



Westchester County Legislator
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Legislator Gelfarb and his family at a recent event in Port Chester.

Westchester County Board of Legislators NEWS

Voice of the People of Westchester County for over 300 years

Summer 2013 Newsletter



David B. Gelfarb

District 6 ~ Harrison, Rye Brook, Port Chester



Bipartisan 2013 Budget Passed with No Tax Increase

Dear Neighbor,

I am pleased to report that the 2013 budget has been approved by the Board of Legislators and signed into law by County Executive Robert P. Astorino. For the third consecutive year, the county portion of your property taxes will carry a zero-percent tax increase.

The finalized budget was ultimately a compromise between both political parties and the Legislative and Executive branches of government. No one party, individual, or branch of government received all of their initial requests. The final result was a responsible, balanced coalition spending plan that preserves essential safety net services. Unfortunately, when it came time to vote on the budget bill itself, eight legislators decided to walk out of the Board's chambers, refusing to compromise. The budget ultimately passed 9-0. In the end, the 2013 budget provides residents with the services that they have come to expect and the County is mandated to provide, along with a zero percent tax increase. Going into negotiations, I never wavered from my belief that both raising taxes and irresponsibly raiding reserve funds were non-negotiable. I am glad that the 2013 budget conforms to these two essential tenets.

The County continues to face ongoing fiscal challenges, such as the rising costs of unfunded state mandates, particularly pensions and Medicaid, as well as ongoing negotiation with the County's largest union. The rising cost of health care for County workers is particularly concerning. Because of the latter issue in particular, some very difficult actions had to be taken, many of which could have been avoided had the CSEA union and the County been able to come to terms on the issue of employee contributions to health care. To date, four unions have agreed to contribute toward their health care. In addition, management and elected officials also contribute. For the 2014 budget, I believe cutbacks can be avoided if such an agreement is reached. Ideally, negotiations must take place now rather than during the upcoming election season. Overall, it is my hope that there will be an agreement in place which incorporates concepts similar to the contracts reached with four of the County's other unions.

As we approach the 2014 budget process in the coming months, I will again look to maintain essential services, such as public safety, while joining County Executive Astorino in his pledge to **not raise taxes for the fourth straight year**. I encourage you to contact me via phone and/or email to let me know of any issues or concerns you may have.

Sincerely,

Highlights of the 2013 budget include:

- Subsidized day care will be funded at a 27% parent share, an 8% decrease from what had initially been proposed, yet slightly higher than last year's budget. This rate is less than New York City parents pay, and less than that of the 30 counties where parents pay 35%.
- Critical services provided by the Departments of Public Safety, Emergency Services, Probation, and the District Attorney's Office received additional funding compared to initial estimates. The Parks Department saw the restoration of four positions, including three curators at nature preserves. Five engineering positions were also restored to the Department of Public Works. In all, the coalition budget restored 30 positions (25 filled and five vacant).
- ArtsWestchester, which continues to be an economic and cultural engine for our entire County, will receive \$1.25 million, \$500,000 more than initially proposed. Cornell Cooperative will receive \$800,000, or \$200,000 more than initially proposed.
- Funding was also added for several programs included in the County's Office for Women related to Small Business Training, Domestic Violence Training, Human Trafficking and Tot Drop as well as key senior citizen services such as Elder Abuse Legal Services and training.



▲ Legislator Gelfarb and the coalition team sign the 2013 budget with no tax increase.

Rye Town Faces Tax Lawsuit

I am proud to serve as the Board of Legislators representative to the Airport Advisory Committee. The Committee meets one Wednesday per month. Like our Committee meetings and the meetings of the entire Legislature, the Airport meetings are open to the public.

One major issue I would like to make residents aware of is a lawsuit that could have serious financial consequences for District 6 taxpayers. Following my intense lobbying, the Board of Legislators authorized the County Attorney to join in a court action to defend the Town of Rye against a lawsuit by Signature Flight Support, a company operating at the Westchester County Airport.

Signature Flight Support is a Fixed Base Operator which leases facilities from Westchester County at the County Airport, and provides support services such as fueling, hangaring and parking to general aviation operators. Signature is suing to have its taxable status changed to tax-exempt for the years 2008-2011. If Signature Flight Support were to prevail in Supreme Court, Rye Town would have to refund all of the property taxes paid by Signature since 2008. The total amount refunded would be approximately \$3.4 million, with more than \$2.3 million being paid by the Blind Brook School District, \$700,000 by the Village of Rye Brook, and \$400,000 coming from Westchester County. A refund of this magnitude would be devastating to the budgets of the Village of Rye Brook and the Blind Brook School District. ■

Progress on Affordable Housing Settlement

The County continues to work toward fulfilling the terms of the 2009 Affordable Housing Settlement. The requirement to build 750 units is currently ahead of schedule. While the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has looked to go beyond the “four corners” of the original agreement, both the County Executive and I steadfastly oppose any federal government overreach. HUD’s claim that village and town zoning in Westchester is discriminatory is simply baseless. HUD’s “grand experiment” to dismantle local zoning would potentially create a situation where high-rise, high-density structures could be built in absolutely any neighborhood. Rest assured, County Executive Astorino and I will continue to work tirelessly to protect our local communities by ensuring that the federal government does not irresponsibly overreach beyond the original settlement terms.

Also, HUD has threatened to revoke \$7.4 million in grants and monies for Westchester communities, including Port Chester, based on unsubstantiated claims of discriminatory zoning in Westchester County. I am particularly distressed that HUD is threatening to withhold this money from Port Ches-

ter when Port Chester, along with every other municipality in Westchester, is not even a party to the settlement. Therefore, I voted to grant the County Attorney the authority to sue HUD to protect the funds that have been appropriated for Port Chester. For example, the Port Chester Housing Authority has been awarded over \$290,000 for emergency generators, and the Village has been awarded \$260,000 for sidewalk improvements and \$150,000 for the elimination of sewer pollution. Open Door Medical Center, which performs valuable services, has been awarded monies for acquisition of medical equipment. The Don Bosco Community Center is scheduled to receive \$300,000 for building improvements. These improvements to the Village, which will enhance its infrastructure and the quality of life of its residents, should not be held hostage to an arcane and bitter dispute over whether certain Westchester municipalities have exclusionary zoning. Moreover, we all as taxpayers pay for these grants. The money does not fall out of the sky. If such zoning exists, it can and should be dealt with in a manner that does not harm villages, such as Port Chester, that have nothing to do with this dispute. ■

Community Events

By far, the best part of being the legislator for our district has been speaking with the many involved and engaged people of our community. I have met many of you at festivals, award presentations, parades, school functions, Eagle Scout presentations, veterans ceremonies, and other events. I attended a very moving Martin Luther King Jr. Day service at St. Paul’s Lutheran Church in Port Chester, visited the Port Chester Senior Center with Senator Latimer and exchanged views on government and politics with the attendees, made a presentation about politics and government service at the Blind Brook High School Career Day, and presented proclamations at numerous events, including the Clay Arts Center 5th Annual Fall Fundraiser. ■



Legislator Gelfarb presenting proclamations at the Clay Arts Center. ▲

Playland

The Board of Legislators is also working hard on plans to enhance and upgrade Playland, while making it more self-sustainable. One of the things that contribute to our wonderful quality of life here in Westchester is our outstanding parks system. As stewards of this county treasure, we must be diligent in the maintenance and repair of our parks while ensuring that every taxpayer dollar is spent wisely. ■

Committee Report

I have been very busy during my time in office. At the beginning of my term, I was appointed to the Legislation Committee, the Public Safety Committee and the Environment and Energy Committee. The Legislation Committee tackled the important, complex issue of establishing a Local Development Corporation (LDC). The LDC is an entity that gives non-profit organizations the borrowing power of a municipal government, in this case, Westchester County. This allows non-profits, some of which help to provide many of the services and programs that serve our residents, to finance capital projects at very low interest rates. The creation of the LDC can potentially lead to both job growth and a more robust and effective non-profit sector. We also passed anti-fracking legislation which will prohibit fracking waste from being applied to roads or being introduced to sewer systems and wastewater treatment plants, and to prevent it from being used as deicing fluid. I worked on and supported the resolution which was developed in the Legislation Committee, and unanimously passed by the Legislature, detailing gun control measures warranting immediate enactment by the United States Congress. It is vital that we take immediate action to curtail gun violence in our communities.

The Public Safety Committee has covered a wide variety of issues, includ-

ing working out agreements for the county police to provide School Resource Officers in local school districts, for various municipal police forces to use the County firing range, for the county police to help local police departments in the enforcement of the taxi and limousine laws, and other ways for the county to work with local public safety forces and lower expenses, including a prom safety initiative. The Committee also regularly reviews agreements in areas such as prisoner transport so that County and local public safety departments work together to save money and operate more efficiently.

The Environment and Energy Committee has worked on projects including mulching regulations and licensing requirements for residential solar installation, and has conducted hearings on recycling projects at school lunchrooms.

I have also appointed several local residents to various boards, including:

- Bea Drechsler
Women’s Advisory Board
- Ron Kuntzman
Senior Citizen’s Advisory Board
- Jack Heinberg
Westchester County Tax Commission
- Amanda Alongi Goodman
Board of Trustees, Westchester Library System
- Jack Robinson
Airport Advisory Board

Animal Abuse Registry

Late last year, the Board of Legislators approved legislation to establish an animal abuse registry in the County to “speak up for those who cannot.” The registry database will consist of a list of animal abusers to ensure that they do not have access to another pet. In addition, the Board was concerned about evidence showing an association between animal abuse and domestic violence, and it is my hope that such a registry will significantly curtail abuse of any kind. ■



Legislator Gelfarb was honored to attend the Blue Mass at the Church of St. Anthony in West Harrison, which was given to recognize and support first responders for their work in the community. He is pictured here with Harrison Chief of Police Anthony Marraccini and Father Chris Monturo.



Legislator Gelfarb presented a \$1500 check from Westchester County to an organization called “Tools for Change” at a reception held before a Rye Town Council meeting in Port Chester. Students from Blind Brook, Port Chester and Rye Neck High Schools took part in the “Tools for Change” seminar led by local League of Women Voters President Debbie Reisner and Dr. Bill Tobin, a professor at Duke University. The group of 32 students researched civic engagement and presented their work to the Rye Town Council.