



Westchester County Board of Legislators

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Westchester County Board of Legislators NEWS

Voice of the People of Westchester County for over 300 years

December 2009 Newsletter



Michael B. Kaplowitz

District 4 ~ Yorktown, New Castle, Somers



News from
Mike Kaplowitz,
your County Legislator...

KAPLOWITZ STANDS UP FOR TAXPAYERS - VOTES "NO" ON 2010 COUNTY BUDGET

Dear Neighbor,

On Monday, December 14th, I voted against Westchester County's \$1.8 billion 2010 budget, which was narrowly approved 9-8 by the Board of Legislators. The budget includes a 2.9% property tax increase.

While the approved budget is \$11 million less than originally proposed, I do not believe the cuts went far enough toward the goal of reducing spending and, in turn, NO tax increase.

I also believe that the budget's revenue projections were too optimistic in these tough economic times. I could not in good conscience vote for a proposal that relies on unknowns like increased revenue from Playland and payments from the Westchester Medical Center.

I'd like to reassure you, especially those who spoke out on these issues, that I was pleased that the budget retained funding for the arts, children's programs and important environmental protection initiatives. But, overall, I believe we could have retained that funding and imposed greater spending reductions in other areas.

With a 2.62% spending increase, the budget approved is \$48 million larger than the county's 2009 budget. This was driven largely by increased costs in areas over which the county has no control, including social services and children with special needs programs, state retirement contributions and employee health insurance. On the revenue side, another factor beyond the county's control is the economic downturn. County sales tax collections are projected to be \$45 million less in 2010. The infusion of \$38 million in federal "stimulus" dollars will certainly help but it is simply not enough to close the spending/revenue gap that was the starting point for our deliberations over the 2010 budget.

Facing such serious challenges, I felt more strongly than ever that I could not support a budget that asks taxpayers to foot the bill for miscellaneous items, such as \$1 million worth of legislator "earmarks" set aside for "pet projects". While the County represents just 20% of your property tax bill, I weighed very heavily the impact of any property tax increase on our community.

I do believe there are unrealized opportunities to further cut spending through consolidating departments and streamlining administrative services – a goal I hope will be achieved with help from our new County Executive. I also sincerely hope that we are on the brink of better times when the county can once again tap sources of revenue other than its residents to preserve and even improve the quality of life we strive to enjoy. Let's hope those times await us in the year ahead.

Best wishes to you and your family,

Legislator Michael B. Kaplowitz, 4th District
Westchester County Board of Legislators

HOW TO REACH ME:

Please let me know of your concerns and suggestions. Send us your e-mail and we'll send you **Enews You Can Use**.



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HOW CAN I SERVE YOU BETTER?

Comments are always welcomed. Thanks for taking the time to fill me in.

Please provide us with your information (optional):

Name: _____

E-mail: _____ Phone: _____

Street: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Kaplowitz & Colleagues Release Preliminary County Government Consolidation Plan

...Saying to Taxpayers: "We Get It!"

Recently, some of my colleagues and I introduced a preliminary outline calling for the consolidation of agencies and the streamlining of Westchester County government. All across America, businesses are downsizing their operations and eliminating duplicate services in order to better control costs in these financially difficult times. As a certified financial planner and immediate past chairman of the Legislature's Budget & Appropriations Committee, I've heard the growing frustration of residents in our county, which culminated on Election Day, and we get it. This is a strong first step towards right-sizing county government.



Details of the Proposed Outline

- Consolidation of county departments and offices from 36 to 19 departments.
- Reduction of 51 non-represented staff positions, for a total savings of \$7.5 million.
- Significant savings through reduction of administrative redundancies, such as payroll, accounting and human resources functions.

Increasingly, communities are looking to the consolidation mechanism as a way of achieving efficiencies in response to citizen demands for cost-savings. These reductions, which recognize the severity of the current fiscal crisis, reflect common sense solutions designed to allow agencies to do more with less. Other cuts will be targeted to eliminate redundancies and maximize efficiencies.

Combatting Drunk-driving in Westchester with DWI Vehicle Forfeiture Law

Westchester County recently passed legislation to toughen the penalties for those convicted of DWI in Westchester. Against the backdrop of increased DWI/DUI-related arrests, the growing cost on taxpayers and a series of recent DWI fatalities, the County Board took an important step in helping to prevent future incidents by approving a law that would allow the county to seize the vehicles of convicted drunk drivers. Modeled on Nassau County's forfeiture law, our legislation is stringent enough to save lives and save taxpayers money, while also including an "innocent owner" affirmative defense, as well as a "hardship relief" provision. According to National Traffic Safety Board (NTSB) studies, forfeiture can reduce recidivism and first time offenses. We hope to have sent a strong message that driving while under the influence of alcohol and/or drugs will not be tolerated in Westchester County.



Kaplowitz Honors Somers Middle School Students

At the September 8th Westchester County Board of Legislators meeting, we honored Somers Middle School students, along with their adult leaders, of the Somers Middle School Destination Imagination Team, for becoming world champions at the global finals in Knoxville, Tennessee. Destination Imagination helps students build skills in creative and critical thinking, teamwork, time management and problem solving. Students in over 30 countries take part in this program.

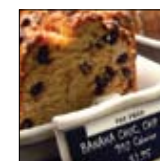


The team challenge combined community service with a presentation, in which the students discussed school nutrition and exercise, between short musical sketches. I am proud to recognize these young people as our future. It is important not only to honor them for their accomplishments, but to encourage all young adults to participate in these types of competitions.

County Legislative Spotlight— Some 2008-2009 Session Initiatives



To improve local air quality and reduce greenhouse gases— Passed law restricting idling time for all vehicles to 3 minutes, except for police, fire or emergency responders while performing their duties.



To protect health of consumers— Passed law requiring chain restaurants to post the calorie content of their selections so consumers can have the information they need to make health conscious selections.



To help people saddled with sub-prime mortgages stay in their homes— Funded mortgage default counseling services and a rescue fund to pay mortgage arrears if there is an impending foreclosure.



To protect the health and safety of minors— Passed social host law which penalizes adults who knowingly allow an underage drinking party on their premises.



To protect drinking water supply and area waterways— Banned the sale and use of lawn fertilizer containing phosphorus within the county. No-phosphorus fertilizers are required to be introduced in Westchester markets by January 2011.

Property Tax Break for Cold War Veterans

Cold War veterans and spouses or the un-re-married surviving spouse of a deceased Cold War veteran are eligible for a partial property tax exemption on the assessed value of residential property. To qualify, a veteran must have served on active duty in the United States Armed Forces for over 365 days during the Cold War period, specifically between September 2, 1945 and December 26, 1991.

Septic Inspection/ Reimbursement Law

This law safeguards the county's drinking water supplies and allows county residents living within a sewer district, who have a private septic system, to recover a partial rebate on their sewer taxes. The law reimburses homeowner the costs associated with routine septage removal and inspection services. It also provides incentives designed to encourage homeowners with septic systems to regularly maintain their septic tanks. An estimated 7,000 parcels in Westchester are eligible for this rebate.