

**EDUCATION AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE
MINUTES**

**MONDAY, MARCH 20, 2023
4:00 P.M.**

PRESENT: Joseph J. Minuta, Chairman
Thomas J. Faggione, **Kevindaryán Luján**, James O'Donnell,
Paul Ruskiewicz, Robert C. Sassi, Genesis Ramos

ALSO

PRESENT: Katherine E. Bonelli, Chairwoman
Leigh J. Benton, Legislator
Betsy N. Abraham, Esq., Legislative Counsel
Steven M. Neuhaus, County Executive
Harold J. Porr, Deputy County Executive
Richard B. Golden, County Attorney
Susan Whalen, Chief Assistant County Attorney
Steven M. Gross, Director, Economic Development
Dr. Kristine Young, President, Orange County Community College
Paul Martland, Vice President of Admin., Orange County Community College
Agnes Wagner, Comptroller, Orange County Community College
Ralph Martucci Jr., Orange County Community College, Board of Trustees Chair
Thomas Weddell, Orange County Community College, Board of Trustees Vice Chair
Amanda Dana, Tourism Director
Rachel Carr, Tourism Coordinator
Lisa Santiago, Tourism Assistant
Nora Martinez, Film Specialist, Tourism
Steven M. Gross, Economic Development Director
Bill Fioravanti, CEO, Orange County Industrial Development Agency
Dina Sena, Budget Analyst

Chairman Minuta opened the committee meeting at 4:00 p.m. by asking everyone to stand for the Pledge of Allegiance. All committee members were present with the exception of Legislator Stegenga who was absent.

Mr. Sassi moved the request for confirmation of reappointments to the Orange County Electrical Licensing Board (B. Cheney, F. Perugino), seconded by Mr. Faggione.

Motion carried. All in favor.

Mr. Luján moved the request for supplemental appropriation to use capital chargeback funds to offset a funding shortage on previously approved County Capital Project CP292-27197 (Bond Resolution No. 265 of 2021 of 12/2/21) which authorized \$350,000.00 to replace HVAC equipment in Orange Hall. The project recently went out to bid and the low bid is \$559,000.00 leaving a shortage of \$209,000.00. This request is to fund one half of the shortage. The State of New York will provide the other half of the funds, seconded by Mr. Sassi.

Mr. Martland stated that the inflation and construction industry has increased, so it caught up to them from when they first introduced this project. He added that there is no new money involved and this is the most rational way to move forward.

Dr. Young updated the committee on the preliminary status of SUNY Orange budget. She shared that enrollment is up by 4.5%. They received a grant from the SUNY System to be able to add nursing labs so there is more space for nursing students by 24 additional students. This will be at the Newburgh Campus. They are trying to recruit students right out of Orange County high schools directly to SUNY Orange. SUNY is working with New York State Education on this. They are getting a Chat Bot with grant money they have and students can talk to them at anytime with the Chat Bot. Dr. Young introduced two of their Trustees who joined them today, Tom Weddell and Ralph Martucci. They are pushing advertising and mentioned the wrapped shuttle bus that has been all over the county.

Mr. Martland stated that the board meets in April and they will discuss tuition rates. He mentioned that last year it was suggested that they come in before the committee to address the tuition rates prior to the board's vote. He reviewed the Orange County Community College Budget Update handout (On file in Clerk, Legislative Office). He is hopeful that enrollment will continue to go up. They want a break even budget.

Mr. Sassi stated that they are all very proud of Orange County Community College. He stressed his disappointment in New York State as they continue to fall short and it is shameful. The County is providing their one third, the state is not. There are elected officials attacking the IDA, they should be attacking this problem and the state coming up short year after year. Their fund balance is going to get wiped out.

Mr. Sassi left the meeting at 4:44 p.m.

Mr. Minuta asked how many students do they need to break even for the college to be okay.

Mr. Martland said about a 25% increase if it was all based on enrollment which is roughly 1,000 full-time students.

Mr. Weddell stated that next month they need to make a decision on the tuition. Last year they tried to be fair and asked for 3% from the county and they were going to ask for 3% from the students. The tuition is at the higher end and he wanted to know what the Legislature felt was a fair number. They do not want to lose the students to Sullivan, Ulster or Rockland County. He asked for feedback. He would love to make it free for students but that cannot happen.

Mr. Minuta stated that he would take that under advisement to the Legislature. They are working as a partner with the college. It sounds like the driver is definitely attendance. There are many other factors as well and he would like to continue to have conversations.

Mr. Luján commented on the great news that was shared about enrollment and the new programs. He stated that there are so many people struggling just to pay their rent so the increase tuition is not the answer.

Mr. Martucci stated that the college deals with a lot of students who are struggling. They get involved and try to find resources for the students to help pay their rent, help them afford transportation.

Mr. Luján commented on how nice it is that the college has a program for students for emergency situations. It shows that they take a deep interest in the lives of their students.

County Executive Neuhaus stated that they do not want high tuition. He felt that the college is doing a great job. There are phenomenal opportunities coming to Orange County this year. There are companies out there like Microsoft and Google that will run an entire program in the SUNY schools. He recently spoke to NYSAC and the budget in Albany is chaotic. New York State has failed for decades to keep their commitment to the SUNY school system. The county and the students carry the load. The budget that the Senate proposed last week is \$5 billion higher than the governors. They do not have the money and will rest on the counties. They should work with SUNY on creative solutions. He is very proud of many opportunities that are coming to Orange County. If they combine these new companies with the educational component, it will be very beneficial. He is concerned about the state budget.

Mr. O'Donnell thanked Mr. Neuhaus for coming to the meeting and he appreciated his remarks. He stated that the IDA was on the agenda for later and they have \$13 million so they should get together with the college and the companies that he was talking about, put some money on the table for the educational pieces of the workers they need. It is worth the discussion. It is a great tool to attract these companies. The Legislature, the County Executive, SUNY Orange, and the IDA should get together and see if they can set up a program that would help SUNY Orange enhance the package.

Mr. Neuhaus pointed out that Mr. Fioravanti has done a great job with the IDA.

Mr. O'Donnell stated that they have always supported the college and the Legislature will be there at the end of the day. They will continue to put pressure on the state.

Ms. Dana provided a quarterly update on Tourism and Film (On file in Clerk, Legislative Office).

Ms. Ramos left the meeting at 5:26 p.m.

Mr. Fioravanti provided a monthly update on the IDA (On file in Clerk, Legislative Office). He mentioned the negative press from Senator Skoufis against the IDA. He has introduced several Bills for IDA reform and every single one that has been presented has failed. His latest

provision would require the Orange County IDA to pay for a monitor from the Authorities Budget Office (ABO), who already watches over them. This monitor would be paid to come sit in on all the meetings and judge what they do, and if they do not like decisions that they make, they can overturn the decision. This is a threat to the IDA and he wholeheartedly feels it is unwarranted. The amount of time he has spent responding to Senator Skoufis' press conferences, attempts at this or that, it is very frustrating. He and the IDA Board are reaching out to their partners in Economic Development looking for support. They are not looking for anyone to attack the Senator, the biggest problem he has is that the board members are volunteers. They have been continuously, for months, been called criminals and corrupt. He gets paid and so do the two employees in his office, the board doesn't. The Board is frustrated. He's requesting support from the Legislature in addressing this. They know these board members, they appointed them. He has a few members who are threatening to leave. Any help the Legislature can offer is appreciated.

Mr. Faggione stated that every time Mr. Fioravanti comes before the committee he is always prepared. He has bullet points in front of him but rarely looks at them. He talks about this because he knows this stuff. He is a great value to the county and to all the people in the county. The board members are citizens who live in Orange County and volunteer to sit on this board. He is proud of each one of them who has taken it upon themselves to put their name out there and be vetted, get approved to be on the board. All IDA meetings are broadcasted, recorded and all the work that they do is sent to the State and the Paris Reporting through the ABO. He commended Mr. Fioravanti on his professionalism and how he has led the IDA. They are lucky to have him and he is a great value to Orange County and all the people in the county.

Mr. Ruskiewicz commented that he was very involved with everything that went on with the IDA. He was involved with recruiting and interviewing the current board members. They are all upstanding people and they work hard to find those types of people to put the IDA back on the right track. These individuals have gone above and beyond and they should be proud of the board members. We should do whatever we can do to support the IDA Board and will coordinate with Mr. Fioravanti to make that happen.

Mr. O'Donnell asked Mr. Ruskiewicz what type of support.

Mr. Ruskiewicz responded that they can pass a resolution, hold a press conference, whatever they have to do.

Mr. Fioravanti pointed out that Mr. O'Donnell has publicly been out in support of the IDA.

Mr. O'Donnell suggested that they propose a resolution, they can have a press conference. There are six of our citizens out there being called boarder line criminal. He called them out at the last public hearing on the Milmar proposal. He said if there was something criminal going on, bring it forward. He would address it with his criminal background history. Stop accusing volunteer citizens of criminal activity because it is a disgrace. He was glad to hear that the six citizens that sit on the IDA Board had enough and are asking publicly now to step forward and stop this. Senator Skoufis is having an extremely negative impact on their ability to attract businesses where they can keep our children here with good paying jobs. We just had a discussion on how the state continuously falls short their one third contribution towards the college. What is our elected Senator doing about that. They should start targeting his lack of responsibility.

Mr. Ruskiewicz pointed out that they were talking about a career politician who never had any experience in the private sector, never ran a business and never had weekly payroll. He is attacking volunteers who are experts and professionals in economic development. It is unacceptable.

Chairwoman Bonelli stated that they have been sitting there month after month after month and have taken aggressive method when they realized something was awry with the IDA. They did not pick and choose who was going to stay, they cleared out the entire board because the IDA needed total change and new leadership. They went through an extensive vetting process for the people who are on the board who have the best intentions for making Orange County better and for them to be attacked is totally uncalled for and unwarranted. They have state Legislators that cannot get their act together to make this state more attractive to economic development. That is why they have an IDA. If they did their job in Albany, it would not be the case. There are good people who are upstanding citizens that are out there working very hard to make the place they live and work in a better place.

Mr. Minuta thanked Mr. Fioravanti for bringing this to their attention.

Mr. Gross provided a monthly update on Economic Development. He announced "Save the Date" for the 2nd Annual Orange County Economic Summit which will be Friday, September 15, 2023 at SUNY Orange Middletown Campus. They plan to have a webinar on May 2nd with the Federal Foreign Trade Zone and get it out there because not many people know about the Foreign Trade Zone. When he was before the committee last time, they discussed the conference center and since then they met with some people about three weeks ago and took them all around Orange County. They feel there is a need for a conference center in Orange County the question is where and how big. He should have more answers.

On the motion of Mr. Faggione, seconded by Mr. Luján, the meeting adjourned at 6:19 p.m.