

A meeting of the Focus Group addressing the Executive/Legislative Relationship met on November 15, 2011 at 6:00PM on the 8th Floor of the County Office Building, Herman Geist Library.

Focus Group members in attendance were: Jeff Binder, Vinni Restiano, Gary Zuckerman, and Alfred A. Gatta. Richard Wishnie, Chair CRC, attended along with two County staff: Melanie Montalto and Stacey Dolgin-Kmetz.

Discussion ensued as to how the Group should approach the task and what areas of the Executive/Legislative Relationship should be reviewed. Two focus areas were discussed:

1. The Group would identify and describe four or five issues where the relationship is not working well. The circumstances would be defined and dissected; structural improvements would be recommended to create a context that fosters and encourages working together hopefully leading to a better relationship. Some of the improvements or changes may require amendments to the County Charter. An example of potential issues that impact the relationship would be (i) the Board of Acquisition and Contracts procedure; (ii) the Corporation Counsel and the Budget Director's reporting path and relationship to the Executive and the Legislative branches and (iii) the communication process between the branches of the government including the sharing of information;
2. Secondly, the Group would take a broader look at the relationship by reviewing the structure of the County government to see if a change in the "form" could improve the overall interaction and cooperation among the Executive, Legislature and the County Administration. This amended "form" would seek to be very self evident, clarifying and didactic.

No decision was made on these areas of concern, but it laid out two next steps for the Focus Group:

1. A meeting was scheduled for December 15, 2011 with someone from the New York State Association of Counties (or someone of equal experience and knowledge that could explain options for forms of government). This individual will be asked to compare and contrast the current form of government in the County, which has an elected County Executive with both executive and administrative powers and a Legislative body with full legislative authority with a form of government that contains a Legislative body with full legislative authority with an elected Executive elected county-wide and serve as a member of the legislative body and hold certain executive powers, e.g. Chair of the body with no vote, but possibly a veto (many more examples can be provided) and a professional independent manager or administrator with certain administrative powers to hire and fire and prepare budgets. The entire legislative body of which the Executive would be a member would appoint this professional.

2. The second step decided was that at the next full CRC meeting which is scheduled for January 25, 2012, a former County Executive be invited to talk about their experience with the Westchester County government structure and whether any structural changes could be made that would improve the overall framework of governance and the service system delivery. This improved framework for governance (form of government) would have to possess the proven elements for success that exist in other forms throughout the State and Country. The form by its very design would be a model where differences can be expressed, politics debated and where various views can flourish. But the end product cannot result in a less effective overall legislative, administrative and service delivery system and governmental performance for Westchester County.