

**HELD IN ROOM #318
PUTNAM COUNTY OFFICE BUILDING
CARMEL, NEW YORK 10512**

Members: Chairman Birmingham and Legislators Ellner & Gouldman

February 19, 2025

The meeting was called to order at 7:00pm by Chairman Birmingham who requested Legislator Gouldman lead in the Pledge of Allegiance. Upon roll call Legislator Gouldman and Chairman Birmingham were present. Legislator Ellner was absent. Chairman Birmingham stated Legislative Chairwoman Amy Sayegh appointed Legislator Jonke to sit on the Committee in Legislator Ellner's absence.

Item #3 – Chairman’s Verbal Report

Chairman Birmingham stated he had a productive meeting last week with the County Law Department to go over some prospective items related to the Legislative Manual.

Chairman Birmingham made a motion to waive the rules and accept all additional and other business items; Seconded by Legislator Jonke. All in favor.

Item #4 – Acceptance of Minutes – October 8, 2024 Special Rules Meeting

The minutes were accepted as submitted.

Item #5 – Discussion – CAREERS Support Solutions Funding – Executive Director Cornish-Lauria

Executive Director of CAREERS Support Solutions Tina Cornish-Lauria provided copies of her letter and a brochure about the organization.

Legislator Jonke made a motion to waive the rules and accept the additional; Seconded by Chairman Birmingham. All in favor.

Executive Director Cornish-Lauria stated CAREERS Support Solutions (CAREERS) has been operating in Putnam County for 36 years. She stated it was not until 2023 that they were provided with \$15,000 in County funding and the same was allocated in 2024. She stated their request was for \$30,000. She stated CAREERS works with about 100 clients with disabilities, most of whom have a mental impairment, who reside in Putnam County. She stated their annual budget is about \$300,000 and is all collected through fundraising efforts, however prior to COVID their budget was about \$190,000 which is why she is seeking additional funding from the County. She stated the \$15,000 in County funding breaks down to about \$12.50 per client per month and is used toward helping clients with job skills, placing them in jobs, finding paid internships for students, providing job support, etc. She stated without this funding CAREERS would not be able

to sustain the level of support they provide. She stated she is requesting an additional \$15,000 to meet their original \$30,000 request. She stated they have a great, loyal staff with little turnover.

Chairman Birmingham thanked Executive Director Cornish-Lauria. She stated CAREERS is a contract agency with the County, which allows the County to fulfill some of its mandates. He drew the Committee's attention to the additional for items #5 and #6 which show the contract agencies the County works with and which have been historically funded, which are new, and which requested County funding but were denied by the Administration. He stated most outside agencies were provided funding lower than they requested; there is a variance of about \$144,000. He stated the Administration placed \$75,000 (now \$71,000) in subcontingency for distribution to the outside agencies by the Legislature. He stated the Legislature is unable to initiate fund transfers except for limited instances, which do not apply here.

Legislator Jonke thanked Executive Director Cornish-Lauria for attending this evening and for the work done by CAREERS within our community. He questioned if any reason was provided by the Administration for denying the requested funding amount.

Executive Director Cornish-Lauria stated no reason was provided.

Legislator Jonke questioned if Executive Director Cornish-Lauria received a form letter regarding the funding placed in subcontingency.

Executive Director Cornish-Lauria stated no, she did not.

Legislator Addonizio stated CAREERS is a wonderful organization. She mentioned the CAREERS thrift store in Carmel.

Executive Director Cornish-Lauria stated the shop is run by volunteers and employs some clients for practical training and retail experience.

Legislator Addonizio requested that Executive Director Cornish-Lauria explain their work with assisting seniors with jobs.

Executive Director Cornish-Lauria stated they received a grant through the Field Hall Foundation which allowed them to work with senior citizens with and without disabilities. She stated they provide help with resumes and applications as well as interview skills. She stated the services provided are very individualized and depends on the needs of the individual. She stated they also have another program, Ambition in Motion (AIM) for lower functioning developmentally disabled individuals. She stated this is a day-hab where the clients are out in the community learning life skills, social skills, budgeting, and everyday tasks. She stated these individuals also receive job training and some are placed in jobs which is a great source of pride because this group of individuals may not otherwise be working due to the limitations they are facing.

Legislator Montgomery thanked Executive Director Cornish-Lauria. She questioned if the grant funding for their work with seniors will run out.

Executive Director Cornish-Lauria stated yes, it has run out. She stated they applied again for the grant but they did not receive it. She stated the grants are available a few times a year so they will keep applying and the program will continue to some degree.

Legislator Montgomery stated these programs are not common which makes it so valuable. She stated there are many services available for young kids with developmental disabilities but the population ages 16+, are falling through the cracks.

Executive Director Cornish-Lauria stated the clients they work with are individuals who may not qualify for other programs.

Legislator Montgomery stated that population also has aging parents which is an important consideration for these individuals who need support. She stated CAREERS is such an important program and she stated her support for their funding request.

Legislator Russo thanked Executive Director Cornish-Lauria for her work. She stated she knows clients of the program and has witnessed their growth.

Legislator Montgomery questioned what the process is from here.

Chairman Birmingham stated the \$71,000 is in subcontingency for distribution to outside agencies. He stated there is also money in contingency. He stated there will have to be discussions to consider how to distribute funding for our outside agencies equitably. He stated the Legislature or the agencies will have to request that the County Executive send the Legislature a fund transfer to provide funding. He stated this should be worked on rather quickly and told Executive Director Cornish-Lauria to stay tuned.

Item #6 – Discussion – Putnam Arts Council Funding – Executive Director Joyce Picone

Putnam Arts Council Executive Director Joyce Picone stated she is here this evening to request that the \$13,993 be moved out of subcontingency to be used for their regrant program. She stated this funding was included in their original budget request for 2025 and was approved by the County Executive. She stated once it came before the Legislature there was a question about the regrant program, however she has been unable to determine what the question was despite trying.

Chairman Birmingham requested clarification on the \$75,000 in subcontingency and whether it includes the \$13,993 for the Putnam Arts Council or if it is in addition to that funding.

County Auditor Sharkey stated \$75,000 was put into subcontingency for the outside agencies and some was utilized to fund another outside agency. She stated the \$13,993 was moved into subcontingency by the Rules Committee.

Executive Director Picone stated Commissioner Lewis suggested moving that funding into subcontingency when Legislator Ellner raised a question about it. She stated she has attempted to meet with Legislator Ellner to discuss his concerns but has not yet been able to. She explained the process of the regrant program; an independent panel reviews each grant request and makes recommendations which are then sent to the Legislature for consideration and final approval. She stated the grant funding is made up of both County and State funds and 100% of the money goes to these grants, none is kept by the Putnam Arts Council.

Legislator Jonke thanked Executive Director Picone for attending this evening. He stated he has no objection to moving the money out of subcontingency.

Legislator Sayegh confirmed that this money has been put into subcontingency specifically for the Putnam Arts Council.

County Auditor Sharkey stated that is correct, it is included in the \$71,000 total.

Legislator Sayegh clarified that the amount left to be distributed among the other outside agencies is \$57,007 (\$71,000-\$13,993). She stated she is in favor of providing these funds.

Legislator Montgomery stated in 2024 the Putnam Arts Council grants were approved in February, therefore time is of the essence. She stated the organizations that applied are awaiting the decision of the regrant committee.

Executive Director Picone stated the regrant panel is meeting on March 2, 2025. She stated 27 applications were received totaling about \$100,000 in requests. She stated they are not asking for any additional funding this evening, they are just requesting the budgeted amount be moved out of subcontingency for use by the Putnam Arts Council.

Legislator Montgomery spoke about the benefits of the arts.

Legislator Addonizio questioned if this funding could be moved this evening.

Chairman Birmingham stated the Legislature does not have the ability on its own to initiate a fund transfer. He stated the Rules Committee could send a letter to the County Executive asking the Administration to initiate a fund transfer request for this funding to be considered at the March Full Legislative Meeting.

Legislator Jonke stated before any action is taken, he believes Legislator Ellner should be involved in this since he was the one who had a question. He stated he is certainly in favor of reallocating the funding.

Chairman Birmingham recognized the benefit of arts in the community as well as the outside agencies as a whole.

*This item is continued below.

Item #7 – Approval – Budgetary Amendment 24A135 – County Attorney – Legal Services (Tabled from 1/27/25 Audit)

Chairman Birmingham stated this was on last month's agenda as well and the Law Department has since provided more information.

First Deputy County Attorney John Cherico stated he, Deputy County Attorney Heather Abissi, and Risk Manager Mat Bruno are present this evening to address issues or respond to questions the Legislature might have with respect to the legal services. He requested that this discussion be had in executive session based on the subject matter.

Legislator Jonke requested clarification on what is being discussed: cases or bills.

First Deputy County Attorney Cherico stated the discussion will be relating to legal services, invoices, and any questions raised in that regard. He stated it is proper to be heard in executive session.

Chairman Birmingham stated there may be questions that are appropriate for open session and he is relying on the Law Department to notify the Legislature if such a question is asked.

Legislator Jonke stated he does not have any questions about legal services, his questions are about the dollar amounts, which he does not believe is necessary to be discussed in executive session.

At 7:35pm Chairman Birmingham made a motion to go into executive session to discuss legal services; Seconded by Legislator Gouldman. All in favor.

Executive Director Picone questioned if another person from the Putnam Arts Council could have an opportunity to speak.

Chairman Birmingham stated that would not be a problem and he will make a motion to come out of executive session.

At 7:36pm Chairman Birmingham made a motion to come out of executive session; Seconded by Legislator Jonke. All in favor.

*This item is continued below.

Item #6 – Discussion – Putnam Arts Council Funding – Executive Director Joyce Picone – Continued

Tina Franzetti, bookkeeper for Putnam Arts Council stated Legislator Ellner raised questions in October and 4 months have since passed with no communication. She stated this money was already allocated and all the necessary documentation was

provided. She stated she does not believe it is not right to hold this funding with no communication. She stated the Putnam Arts Council has been in operation for 40 years and has never had an issue. She questioned how they will know they will be able to get in contact with Legislator Ellner.

Chairman Birmingham explained the budget process and how once adopted it cannot be touched until the fiscal year it is for begins. He stated this meeting this evening is the first action meeting for the year.

Ms. Franzetti stated this problem can be easily solved, but for some reason it has not been.

Item #7 – Approval – Budgetary Amendment 24A135 – County Attorney – Legal Services (Tabled from 1/27/25 Audit) – Continued

At 7:39pm Chairman Birmingham made a motion to go into executive session to discuss legal services; Seconded by Legislator Gouldman. All in favor.

At 8:03pm Chairman Birmingham made a motion to come out of executive session; Seconded by Legislator Jonke. All in favor.

No action was taken.

Legislator Gouldman made a motion to pre-file the necessary resolution; Seconded by Chairman Birmingham. All in favor.

Item #8 – Approval – Budgetary Amendment 25A006 – Veterans Service Agency – Veterans Peer to Peer Program

Legislator Jonke made a motion to pre-file the necessary resolution; Seconded by Legislator Gouldman. All in favor.

Chairman Birmingham made a motion to address item #14a at this time; Seconded by Legislator Jonke. All in favor.

Item #14a – Other Business – Approval/ Authorizing a Moratorium on the Implementation of Certain Provisions of the Legislative Manual

Chairman Birmingham stated he brought forward this resolution which delays the effective date of Rules 31, 32 & 33 of the Legislative Manual until July 1, 2025 and delays the effective date of Section II(B)(5)(c) until October 15, 2025.

Legislator Montgomery questioned why this is being proposed.

Chairman Birmingham stated more time is needed to discuss these changes. He stated Rules #31-#33 generated the most comments from County departments.

Legislator Montgomery stated she hopes the Committee recognizes this and tables the next three (3) items on the agenda to address the long agendas still ahead of us.

Chairman Birmingham made a motion to pre-file the necessary resolution; Seconded by Legislator Jonke. All in favor.

Legislator Gouldman stated there are clearly flaws in the Legislative Manual.

Legislator Gouldman made a motion to adopt the previous Legislative Manual.

Chairman Birmingham stated that is not a motion that is germane right now.

Item #9 – Discussion – Approval/ Rule #31 Legislative Manual

Item #10 – Discussion – Approval/ Rule #32 Legislative Manual

Item #11 – Discussion – Approval/ Rule #33 Legislative Manual

Chairman Birmingham made a motion to table items #9, #10 & #11; Seconded by Legislator Jonke. All in favor.

Item #12 – General Discussion of Legislative Manual

Legislator Gouldman stated in his opinion, the changes to the Legislative Manual were not done in the correct way. He stated the changes were pushed through at the Organizational Meeting and now further amendments are being brought forward. He read comments from Conrad Pasquale, who was acting as Legislative Counsel.

Legislator Gouldman made a motion to do away with the changes made at the Organizational Meeting and use the 2024 version of the Legislative Manual. There was no second.

Chairman Birmingham stated Rules #31-#33 were the most controversial and were just tabled to give us that time.

Legislator Gouldman stated he does not agree with the changes to Section II(B)(5)(a), which speaks to Legislative meetings being held in the Historic Courthouse. He stated mandating that meetings be held in one place does a disservice to the residents of Putnam County. He stated it is valuable to hold meetings throughout the County because it encourages people to get involved. He stated he would also like to speak to Section II(B)(5)(c). He stated he has had the opportunity to attend many State of the County addresses including Manhattan, Queens, Bronx, Westchester, and Putnam County. He stated during those State of the Counties the County Executive has always stood at a podium. She stated the previous Putnam County Executive would wear a headset and move around the room. He stated requiring the County Executive to sit in a chair is micromanaging them and questioned what would happen if they stood up.

Chairman Birmingham stated Section II(B)(5)(c) was one that a moratorium was placed on through October 15, 2025. He stated he recently spoke to the County Executive

about this and the reason the moratorium on this is longer than the others is so it does not apply to the budget address in the beginning of October. He stated when he was previously a Legislator he appreciated when the County Executive would sit at the table with the Legislature as it gave a sense of collegiality and equality among the branches. He stated with that moratorium in place, it allows these discussions to take place before anything goes into effect.

Legislator Montgomery stated her concerns about ADA requirements in relation to requiring someone to sit or stand during a meeting. She stated restricting the meetings to the Historic Courthouse is unfortunate and seems archaic. She stated we have the technology and resources to bring government to the people. She stated Section II(B)(5)(c) should be removed.

Item #13 – FYI – Litigation Report – Duly Noted

**Item #14b – Other Business – Approval – Amendment of Legislative Manual –
Public Comment During Committee Meetings Prior to Taking a Vote**

Legislator Crowley stated she brought this resolution forward and proceeded to read it into the record. She stated a period for public comment would be designated prior to votes being taken in a committee meeting. She stated Putnam County is one of the few municipalities that does not have this. She stated she would like to ensure this is codified and provide the public full transparency and a place to speak.

Chairman Birmingham made a motion to pre-file the necessary resolution; Seconded by Legislator Jonke.

Chairman Birmingham opened the floor for discussion on this item.

Legislator Jonke questioned how this proposal differs than what is already being done in committee meetings.

Legislator Crowley stated each chairperson runs the committee meetings differently. She stated this would ensure the Legislature is always being fully transparent. She stated since it is already being done, there should be no issue with codifying it.

Legislator Gouldman agreed with Legislator Crowley.

Legislator Sayegh stated as a chairperson, she has always asked for public input prior to asking for a committee vote. She stated this is already being done, but can certainly be codified as well.

Legislator Montgomery stated her support for putting this in the Legislative Manual. She stated there could be a chairperson who denies the public the opportunity to speak. She requested that the resolution be amended to include both committee meetings and Full Legislative meetings.

Legislator Sayegh stated there is a distinction between a work session, which would be a Legislative committee meeting, and voting meetings. She stated the committee meetings are where the work is done and information is gathered so by the Full Legislative Meeting, the Legislators are prepared to vote. She stated members of the public are welcome to submit comments and ask questions up until the Full Legislative Meeting.

Legislator Gouldman stated there are instances where items do not go to committee, therefore there is no opportunity for the public to speak to it. He stated for example, the changes to the Legislative Manual went right to the Organizational Meeting, not a committee meeting.

Legislator Gouldman made a motion to amend the resolution to add Full Legislative Meetings. There was no second.

Brett Yarris, resident of Carmel, stated he respects the idea that this is a general practice, however it is concerning that it is at the whim of the chairperson. He stated codifying this preserves the right of the public to have the opportunity to speak and give their opinion before votes are taken. He stated he would appreciate knowing that he will have the chance to be heard when attending a meeting.

Chairman Birmingham stated his support for this proposal.

Chairman Birmingham made a motion to pre-file the necessary resolution; Seconded by Legislator Jonke. By roll call vote: all ayes. Motion carries.

Item #14c – Other Business – Approval – Amendment of Legislative Manual – Livestreaming Legislative Sessions and Public Meetings

Legislator Crowley stated she brought this resolution forward and proceeded to read it into the record. She requested the following amendments to the proposed resolution:

- Change all mentions of “legislative sessions and public meetings” to “legislative sessions, public meetings, and public hearings”.
- In Rule 34(A)(1) – remove “social media channels (e.g. Facebook, YouTube or a public access channel” and add “or YouTube”.
- In Rule 34(B)(1) change “of significant public interest” to “and public hearings”.

Chairman Birmingham made a motion to pre-file the necessary resolution; Seconded by Legislator Gouldman.

Chairman Birmingham stated when he was a freshman Legislator in 2004 he put the County Legislative minutes on his own personal website, which some of his colleagues did not agree with saying they were the Legislature’s minutes. He stated the Legislature has come a long way and this is another step in that direction.

Legislator Jonke questioned if Legislator Crowley checked with IT/GIS Director Thomas Lannon about livestreaming from the Historic Courthouse.

Legislator Crowley stated yes, she did.

Legislator Jonke stated when he was Chair of the Legislature he worked on this as well and there were issues streaming from the Courthouse. He agreed that it has taken quite a long time.

Legislator Sayegh stated she also contacted Director Lannon as Chair of the Legislature to inquire about the process and cost of getting the Full Legislative Meetings livestreamed. He stated the February Full Legislative Meeting was livestreamed as a test and it went well.

Legislator Jonke stated when the camera was installed in the Legislative Meeting room they had to be tested for the quality of the video and audio to see what needed to be tweaked or if any other equipment was needed. He stated the livestream was then tested over a couple months without being published to ensure that it worked well. He stated it is moving forward albeit slowly.

Legislator Montgomery stated she made requests for livestreaming dating back to 2020 and multiple times since. She stated the technology is not that difficult.

Legislator Crowley stated Legislator Ellner initiated the purchase of new microphones which will enhance the audio for the meetings and recording.

Chairman Birmingham made a motion to pre-file the necessary resolution; Seconded by Legislator Gouldman. All in favor.

Item #15 – Adjournment

There being no further business at 8:41pm, Chairman Birmingham made a motion to adjourn; Seconded by Legislator Jonke. All in favor.

Respectfully submitted by Administrative Assistant Beth Robinson.