

**WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE
MINUTES**

**TUESDAY, JULY 25, 2023
3:30 P.M.**

PRESENT: Leigh J. Benton, Chairman
Mike Anagnostakis, L. Stephen Brescia, James D. O'Donnell,
Thomas J. Faggione, Kevin W. Hines, Michael D. Paduch,
Barry J. Cheney

ALSO

PRESENT: Katie Bonelli, Chairwoman
Betsy N. Abraham, Esq., Legislative Counsel
Harold J. Porr, Deputy County Executive
Richard B. Golden, Esq., County Attorney
Lisa Morgillo, Assistant County Attorney
Matthew Nothnagle, Chief Assistant County Attorney
Kerry Gallagher, Commissioner of Finance
Michael Schreiber, Deputy Commissioner of Finance
Andrea Concannon, Deputy Commissioner of Finance
Alan Mack, Deputy Commissioner, Department of Emergency Services
Christian Farrell, Director, Veterans' Service Agency
Paul Wiley, Director, Real Property Tax Service
Deborah Slesinski, Budget Director
Elizabeth Matis, Budget Analyst

Chairman Benton opened the committee meeting at 3:30 p.m. by asking everyone to stand for the Pledge of Allegiance. All committee members were present with the exception of Legislator Sierra who was excused.

Mr. Paduch moved to approve the request for supplemental appropriation to the capital projects budget for Veterans Memorial Cemetery Columbarium project. This project has been approved under the 2023 Capital Plan as Capital Project No. 134. Upon approval, a new capital project will be created, \$150,000.00 (bonding), seconded by Mr. Cheney.

Mr. Farrell stated the columbarium gives the Veterans and their families an above ground option if they choose to be cremated. At the Veterans Cemetery those who pass can have a traditional burial (in ground) or cremated and put in the ground, but the columbarium is an above ground option. They currently have one columbarium in place, the one being requested would be similar, made of granite and weigh 12,000 pounds. The current columbarium has 96 units (48 on each side) and is near full. It has become a more popular option when a loved one passes away.

Mr. O'Donnell asked how much one would pay for an in-ground burial.

Mr. Farrell replied an in-ground burial is free.

Mr. O'Donnell then asked why there is a charge for a columbarium.

Mr. Farrell replied that a charge of \$400.00 has been in place for several years. He further explained that if a veteran chooses to be buried in the ground, it is free, but there is a charge for the spouse of \$250.00. A half plot (4x4) rather than a traditional plot is \$500.00 for the spouse of a veteran, \$200.00 cremated, and the columbarium is \$400.00.

Mr. O'Donnell clarified that the spouse of a veteran can go into the columbarium.

Mr. Farrell stated that is correct, there are two spots, and it would cost \$400.00.

Mr. Benton requested a packet of information with the site plan and pictures be provided to the committee members.

Mr. Anagnostakis asked if the columbarium is expandable once it reaches the maximum capacity.

Mr. Farrell replied no, they would have to order another one or other options they could look into. He stated the first columbarium took 15 years to fill up.

Mr. Anagnostakis then asked if this kind of service has increased.

Mr. Farrell replied yes, it has been a little more of a popular option.

Motion carried. All in favor.

Mr. Benton stated that Agenda Item IIa., **Legislative Request No. 050 of 2023 (Probation) requested that the serial bonds on Capital Project No. 323 (Body Worn Cameras) be reduced by \$100,000.00 and State Aid be increased by \$100,000.00. The request was approved by Resolution No. 122 of 2023 on April 7, 2023. No further funding changes are requested; however, the Finance Department is requesting approval of a bond resolution as acknowledgement/approval of the reduction of bonds by Orange County's Bond Counsel (bonding) (LR#181) is being withdrawn.**

Mr. Faggione moved to approve the request to create a new Fund (Fund 1090) to account for County Grant funding. This fund will be rolled into the General Fund for financial statement purposes, seconded by Mr. Brescia.

Ms. Gallagher explained the auditors were just on site, and every year they recommend this be done, so it is now being implemented and put in place. She is requesting permission to open another fund for grants since it is separate from the operating budget. It will be cleaner and easier to report on how much money is truly in all the grants the county has. They currently have about 400 grants, so this is going to be a big undertaking. She stated it is being spearheaded by the Budget Department with the support of the Finance Department. Furthermore, they will be relying on the departments, IT, and Cherry Road for the implementation.

Mr. Paduch commented that this will help during the budget process.

Mr. O'Donnell asked if a new IT Program would be developed to get the grants put under a new fund.

Ms. Gallagher stated it will still be under Oracle, which is the current financial planning system, but they are creating a new fund which then will need a lot of work on the back end to make sure everything is done properly.

Mr. O'Donnell then asked if it can be programmed to show when a grant expires so the Legislature is aware.

Ms. Gallagher replied this will be more transparent and come back to the committee to show deadlines, what was spent, and when it ends.

Mr. O'Donnell stated that he would like the committee to be kept informed monthly, so they know what expires each month.

Motion carried. All in favor.

Ms. Gallagher addressed the next agenda item was a Sales Tax Update which included County of Orange Sales Tax Received Year-To-Date (County Portion Only) and a 4-Year Gross Sales Tax Comparison (on file in Clerk, Legislative Office). She pointed out that they are paid out through July and are .66% over budget, but compared to last year at this time, we are 5.11% over the same period last year, which is great. The national trend is seeing that sales tax revenue is not as strong as it has been in the past but considering that we are still over budget from last year, we are in a good place.

Mr. Faggione moved to approve the request for supplemental appropriation to cover all 2022 year end budget shortages, seconded by Mr. Benton.

Ms. Slesinski stated this is the final housekeeping issue for the end of 2022 to create any shortfalls and keep the budget in place.

Motion carried. All in favor.

The next agenda item was a Budget Update-General Fund Status Report as of June 2023 (on file in Clerk, Legislative Office). Ms. Slesinski stated in June of 2023, there were 368 vacant positions, in June of 2022, there were 331 vacant positions, and in June of 2021, there were 341 vacant positions.

Mr. Paduch moved to discuss deed sale parcels, seconded by Mr. Brescia.

Mr. Wiley stated that there is only one bid this month and it is in the Town of Crawford (21-1-28.2). The minimum bid is \$6,500.00 and the amount bid is \$600.00, therefore, he recommends it be denied because the county can get more money for it.

Motion carried. All in favor of Mr. Wiley's recommendation to not accept the bid.

Mr. Hines moved to adopt a resolution requesting the Federal and State Governments to provide assistance to Orange County businesses, individuals, and farmers effected by recent floods who are not otherwise eligible for Federal and State Aid, seconded by Mr. Paduch.

Mr. Hines explained that as everyone knows, there was a massive rainstorm that affected the communities of Highland Falls, Fort Montgomery, Cornwall, and West Point. The communities were devastated and there was massive damage. FEMA has declared that the governments get aid for the damage they have, but did not declare an Individual Assistance FEMA Grant, therefore, the individual homeowners who suffered huge damages get nothing. Part of this request to the Federal Officials is to say that they should step up and make this happen for the residents of Orange County who suffered damage. The next issue is Governor Hochul has publicly said that she created a fund of \$3 million for people to get assistance, individuals, due to this devastation, however it came with income caps (on file in Clerk, Legislative Office) which are not working here in Orange County. He then reviewed it with the committee and stated that there are a lot of people with significant damage who will not get a nickel. The numbers need to be changed. Earlier this morning he spoke with Legislator Tautel who is seeing the same issues in her community and reached out to Senator Skoufis and Assemblyman Eachus to assist with speaking to the Governor to get these numbers changed. She is still awaiting a response. He stated that these numbers were printed today, and people are stuck with them. For those watching this meeting, the County has a 3-1-1 line which is for mental health and is currently being used for claims. He clarified with Mr. Mack that thirty-six million in individual damages is needed to qualify.

Mr. Mack stated \$36 million in individual structures of people who live in these houses who meet certain criteria are needed to qualify. The County does not currently meet the criteria because almost everyone in that area is a renter and it needs to be a primary residence. He explained that the number is picked based on some sort of algorithm and fifty is the number, but it can be lowered.

Mr. Hines clarified that individual assistance is covered under FEMA.

Mr. Mack stated yes, individual assistance is FEMA and the criteria for that, and the number of homes is fifty (major damaged or destroyed).

Mr. Hines pointed out that a lot of the damage in Highland Falls was to renters. The landlord gets nothing because he/she does not live there and the tenant gets nothing because he/she does not own it, and farmers get nothing. There is tremendous damage throughout the County. He thanked the County Attorney for creating the resolution and stated that it should be tweaked a little so it can be sent to our Federal and State Officials as well as the Governor so they are aware that Orange County has residents that have severe damage and will receive nothing. It behooves everyone to reach out to the Governor and State Officials and that is what this will do. He would like to have Mr. Golden or Ms. Abraham tweak it to add the individuals that represent us.

Further discussion ensued upon Mr. Mack and the committee regarding insurance and flooding.

Mr. Golden stated that he was advised by Cornell Cooperative Extension that in addition to the flooding in that area, there was also over 800 acres of farmland in the black dirt region that sustained damage because of the flooding with an approximate price tag of \$8 million to \$10 million.

It may make sense to broaden the resolution to include the black dirt area. He further stated that he can make these modifications with respect to adding another RESOLVED that it be sent to all elected officials representing Orange County at a Federal and State level.

Motion carried. All in favor.

Before adjourning, Mr. Benton shared additional information (on file in Clerk, Legislative Office) regarding the Joint Education and Economic Development and Ways and Means Committee meeting last week (July 17, 2023). It turns out that there was additional information that should have been presented. Nick DeSantis (Partner, PFK O'Connor Davies-audiors) did have a copy of the audit (Bonodio Group) from the College and the Foundation in 2022. Mr. Benton then reviewed it with the committee and pointed out that he wanted to make it clear so everyone can see what the answers were when the questions asked at the meeting could not be answered. Leadership will be having a future meeting with Dr. Young and the Foundation.

The meeting adjourned at 4:11 p.m.