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Westchester County Board of Legislators NEWS

Voice of the People of Westchester County for over 300 years

Winter 2021/2022 Newsletter



Nancy E. Barr

District 6 ~ Harrison, Rye Brook, Port Chester
Chair, Law & Major Contracts



Dear Friends & Neighbors,

Another year has gone by, and what a year it has been! We welcomed the COVID vaccines and a partial return to normalcy, only to be thrown by the Delta variant, which led us to re-mask and re-implement social distancing measures. Schools went from remote to in-person, and then often back to remote again. Businesses suffered, parents juggled jobs and childcare, and healthcare and other essential workers did not get a break.

Then Hurricanes Henri and Ida hit, and we experienced unprecedented rainfall, storm damage, and even loss of life. The focus for many in our community turned to storm recovery, with families displaced from their homes and local businesses shuttered again, just as they were getting back on their feet after a devastating 18 months. At year's end, the Omicron variant arrived in New York, leaving many of us feeling dismayed that the pandemic will never end.

Yet through it all, I have continued to work closely with my colleagues and community members to mitigate the harm and damage, improve lives, and bring resources to our community.

As we head into 2022, I am hopeful we will put the most difficult challenges of the last two years behind us, and that, together, we will continue to work toward solutions to both current and new challenges. While the difficulties are many, we are fortunate to live in a community that offers so much, and I hope that going forward, we will find ways to enjoy the simple pleasures of life right here at home. Spend quality time with friends and family, support local restaurants and shops, sign up for a class, start a new hobby, or volunteer your time to a cause that is important to you - the possibilities are endless.



Memorial Day Ceremony in Lasdon Park

Best wishes for a happy and healthy New Year

Warmly,



Rye Brook Holiday Lights

PROTECTING THE ENVIRONMENT



Surveying Storm Damage in Port Chester & Harrison



I am committed to taking bold action to protect our environment, combat climate change, and make Westchester cleaner, greener and more sustainable. The most recent Hurricanes, Henri and Ida, left us reeling from the detrimental impact of climate change in our community. In October 2021, the Board unanimously passed a Declaration of

Climate Emergency. The resolution cites the catastrophic global and local impacts of climate change, as well as many of the recent steps that County government has taken to reduce the County's carbon footprint. My colleagues and I recognize the need to prioritize hazard mitigation and to incorporate sustainable practices into all facets of the decision-making process.

MENTAL HEALTH

During the COVID pandemic, mental health practitioners and programs have been inundated with people seeking their services, yet they still stand ready to assist. If you or someone you know needs help, contact the Westchester County Department of Community Mental Health at 914-995-9220 or visit mentalhealth.westchestergov.com, and they will direct you to local resources and providers.

WESTCHESTER COUNTY BUDGET

The 2022 Operating Budget totals \$2.2 billion and maintains all County services, while restoring fiscal stability to the County and continuing to make progress toward improving the County's credit ratings. The Operating Budget includes investments in childcare, youth services, healthcare, and workforce development. The 2022 Capital Budget emphasizes investments in flood mitigation, hybrid and electric vehicles, affordable housing, infrastructure, and improvements to recreational facilities throughout the County. The 2022 budget reduces the tax levy by \$7,000,000.



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2021 HIGHLIGHTS

ADDRESSING WESTCHESTER'S HOUSING NEEDS



Westchester's vitality and economic sustainability depend on people with a wide range of incomes being able to live and work here. Access to affordable housing enables young couples, single parents, seniors on fixed incomes, and essential workers to make Westchester their home. Too often, "affordable" is associated with "undesirable," but this is not the case. In July, I was pleased to attend the ribbon cutting for a beautiful 4-story, affordable building for senior citizens in close proximity to downtown Port Chester. Collaboration between the Board of Legislators, the County Executive, the County Planning Department, local elected officials, and developers made this possible.

GOVERNMENT ETHICS

This year, the Board of Legislators passed a major overhaul of the Westchester County Ethics Code, designed to make our rule for good governance stronger and more transparent. A good ethics law gives the public confidence that elected officials, who act on behalf of the public, are not doing so for personal benefit.

PLAYLAND SETTLEMENT

As Chair of the Board's Law & Major Contracts Committee, I led the Board through the complicated court-supervised bankruptcy settlement with Standard Amusements. The bankruptcy case arose over a 2016 contract, signed under the prior Administration, which delegated the management of Playland to Standard Amusements for 30 years. My colleagues and I worked hard to preserve the rights of the people who enjoy Playland, the county employees who work there, and the residents who live nearby. The settlement gives the County significantly improved terms over the 2016 agreement.

WESTCHESTER COUNTY AIRPORT

At Westchester County Airport, non-commercial flights have resumed to pre-pandemic capacity, while the commercial airlines slowly increase their activity. This has brought to light some new challenges. One such challenge involves a violation of the Terminal Use Agreement (TUA), which governs operations at the airport. Small "quasi" airlines operating out of Fixed Base Operators at the airport have begun to offer flights of more than 9 passengers to the general public, in violation of the TUA. I, along with community advocates, have brought this to the attention of the County Administration, and as a result, the County has made it clear to the operators that this activity violates the TUA. The primary purpose of the TUA is to protect our environment and our safety by preventing Westchester from becoming a bigger hub for air traffic. We all enjoy the convenience of a nearby airport, but we must balance this convenience with the health and safety of our residents.

UPGRADING INFRASTRUCTURE

A critical job of County government is to protect the environment and public health by maintaining our wastewater treatment facilities. Over the past few years, the Board has been engaged in an ambitious program to modernize Westchester's facilities to make them more energy efficient, to improve odor control and to protect ground water.

Projects in our area include a \$34 million plan for equipment and upgrades at the Port Chester Water Resource Recovery Facility. The new equipment will provide for a more energy efficient, reliable and maintenance-free operation. The Board also approved \$1.5 million to rehabilitate the Primary Settling Tank at this facility, which helps to protect the environment by creating useful resources out of waste streams, and \$7.5 million to upgrade the Blind Brook Water Resource Recovery Facility in Rye.

QUALITY OF LIFE

To combat noise pollution for residents living near our County parkways, the Board approved a study to use automatic noise detectors to help the County identify, and ultimately ticket, drivers who violate legal noise limits. Under the program, the County will explore how to use noise detectors, along with pre-existing technology like traffic cameras and license plate readers, to identify violators of the current 75-decibel noise limit. This kind of noise is often associated with dangerous behavior like drag racing. My hope is that this study will provide solutions to reduce noise pollution while increasing safety on our roads.

ANTI-DISCRIMINATORY HARASSMENT BILL

This year the Board passed the Anti-Discriminatory Harassment Bill to respond to increased incidents of discrimination and harassment throughout the County. The new law expands on current County law to enforce the rights of individuals who are targeted because they belong to, or are perceived to belong to, a protected class. Violators are subject to penalties, including, but not limited to, fines up to \$250,000. For more information or to report unlawful discrimination, contact the Westchester County Human Rights Commission at 914-995-7710, or visit humanrights.westchestergov.com.

VETERANS TAX RELIEF



Harrison Veterans Day Ceremony

There are few things more important than supporting those who have served to protect us. This is why the Board voted unanimously to increase the property tax exemptions for veterans to the maximum level allowable under New York State law.

PHOTO GALLERY



Packing Backpacks at Sharing Shelf



Little Free Library Dedication in Pine Ridge Park



Honoring 50 Years of Fire Fighting Service



Presenting Resolution in Memory of Fr. John F. Grinsell



SPRYE Seniors Luncheon



Port Chester Youth Volunteer at Police Night Out



Volunteers Help with COVID Vaccine Sign-Ups



Clay Art Center



BOL African American Heritage Celebration



BOL Jewish Heritage Celebration