

**WESTCHESTER COUNTY CHARTER REVISION COMMISSION  
MINUTES**

**November 20, 2013**

Members in Attendance: Richard Wishnie, Jeff Binder, Alfred Gatta, Herman Geist, Derrickson Lawrence, Steve Mayo, Anne McAndrews, Florence McCue, Paul Meissner, David Menken, Jane Morgenstern, Bertrand Sellier, Matthew Thomas, Dr. Ronald Volino, Paul Windels III, Gary Zuckerman,

Absent Members: Raymond Belair, Julie Killian, John Mattis, Guy Parisi, Vincenza Restiano

County Staff in Attendance: Justin Adin, Chris Crane, Stacey Dolgin-Kmetz, Anand Singh, Matthew Richter

Commission Counsel: Lester Steinman

Commission Consultant Dr. Gerald Benjamin

Legislators in Attendance: Michael Smith (D3), Michael Kaplowitz (D4), Sheila Marcotte (D10)

Guests in Attendance: Edye McCarthy, Beverley Sved, Janet Zagoria, Patrick McEvily, Nanette Albanese, Denise Khaner, Karen Schatzel

**MINUTES**

The meeting of the Charter Revision Commission was called to order at 7:09 PM. Chairman Wishnie thanked the commission members and guests for coming to the meeting and following Public Forum. He briefly gave some background on the Charter Revision Commission and its mission before moving onto discussing the agenda for the evening.

Chairman Wishnie indicated they would begin by reviewing the minutes from the prior meeting on October 24, 2013. Mr. Windels asked that a change be made to his comments regarding the short time frame for reviewing the draft report and how it impacted his decision over whether or not to write a minority report. The changes were noted and after a motion by Gary Zuckerman, seconded by Steve Mayo, the minutes were unanimously adopted as amended.

Chairman Wishnie then called to order the Public Forum and introduced the first speaker, Edye McCarthy, representing the Westchester County Chapter of the NYS Assessors' Association. Ms. McCarthy read into the record a letter from Mark Heinbockel, President of the Westchester County Chapter of the New York State Assessors' Association in opposition to the Commission's recommendation to establish a County Department of Assessment. The letter is attached to these minutes. Chairman Wishnie thanked her for her comments.

Chairman Wishnie then called the second speaker, Beverley Sved, representing the League of Women Voters of Westchester County Ms. Sved expressed the League's support for the Commission's recommendations to consolidate assessment functions to the County level, to improve the budget process and to appoint rather than elect the County Clerk.. A record of her comments is attached to these minutes. Chairman Wishnie thanked her for her comments.

As there were no other speakers signed up to give comment, Chairman Wishnie asked if anyone in the audience wished to make any comments before they closed. Legislator Michael Kaplowitz (D4), briefly thanked the Commission members for their dedication and hard work over the past two years on behalf of the Board of Legislators and stated that he looked forward to reviewing the proposals with his colleagues. Legislator Sheila Marcotte (D10) spoke next and followed up on Legislator Kaplowitz's comments, also thanking the Commission for its work, especially for their proposal to establish a minimum period for consideration of budget additions and deletions prior to a final vote.

With no other speakers Chairman Wishnie, thanked the speakers for their comments and for everyone coming and expressing interest in the Commission's work. Chairman Wishnie asked that all of the commission members stay for a few minutes after they adjourned. With no other business before them, Chairman Wishnie asked for a motion to adjourn. With a motion by Gary Zuckerman, seconded by Steve Mayo the meeting and Public Forum of the Charter Revision Commission were adjourned at 7:33 PM.

WESTCHESTER COUNTY CHAPTER  
OF THE NEW YORK STATE ASSESSORS' ASSOCIATION  
Mark Heinbockel, Town/Village of Harrison  
2013 President

November 20, 2013

Westchester County Charter Revision Commission  
800 Michaelian Office Building  
148 Martine Avenue, 8th Floor  
White Plains, NY 10601

Dear Members of the Commission:

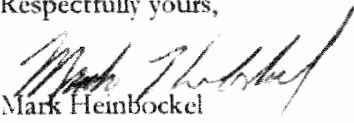
We have read with great interest the November 13, 2013 Draft Determinations of the County's Charter Revision Commission, specifically their approval of a resolution that recommends the establishment a County Department of Assessment. We applaud the efforts of the Commission, as well as those of the County in recognizing the enormity of the issues and challenges.

We, however, oppose the conclusions arrived at by the Commission, which failed to consider less extreme, more viable alternatives, such as those established in the Westchester County Collaborative Assessment Study of March 4, 2011. The detailed recommendations of this study, which took over two years to compile, appear to have been dismissed out of hand. In addition, the unintended consequence of the determinations of the Charter Revision Commission may serve to undermine the growing momentum and the efforts now underway by the 15 municipalities that have undergone, or are in the initial stages of reassessment, not to mention those that may also consider it.

The determination to establish a County Department of Assessment, in essence, shifts the burden, without solving the underlying problems. The report offers a concept, without a framework and is not data driven. The fact that only 2 of the 62 counties in New York State have chosen to perform the assessment function on the county level, is evidence of the fact that there are inherent problems with such a highly centralized approach.

For all of the reasons cited above, it is our professional opinion that the determination of the Commission to establish a County Department of Assessment is the big government solution to what is and should remain a local government function.

Respectfully yours,

  
Mark Heinbockel  
Harrison Town/Village Assessor  
2013 President, WCCNYSAA

My name is Beverley Sved. I am here to represent the League of Women Voters of Westchester.

I and several of my fellow League members have attended many of your meetings. We have been very impressed with how your Commission organized itself; how the Chair presided over meetings that were focused and, at the same time, let all voices be heard; and most importantly we found that this important work was addressed in a non-partisan manner.

Based on the League's past study, we would like to comment on three of the Commission's recommendations:

- Improve the budget process
- Consolidate assessment functions to the County level
- Appoint, rather than elect, the County Clerk

### **Budget Process**

The LWVW has, for many years, examined the proposed County Budget. Each year we have recommended an earlier release of the budget to provide for a more orderly review by the Board of Legislators and by the public. The current process results in a compressed month to six weeks of effort during a time when secular and religious holidays shorten the actual time available.

The Charter Revision Commission proposes a series of solutions that we support.

1. Change the County's fiscal year so that it begins on July 1 and ends on June 30. This would avoid a crunch at the end of the calendar year and would be more in line with New York State's fiscal year, thus allowing for more accurate estimates of State aid to be incorporated into the county budget.
2. Establish a minimum 75-day period for budget review by the Board of Legislators, the public, and adoption by the BOL.
3. Establish a minimum period for consideration of budget additions and deletions prior to a final vote.

4. Provide the Board of Legislators estimates of revenues and expenditures along with supporting data that each department submits to the Budget Director.

Two additional recommendations would increase public understanding of the budget and of its future consequences; the LWVW supports them.

1. Submission to the Board of Legislators of quarterly financial reports and publication of these reports for public consumption. Such reports currently are made so that the BOL can exercise its oversight responsibilities; the public should have equal access.
2. Public notice of borrowing to cover pension costs. This notice should be made in the County Executive's budget message and should be detailed as to amount and duration.

### **County Reassessment Board**

In a November 2009 report we stated that centralizing assessment would increase government efficiency and might lower costs. We closely followed the work of the Westchester Collaborative Assessment Commission, which promoted uniform data collecting methods and generally took a countywide approach to the issue. In 2012, we conducted a survey of Westchester municipalities to determine where they are on reassessment. And on March 20, 2013, we sponsored a panel discussion on reassessment at which the panelists generally agreed to a countywide approach.

On the basis of all of this, the LWVW supports the Charter Revision Commission's recommendation that a County Reassessment Board be formed.

### **Appointment of the County Clerk**

We understand that some posts require professional qualifications. In line with this, the League of Women Voters of New York State in its consolidation guidelines of November 2009 called for making the position of County Clerk appointive rather than elective. We also note that at a recent LWVW candidates meeting, both aspirants to the position supported such a move. Accordingly, the League of Women Voters of Westchester supports this recommendation.

Thank you for your hard work to make our County government more efficient and effective to the betterment of all Westchester County residents.