



Westchester County Legislator
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Westchester County Board of Legislators NEWS

Voice of the People of Westchester County for over 300 years

Fall 2018 Newsletter



Legislator Catherine Parker

District 7 ~ Mamaroneck, Rye, Larchmont,
 part of New Rochelle, part of Harrison



Dear Friends and Neighbors,

Thank you for taking the time to read this year's update on happenings at the Board of Legislators. As you know, we live in a time when local decisions matter more than ever. That is why I am fighting every day for the values that I was elected to represent, but what a difference a year makes! With a new County Executive, and a new makeup of our board, we have been able to move legislation like banning gun shows from our county buildings, raising the age for tobacco products and e-cigarettes to 21 years of age, and extending our policy to encourage minority and women owned businesses to also include disabled and veteran owners.

Taxes continue to be an area of concern for all of us. For those of you not new to my district, I have been writing to my constituents for years about the precarious state of our fiscal condition of the county. The policy of the previous administration to pretend that county government was able to pay for itself while at the same time keeping taxes flat has put us in a serious hole. Borrowing to cover up that hole has only made the situation worse. Our new County Executive and my colleagues and I at the board will be making some difficult choices shortly as to how to get us on better footing. Whatever is decided, know that it will take us several years to right the ship.

On a personal note, I continue to find strength to take on the issues and challenges big and small by meeting with and hearing from so many caring individuals who are doing so much for our community. I thank you for continuing to show that no matter what your political affiliation we all love this country and want what will be best for future generations. We are all in this together. My office can always be reached by email at Parker@westchesterlegislators.com or by phone (914) 995-2802.

With gratitude,

Catherine F. Parker



For the first time in its history, the Board of Legislators is a female-majority body

Con Edison – I Have My Eyes on You!

This past spring, violent storms ripped through the county, leaving thousands of residents without power, many for a week or more each time. The poor response by Consolidated Edison dramatically revealed flaws in their communications with customers, coordination with local authorities and reliance on help from utilities across the country after storms hit. Relying on distant crews seems to ensure that power will remain down for days after storms as ConEd waits for crews to arrive so they can begin restoration work. The reliance on this “mutual aid” is even more problematic now that climate change is bringing bigger, more frequent, and more violent storms.

At the Board of Legislators we've been working hard to hold the utilities accountable for their actions. We convened multiple meetings with representatives from ConEd in our area and NYSEG in Northern Westchester to examine the flaws in the system, and demand changes. The Board has urged



the state's Public Service Commission to levy harsh fines against the utilities.

ConEd seems to be hearing us. On October 16th, at a meeting ConEd convened with municipal officials to update us on changes made, there was some good news. Communications with customers can now come as a text message, whether it's to report an outage

or check on the status of a problem. To register, use your cell phone and text REG to OUTAGE (688243) and follow the prompts. You'll need your account number and to confirm your zipcode.

I will continue to monitor ConEd's actions and see if it leads to better service. Utilities with swelling profits owe us at least that much. ■

Snail Mail Is Expensive – Make Sure You SIGN UP FOR MY EMAILS!

Generally, I only send one piece of mail to you via US post once a calendar year. It's an expense that I hate to make, but unfortunately for some of you, it's the only way that I can communicate what is going on in the county. I know we all get a ton of emails too, but I pride myself on not abusing the privilege and only email when there is something that I think is really worth sharing, such as during the budget, when we have scheduled public hearings, if our health department has an important program to curb mosquitoes, or if there are job openings at our county parks, etc. Please make sure your family is receiving my emails by signing up at westchesterlegislators.com/subscribe-to-updates.html.



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Making Sure Army Corps of Engineers' Flood Prevention Plans Are Not Harmful to Westchester

The Army Corps of Engineers is studying a coastal flood mitigation plan that could permanently alter the landscape and potentially damage the ecosystem of the Hudson River and the Long Island Sound by erecting giant sea barriers to block New York Harbor, the western end of the Sound, the Hutchinson River, and other waterways.

Barriers could disrupt the migration of species and irrevocably change life for the residents of Westchester County.

After Westchester residents, environmental activists, and elected officials expressed concern that their input wasn't being sought on the proposals, the Army Corps agreed to slow the timeline and to meet with County officials and



As those of us who live on the Sound Shore know, it is crucially important to address issues of flooding, especially now that climate change means bigger, more frequent, and more violent storms.

But in the process, it's also imperative that we don't do something that damages the environment for generations.

We need to be vigilant to ensure that the Corps as well as the other agencies involved in this project -- the New York State Department of Environmental

Conservation, the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, and the City of the New York -- thoroughly consider the impact of any such project on Westchester and surrounding communities. ■

residents this past October. The Corps also agreed to issue a preliminary report in January reviewing the six proposals under consideration, five of which contain giant sea barriers.

Nevertheless, planning continues.

Conservation, the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, and the City of the New York -- thoroughly consider the impact of any such project on Westchester and surrounding communities. ■

Here's What Our Auditors Have Said Should Be Considered for the 2019 Budget

As I have mentioned before, the previous administration had made a habit of borrowing for costs that should have come out of the operating budget -- in other words, we should have had that money in the bank from revenues collected. Just on borrowing for pension costs since 2012, Westchester County now owes over \$81,000,000. The interest alone on that pension borrowing is \$4.2 million dollars or 5%, a pretty high interest rate. Even worse news -- according to the schedule, \$11,464,678 is due within one year.

Our "rainy day fund" or fund balance has been depleted to well below the recommended levels. If there is an emergency of extraordinary proportion, we may be up a creek. In addition, if any of the credit rating agencies downgrade us because of this, we will end up paying more in interest when we borrow for capital projects. As Moody's wrote in their recent explanation of Westchester's Aa1 rating, "reflects...narrow reserves and liquidity

and financial operations that have recently been balanced based on nonrecurring measures that will put pressure on future budgets".

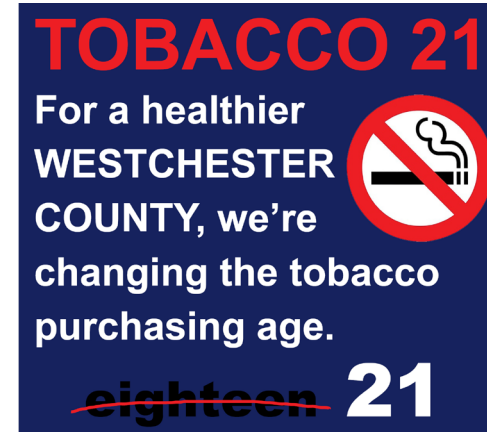


No one wants to raise taxes, but as we saw at the end of 2017, all legislators agreed the responsible thing to do for 2018 was to increase taxes. Though we could have raised taxes over 5% and still kept below the tax cap, we only raised them by 2%. And just as for 2018, our auditors have said that we still have the taxing capacity of 5.72% to keep under the tax cap to help balance the 2019 budget. We will see what else we can do to keep that

number as low as possible, but again we are paying for years of borrowed money to cover expenses.

I know what you're thinking -- cut government. We did that by almost 20%, but what we have learned is we were providing services that really mattered to people, and when those services became more difficult to attain, or impossible to attain, lives were adversely affected. As an example, recently I was contacted by a widow who had been told by the County's Medical Examiner's office that the autopsy for her husband would take a week because they were so short-staffed. There were family and religious considerations which made the whole situation an additional upset and concern for someone who really needed support. I have spent a considerable amount of time over the last five years learning about the function and services of each department. I can tell you that each job in Westchester County government provides a service that is important to a group of residents. ■

Protecting Our Kids by Raising the Age for Tobacco and Vaping Purchases



Protecting the health and welfare of residents is one of county government's most important jobs, and we took a big step in that regard this June when we raised the age for the sale of tobacco and related products from 18 to 21.

This bipartisan measure, which passed with a vote of 16-1, applies both to tobacco and to vaping products for sale in Westchester. In considering the new law, we heard moving testimony from many young people about the explosive growth in use among high schoolers and

even middle schoolers of high-nicotine vaping products. These products threaten the health of these young people today and create lifelong addictions, since research show that longer term addictions to nicotine are more likely when people start at young ages.

By raising the age to 21, we not only protect 18- 19- and 20-year-olds, but also younger children who might have had 18 or 19 year old friends and family members willing to buy them tobacco products in the past. ■

Stabilizing Our County's Finances

The Board of Legislators will face some very difficult and consequential decisions this fall as we consider the county's 2019 budget.

The county ended 2017 with a \$32.3 million deficit and at mid-year faced a 2018 deficit of around \$18 million. That's before any money is budgeted for a settlement with the county's largest union, which has worked without a contract for seven years.

This is not a situation that was created overnight.

The former County Executive submitted budgets that he balanced with one-shot revenues and by borrowing to pay for short-term operating expenses.

Investments in roads, parks, and critical facilities were neglected. And the county's rainy day funds were drawn down to cover gaps.

It will take time to stabilize our finances and rebuild our fund balance, but with a new majority and new leadership on the Board -- and working with a new County Executive -- our mission is to stabilize and improve the county's fiscal condition while holding fast to our values and improving the quality of life for residents. It's our duty to leave Westchester better tomorrow than we find it today. ■

Ending Conversion Therapy for Minors in Westchester

I'm proud to say that the Board of Legislators has passed a law banning paid professionals from offering so-called "conversion therapy" for minors in Westchester County.

Conversion therapy really isn't "therapy" at all. It's an inhumane, discredited practice, denounced by nearly every major medical organization. It seeks to alter a person's sexual orientation through coercive and often cruel practices. But same-sex orientation isn't a disease that needs curing.

It is especially damaging when children who are just beginning to come to an awareness of their sexuality are subjected to such "therapy." That's why this law, which protects those who may not be in a position to protect themselves, is so important.



Everyone in their lives must come to understand who they are, and, we hope, learn to accept and even love themselves. Practices like conversion therapy undermine that, and can do

long term psychological harm to people at the most vulnerable stages of their lives.

I'm glad we at the Board are able to end such practices in Westchester. ■