

**Westchester County Charter Revision Commission –**

**Local Government - County Government Relationship Focus Group**

Meeting Minutes – January 17, 2011

In attendance: Members - Vice-Chair David Menken, Anne McAndrews, Julia Killian, Jane Morganstern, Florence McCue, Randy Sellier, Dr. Ronald Volino, Gary Zuckerman; Guests – CRC Chairman Richard Wishnie, Jeff Binder; Staff - Chris Crane.

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Vice-Chair David Menken called the meeting to order and noted he would preside in lieu of Chair Restiano at the meeting. Upon the motion of Ms. McCue, seconded by Mr. Sellier, the group approved meeting minutes of December 15, 2011 (with minor spelling correction).

At the outset, the group discussed several budget and finance-related topics. Ms. Killian noted that Mark Tulis, a guest at a recent Budget & Finance (B&F) focus group meeting, had stated the current requirement for municipalities to guarantee tax revenues to the County poses an unfair burden on less affluent municipalities. Ms. McAndrews questioned which statute imposed this requirement, to which Mr. Wishnie later replied that it exists in the County laws. Mr. Binder mentioned the recent release of the Governor’s proposed budget and noted certain aspects, such as Medicaid. Mr. Zuckerman suggested a review of alternatives for the guarantee of taxes and referenced existing Charter chapter 125 which contemplates a County Department of Assessment. He questioned how the County might assist municipalities in conducting a property re-valuation and urged the use of incentives. Ms. McAndrews noted the Governor’s veto of 1998 legislation to establish re-valuation.

Mr. Menken initiated discussion on the group ‘Mandate’ document. Mr. Zuckerman stated less emphasis should be placed on municipal consolidation. Mr. Wishnie said the Westchester Municipal Officials Association (WMOA) told him there is not political support for consolidation, but WMOA is receptive to re-considering, with local input. Mr. Zuckerman questioned what level of services is “right-sized”. Mr. Binder questioned what requirements the County Charter and Code presently imposes upon municipalities (i.e., mandates). After discussion, and upon the motion of Mr. Zuckerman, seconded by Ms. McCue, the group approved revisions to the Second Draft of the Mandate document (revisions attached).

The group then considered the list of questions for discussion with municipal mayors and supervisors. The group reviewed two versions of questions – a set of 8 questions provided by Mr. Zuckerman and a set of 14 questions circulated prior to the meeting (note, several questions in common among both sets). Ms. Killian noted that abolishing County government does not seem to be an appropriate question. Mr. Sellier expressed interest in including a question on housing and affordable housing, noting that zoning is a fundamental issue. Mr. Zuckerman responded that affordable housing is being addressed by many levels of government. Ms. Killian

commented that the questions serve as guidelines for discussion, and Mr. Wishnie added that it may not be possible to discuss all questions on the list. Mr. McCue stated that Ms. Restiano wanted a question about fair value to taxpayers. Mr. Menken stated he would revise the questions in final form and distribute.

The group discussed whether the interviews with municipal officials should be considered confidential. Ms. Morganstern questioned whether confidentiality can be maintained for the discussions. Mr. Binder commented that the Charter Revision Commission is a public body and subject to FOIL requirements. Mr. Wishnie stated that the answers provided by officials will be reported on an anonymous basis in subsequent Commission reports. Upon the motion of Mr. Sellier, seconded by Ms. McCue, the group approved revisions to the questions, which are to be provided by Mr. Menken.

Ms. McCue suggested that Leg. Lyndon Williams be invited to the group for discussion, as he has been appointed chair of the County Board's Committee on Government Reform Efficiency & Savings Committee. Mr. Menken noted the need for a list describing which members will interview different municipalities. Mr. Zuckerman questioned whether the visits should be alone or with another member and commented that visits with a partner seemed better. Ms. McCue requested that lines be added to the form to facilitate its completion.

The next focus group meeting was set for February 15, 2011 (meeting date subsequently changed). Upon the motion of Mr. Sellier, the meeting adjourned.