

**WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE
MINUTES**

**(REMOTELY)
TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 22, 2020
3:30 P.M.**

PRESENT: Leigh J. Benton, Chairman
Mike Anagnostakis, Katie Bonelli, Kevin W. Hines,
James M. Kulisek, Joseph J. Minuta, Michael D. Paduch, Janet Sutherland

ALSO

PRESENT: L. Stephen Brescia, Chairman
Thomas J. Faggione, Legislator
Kathy Stegenga, Legislator
Peter V. Tuohy, Legislator
John S. Vero, Legislator
Antoinette Reed, Legislative Counsel
Harry Porr, Deputy County Executive
Dan Bloomer, Director, Operations and Cost Control
Matthew Nothnagle, Chief Asst. County Attorney
Stacy Butler, Senior Assistant County Attorney
Karin Hablow, Commissioner of Finance
Kerry Gallagher, Deputy Commissioner of Finance
Christopher Ericson, Deputy Commissioner, Health Department
Erik Denega, Commissioner, Dept. of Public Works
Travis Ewald, Deputy Commissioner, Dept. of Public Works/Engineering Div.
Eric Ruscher, Director, Real Property Tax Service
Deborah Slesinski, Budget Director
Deanna Crawford, Budget Analyst
Gretchen Riordan, Budget Analyst

Chairman Benton opened the committee meeting at 3:35 p.m. by asking everyone to stand for the Pledge of Allegiance. All committee members were present.

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

Mr. Ruscher stated there are four deed sale parcels on the bid list (12-1-62, 9-2-3, 53-4-3, 218-1-89.2), three of which are not close to the taxes due. He recommends that parcel No. 2 located in the Town of Montgomery (9-2-3) be approved. The minimum bid is \$25,000.00 and the amount of bid is \$25,100.00.

Motion carried. All in favor of accepting Mr. Ruscher's recommendation to approve deed sale parcel No. 2 and deny parcel Nos. 1, 3, and 4.

Mr. Ruscher explained that the next set of parcels are related to municipalities. The first parcel is in the Town of Monroe (1-1-77.2) and has a minimum bid of \$17,377.91 and amount bid of \$23,619.95; therefore, he recommends it be approved. Parcel number two is in the Town of Mount Hope (5-1-22) with a minimum bid of \$1,263.45 and amount bid of \$1,630.55. He recommends it be approved.

Motion carried. All in favor of accepting Mr. Ruscher's recommendation to approve deed sale parcels Nos. 1 and 2.

Ms. Hablow addressed the committee with a brief update regarding Sales Tax by reviewing the County of Orange Sales Tax Received Year-To-Date, County Portion Only and a graph of the County Share-Sales Tax 2020 vs. 2019 (see original minutes).

The next agenda item was an update from Ms. Slesinski regarding the Budget Department.

She explained that earlier this month she prepared a projection for 2020 while still thinking we will have a deficit in the \$35 to \$40 million range. To help the situation, we have instituted a purchasing deadline for commodities and equipment as of September 30th. Department heads and fiscal staff have been made aware of this deadline as it is earlier than in previous years. She stated they have also been steadfast in hiring freezes. The department continues to monitor vacant positions. As of September 11th, there are 290 full and part time vacant positions and a savings of \$12.6 million dollars. As a reminder we did budget \$10.2 million in austerity savings, so we have exceeded that number and the additional savings from now until the end of the year will help our deficit. Furthermore, she is still very concerned about state revenues because it is still being considered a deferment; however, the deferment or withholding is adding up. In some instances, they are withholding just 20% which went back to June, in other instances, such as the Health Department, they are not releasing Early Intervention payments until funds are available. In most cases we are spending this money and this shortage will add to the deficit. We still have no idea if these deferments will become permanent reductions and carry over into the 2021 year, but if they do, the impact will be significant. The sales tax gap is narrowing. She stated that she plots each payment and right now the county is on a positive trend. It seems people are out and about spending some money; therefore, she is cautiously optimistic. Also, last week she did a presentation for NYSAC's fall online seminar and presented the changes that were initiated during the COVID response as well as talked about our hiring freeze and separation/furlough packages to name a few. In closing, she stated they are finalizing the 2021 budget numbers and will begin to assemble the book for distribution as well as have a Budget 101 overview next month for all legislators.

Mr. Paduch clarified that the county is behind on receiving special education reimbursement funding.

Ms. Slesinski stated they are approving authorizations, but not sending the payments.

Mr. Paduch asked how much the county saved on the separation agreement and if it is possible to offer it again.

Ms. Slesinski replied she does not have the figures for how much money the county saved with the separation agreement, but there were 68 people who took advantage of it.

Mr. Paduch commented that if the agreement is offered again, it would save the county more money and there have been several people who have asked him about it.

Mrs. Bonelli asked Ms. Slesinski to explain CHIPS funding.

Ms. Slesinski replied the county receives an allotment of State CHIPS funding. The Department of Public Works was advised early on that there was a probability that 20% of those funds would not come through to the county. Mr. Denega spoke with her and stated that he cannot spend the money.

Mr. Denega added they will only receive 80% of the CHIPS funding which is a change across the board.

In response to Mr. Paduch's question regarding the money saved for those who took the separation agreement, he stated that the county saved about \$1 million between the furlough and early retirement; therefore, they may discuss it again.

Mr. Hines moved to approve the request for supplemental appropriation to the capital projects budget for preliminary engineering and design of the replacement of Main Street Bridge No. 1 (BIN 3345430) in the Town of Cornwall. This project has been approved under the 2020 Capital Plan as Project No. 60. Upon approval, a new capital project will be created, \$100,000.00 (bonding), seconded by Mr. Kulisek.

Mr. Denega explained the bridge is in Cornwall near the middle school and has a low rating which is critical, but it does not get a red flag. The project was in the 2022 5-year Construction Capital Plan. This is for the design funds for the bridge, but they will be leaning on consultants to do as much as they can in-house.

Mr. Benton asked about the safety rating of the bridge.

Mr. Denga replied the condition rating is a 3.6 out of 7.

Motion carried. All in favor.

Mr. Kulisek moved to approve the request for supplemental appropriation to the capital projects budget for preliminary engineering and design of the replacement of Highland Mills Bridge (BIN 3345420) in the Town of Woodbury. This project has been approved under the 2020 Capital Plan as Project No. 59. Upon approval, a new capital project will be created, \$100,000.00 (bonding), seconded by Mrs. Bonelli.

Mr. Denega stated this bridge is in the Town of Woodbury and is not a county road, but there is a town/village road which the county is responsible in putting a bridge on. The project was slated for construction in 2021 and has a low rating. He pointed out that this request is very similar to the last one. The approximate construction cost is \$1 million and 10% of that is \$100,000.00 which was estimated for the design. He added that they will do what they can in-house but will need to lean on consultants.

Mr. Paduch asked what numbers qualify to flag a bridge.

Mr. Denega replied 3.6 is not flagged, it is a rating, so they can plan better for any rehabilitation the bridge may need. A bridge could be flagged for individual problems such as a beam. Once the beam gets repaired, you come off the flag list and still have a good rating.

Motion carried. All in favor.

Mrs. Bonelli moved to set a date for a public Hearing Re: 2021 Orange County Budget (10/22/2020 – 5:00 P.M.), seconded by Mr. Kulisek.

Mr. Paduch asked if the public hearing will be virtual because there have been issues where the public hearings are virtual and the public can call in, but they are not allowed to call into the legislative sessions for comments/concerns.

Mr. Benton replied that he has not heard of any changes; therefore, it would be virtual, but it is something they can work on after the hearing is approved.

Mr. Paduch commented that it is important to further discuss having it held in the legislative chambers.

Mr. Benton pointed out that the public can always view the budget online, but he and Mr. Paduch will further discuss this with the County Executive. Furthermore, not many people show up, but there must be a way they can socially distance and hold the meeting.

Motion carried. All in favor.

Mr. Paduch moved to approve the request to accept and appropriate funds from the New York State Department of Health for the Epidemiology and Laboratory Capacity (ELC) – COVID-19 grant for the period 7/1/2020– 6/30/2022 to be used for enhanced detection surveillance and prevention of COVID-19, \$2,227,399.00, seconded by Mrs. Bonelli.

Mr. Ericson stated this funding is part of the CDC Sponsored Cooperative Agreement for the Epidemiology and Laboratory Capacity (ELC) for infectious diseases. As the award states, “the majority of these funds are expected to be used to increase staffing capacity to conduct rapid complete case and contact investigations and report data”. He added the funds will be for a two-year period and they plan on using the funding for staffing issues. The Health Department finds it very challenging to get their work done during this pandemic because the data requires a lot of follow-up.

Motion carried. All in favor.

The meeting adjourned at 4:22 p.m.