUTNAM COUNTY SHERIFF 2.75% COLA INCREASE/ VETOED BY COUNTY EXECUTIVE

RESOLVED, that the County Executive's veto of Budget Resolution #215 of 2023 providing a 2.75% COLA increase for the Putnam County Sheriff, after Legislative reconsideration, is hereby overridden.

BY ROLL CALL VOTE: SIX AYES. LEGISLATORS CROWLEY, GOULDMAN & MONTGOMERY WERE ABSENT. MOTION CARRIES.

There being no further business, at 6:24 P.M., Chairman Jonke made a motion to adjourn; seconded by Legislator Sayegh. All in favor.

Respectfully submitted by Diane Schonfeld, Clerk.