



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 2021 Newsletter



## Catherine Borgia

District 9 ~ Cortlandt, Croton on Hudson,  
 Ossining, Briarcliff Manor, Peekskill  
 Chair, Budget & Appropriations Committee

## HOUSING HELP FOR FAMILIES

The Families Task Force, which I lead with Kathy Halas, Executive Director of the Child Care Council of Westchester, is a coalition comprised of Legislators, non-profit leaders, educators, parents, and members of the public working toward identifying and addressing the issues and concerns facing Westchester families today.

Recently, one of the main focuses for the Task Force has been the need for affordable housing in Westchester County. It is critical that there is more housing available and at every price point. The moratorium on residential evictions ends in the state of New York on August 31, 2021. We are working toward distributing more information on a tenant's right to legal assistance in eviction cases. This is a necessary service that needs to be in place when the moratorium comes to an end so that no tenant is left without counsel and disadvantaged in housing court.

The Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP) is an excellent service available in our county to help tenants, who are struggling to pay rent due to repercussions of the pandemic, meet their rental requirements. Please visit <https://homes.westchestergov.com/housing-help/emergency-rental-assistance> to find more information on this program. ■

I was honored to meet the owners of the new PureDC for the opening of their new juice bar at the Croton-on-Hudson train station. Small businesses are the backbone of our local economy, and especially during the pandemic it is crucial that from government to consumers we do what we can to support the hard working entrepreneurs in our own community.



## IMPROVING OUR PARKS

Westchester County parks have been an essential refuge for us all during the COVID pandemic. At the Board, our commitment to caring for and improving our parks remains as strong as ever.

**TARRYTOWN LIGHTHOUSE:** This year we approved a \$3.3 million restoration of the historic Tarrytown Lighthouse. The 19th century structure, located just off the Kingsland Point Park shoreline, is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The work will restore not only the building's exterior and land around it, but also the lighthouse's interior, so the building can once again be opened to visitors.

**PLAYLAND SETTLEMENT:** After months of committee work, we approved a bankruptcy court settlement with Standard Amusements over the management of one of the crown jewels of our parks system—Playland. The settlement gives the County significantly improved terms over the County's 2016 agreement with the company, including better financial terms, more oversight of Standard's work and operations at Playland, and requires more outside financial investment from the company. Standard will take over management of the park on December 1, 2021. ■

Dear Neighbor,

I would first like to express my hope that you are staying safe and well during this time and that you are taking good care of yourself. I would also like to extend my deepest condolences to those who have lost loved ones over the last year. I know things may seem confusing as of late, with new information circulating about the ongoing pandemic every day, but I want to commend you for persevering! There is light at the end of the tunnel, neighbor, so long as we work together to get our community vaccinated and make sure we are following the proper guidelines.

However, while the pandemic raged on, we at the Board of Legislators kept hard at work. The co-op disclosure law, a law that I introduced and sponsored, was amended to fight tenant discrimination. I also introduced an amendment to the County's earned sick leave legislation extending benefits to domestic workers in the County. The ongoing effort to make sure Indian Point closes safely has been another major focus of mine these last few months. County Executive George Latimer, Legislator Colin Smith and I continue to advocate on the behalf of our constituents

to ensure everything goes smoothly.

Our Board Meetings are once again open to the public in person! While all committee and full board meetings are always available for streaming through the Westchester County website, with vaccine numbers on the rise, we are now able to invite the public to our Chamber in person, if all guidelines are followed. However, my office is always here to help if there is anything that you need, whether there is public meeting happening or not. My phone number is (914) 995-2812 and my email address is [borgia@westchesterlegislators.com](mailto:borgia@westchesterlegislators.com). If you are in need of assistance, need help in accessing a County resource, want to discuss a piece of legislation, or just want to chat over coffee and learn more about what we do at the Board of Legislators, please do not hesitate to reach out. It is critically important to me that all voices are heard. I am always happy to speak with members of the community!

Let's keep moving forward and staying positive.

Yours truly,

*Catherine Borgia*



LOFT Westchester organization painting the Pride Flag outside of Playland to celebrate Pride Month

## POLICE REFORM

In March, the Board of Legislators voted unanimously to adopt the report of the County's Police Reform and Reimagining Task Force, establishing a road map for police reform in Westchester County.

The Task Force included public safety personnel, community leaders, members of the County Executive's staff and legislators. Its outstanding work was a model for how government officials and community members can work together to address complex issues.

The Board's deliberative review of the 177-page report took place over nearly a dozen meetings with Task Force members, public safety officials, community leaders and the public. We thoroughly examined the report's 50+ recommendations for the County police, correction and other public safety operations.

Those recommendations included:

- Implicit bias and intercultural competency training for law enforcement personnel
- A formal review of the County Department of Public Safety's use of social media for branding and community outreach
- Establishment of community liaisons
- Increased multi-lingual communications
- Training in implicit bias and restorative justice for School Resource Officers
- Joint de-escalation training with the Department of Correction
- Increased Police Academy training in procedural justice, cultural diversity and bias-related crimes
- Creation and implementation of a

County-wide electronic database for mental health behavioral cases and special needs populations

- Creation of a County Office of Police Accountability

I'm proud to say that many of the report's recommendations are already being implemented by the County's Public Safety Department. Others will require longer-term work by this Board, the Executive Branch and NY State government, to iron out details, explore legal requirements, and establish policies and processes.

Our adoption of the plan it is just the beginning of a generational process and reflects our continuing commitment to protecting the public, improving transparency, ensuring fairness and modernizing policing in Westchester. ■

## STRENGTHENING GOVERNMENT ETHICS

This year, we passed a major overhaul of the Westchester County ethics code, designed to make our rules for good governance stronger and more transparent.

The new regulations explicitly cover things like the use of County positions for personal gain, requirements related to contracts where employees might have a

material interest, prohibitions on inducements to making political contributions and more. The code creates new, clearer financial disclosure forms and mandates ethics training for County employees,

It also changes the way members of the Board of Ethics are appointed, to better insulate the Ethics Board from the influence of one branch of govern-

ment or another. Under the prior code, all seven Ethics Board members were appointees of the County Executive. The new code, five will be appointed by the County Executive, and two will be appointed by the Chair of the Board of Legislators. This change to the Ethics Board appointments will be on the ballot this November in a public referendum. ■

## INDIAN POINT DECOMMISSIONING

The shutdown and cleanup of the Indian Point nuclear power plant in Buchanan will have environmental and financial consequences for our district, and the County as a whole, for years to come. Last year, all legislators, as well as County Executive Latimer, wrote to insist that the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) grant a hearing on an application by decommissioning company Holtec to take over the plant from its one-time operator, Entergy. Although the NRC did not grant the public hearing, legislators took part in a New York State Public Service Commission (PSC) Hearing, urging the PSC to maintain oversight of the process



and negotiate for adequate financial and environmental protections from Holtec.

The PSC, before approving the transfer, negotiated a deal that addressed many of our concerns, required the maintenance of hundreds of millions of dollars in important

decommissioning trust funds, State oversight of hazardous materials and residual radiation cleanup, money for State and local emergency response, and robust public reporting by Holtec.

As a member of the New York State Indian Point Closure Task Force and the NYS's Indian Point Decommissioning Oversight Board, I, as well as Legislator Colin Smith, who is also a member of the Closure Task Force, am committed to making sure that Holtec complies with the terms of the PSC, as well as with other regulatory standards to ensure the safety and economic security of Buchanan and beyond. ■

## INCREASING TRANSPARENCY IN THE CO-OP MARKET

To make the process easier and more transparent, the Board voted to approve legislation I sponsored to strengthen the County's disclosure law for the buying and selling of co-operative real estate.

The new provisions build on protections for buyers that we passed in 2018.

The new law requires co-op boards to provide written notice of a reason for rejection when a prospective buyer's application is declined. The reason, along with the notice of rejection, will have to be filed with the County's Human Rights Commission.

The measure is similar to one that has been in effect in Suffolk County since 2009. Work to make the process of buying and selling co-ops more transparent in Westchester has been on-going for decades in Westchester. It began in the 1990s with the pioneering efforts of the

late Legislator Lois Bronz, now State Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins and now State Senator Pete Harckham when they were County Legislators. I'm proud that we've been able to take the baton from these great leaders and finally carry it over the finish line.

I also applaud the tireless efforts of so many advocates whose commitment to these important reforms never wavered.

The new law does not change any of the reasons that co-op boards may legally reject buyers. Co-ops have wide-ranging discretion in choosing who to approve and why, but under fair housing laws, applicants cannot be rejected on the basis of race, familial status, national origin, religion, disability, or sex.

The new requirement will allow the County's Human Rights Commission to

look at the hundreds of annual co-op rejections in Westchester and be better able to identify any pattern of illegal discrimination if it occurs.

The Human Rights Commission has prepared a form for co-ops to use for the notification, which you can see at: <https://humanrights.westchestergov.com/resources/cooperative-housing-disclosure>.

The new legislation also requires co-ops to inform prospective buyers of their co-op's minimum financial requirements or financial preferences before home seekers file an application, which hopefully will help reduce the time and cost of the co-op application process. And the law requires fair housing training for co-op board members, which will better protect co-op boards by giving members guidance and grounding in their legal requirements. ■

## PHOTO GALLERY



With Kemi Pogue, Executive Director at Home Run Against Drugs in Ossining, at Juneteenth event



Bishop Joan E. Whittaker of HORAC Ministries, Ossining receives Caribbean Heritage Month award



With Leg. Smith, Drew Claxton and Vivian Mackenzie at the Revolutionary War Marksman event, Peekskill Museum



Mayor Pugh & Deputy Mayor Gallelli of Croton on Hudson at ribbon cutting for Croton Point Ave. Traffic, Pedestrian, & Bicycle Improvement Project

## PROTECTING WORKERS RIGHT TO EARNED SICK LEAVE

During the pandemic, we've seen more clearly than ever how vitally important it is for all workers to be able to stay home when they're sick, so as not to spread a disease, or to care for a sick relative without fear of losing their jobs or fear of economic disaster.

Westchester led the way for New York State when we passed our Earned Sick Leave Law, which I sponsored, in 2018. The State followed suit in 2020 with a law that incorporated many of our County provision. However, the state law did not provide the same level of protection for domestic workers as our law did. Under the Westchester law, domestic workers, regardless of the number employed by an employer, can to earn up to forty hours of paid sick time per year.

Under the state law, we were able to act to make clear that the domestic worker provisions remain in effect and protect domestic workers in Westchester. ■