



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 2020 Newsletter



Terry Clements

District 11 ~ New Rochelle, Pelham, Pelham Manor

RESPONDING TO THE COVID-19 CRISIS

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused a profound personal loss and economic instability in parts of the County. At the Board of Legislators, we continue to work daily to respond to the crisis.

Westchester was one of the country's first COVID-19 hotspots. Working together with the County Executive George Latimer, the County health department, federal, state, and local officials, this partnership rapidly scaled up testing and expanded hospital capacity. Rethinking public transportation, we made health and safety changes to our bus system. Some additional measures to make our County a safer place included providing personal protective equipment to medical personnel, enforcing health and safety measures such as requiring masks and social distancing.

To help mitigate the financial impact to taxpayers, we moved quickly to enact a range of property tax relief measures -- extending the deadlines for taxpayers facing COVID-19 related hardship and slashing late payment penalties for every other property taxpayer during this crisis.

Because of our budget discipline last year, we had leeway in this emergency to respond rapidly to the dramatic loss of County revenue resulting from the pandemic -- including reallocating \$10 million that had been earmarked for the County's rainy-day fund and reducing spending by at least \$11 million by bonding for certiorari repayments and annual pension contribution costs.

At the Board, our investments in upgraded information technology have allowed us to work continuously without interruption for the people of this County. We have not missed a single Board meeting.

But our work is not done.

Public health and mental health services remain crucially important. We need to continue to support programs to provide for residents facing food insecurity. We must prepare for challenges Westchester families and businesses will face when moratoriums on evictions are lifted. And soon, we will begin debating a 2021 budget that will be enormously challenging. We remain committed to ensuring that we provide the support that Westchester residents and businesses need during the pandemic with the fiscal responsibility that Westchester taxpayers deserve. ■



WESTCOP New Rochelle Food Distribution



Dear Friends and Neighbors,

It is an honor and privilege to represent the people of Pelham, Pelham Manor, and New Rochelle on the Westchester County Board of Legislators. On this 50th Anniversary of the Board of Legislators, I would like to thank the residents of our unique and resilient community for your continued support during these challenging times.

At the Board, we are working hard responding to the COVID-19 crisis, protecting our environment, monitoring storm response by utility companies, and protecting our elections. We continue to improve our aging infrastructure and protect the rights of seniors and immigrants.

I continue to serve as the Chairman of the Intergovernmental Services Committee. During this pandemic, I worked alongside representatives from federal, state, and county governments to develop collaborative solutions to help and assist residents in need during these uncertain times. When I requested volunteers to assist with food distribution, I was beyond grateful to my governmental partners who provided the National Guardsmen to help distribute food to needy families. Along with my colleagues and other county agencies, we are committed to continuing to identify and develop joint health and safety measures so Westchester residents can live and work without fear in our community.

As a member of the Westchester County Police Reform and Reimagining Task Force, my working group, the Transparency Subcommittee, has worked collaboratively with law enforcement. Members of our committee recommended information sharing to foster trust and confidence in the WCPD and vice versa. Our final report will be available in early 2021.

As a member of the Complete Count Committee, the entire Countywide committee was committed to ensuring an accurate count of all Westchester residents. The results of the 2020 Census will help determine how billions of dollars in federal funding will flow into our community every year for the next decade. That funding supports vital services in Westchester. The Census results influence highway planning and construction and grants for buses, subways, and other public transit systems. The Census determines how much federal funds the County receives for schools and other essential services for our citizens.

Along with my colleagues on the BOL, we unanimously passed a resolution I sponsored, supporting NYS elimination of the "Pink Tax," in which similar goods and services are routinely priced higher for women. We continue to clean up the environment with new and innovative solutions to the environmental issues, food scrap recycling programs, green procurement, and increasing the number of new electric buses for the County's Bee-Line fleet. The BOL recognizes the immediate need to act and protect our environment in the face of global warming.

Finally, I'm proud to report that work is proceeding on the new Family Court building in New Rochelle. I had an opportunity to tour the site recently with County Executive George Latimer, and I am so excited by the progress made.

I would love to hear from you. With frequent communication, we can resolve issues and make Westchester County one of the best communities to reside in.

Thank you again for your support.

Sincerely,

NEW FAMILY COURT CONSTRUCTION ON TRACK

I'm proud to report that work is proceeding on the new Family Court building in New Rochelle.

I had an opportunity to tour the site recently with County Executive George Latimer, and I am so excited by the progress made. The building is expected to open on schedule next year.

Last year, the Board of Legislators voted unanimously to approve a lease for the new site at 26 Garden Street. Finding the perfect location – with excellent access to mass transit at the nearby New Rochelle Transit Center – took effort and cooperation across County and local



government, court administration, and the entire community. That cooperation is paying off.

The new Family Court will be a state-

of-the-art facility occupying 35,000 square feet on two floors in the new building. It will replace the Family Court on North Avenue, which the Court cannot remain after its lease expires. The Court serves people with adoption, custody issues, child support, and other family matters. The new Family Court will be an enormous benefit to the families and children of New Rochelle, Pelham, and all the areas it serves. The new building at 26 Garden Street will be a great addition to downtown New Rochelle.

I hope we will all be able to gather in person next year for the ribbon cutting. ■

PROBING STORM RESPONSE BY UTILITY COMPANIES

Local power and telecommunications companies faced the challenge of dealing with a significant weather event when Tropical Storm Isaias ripped through Westchester in August. Unfortunately, preparations and response by the companies once again proved inadequate.

In September, we invited Con Edison, New York State Electric and Gas, and Altice to meet with the BOL's Committee of the Whole. Verizon declined to attend, citing a pending investigation by

the New York State Public Service Commission. We found the companies' responses inadequate and requested storm preparedness data be shared with elected officials in response to their customer's concerns.

Since we held the last round of such meetings – after winter storms Riley and Quinn in 2018 – we have seen some areas of improvement, but too many of the same problems remain, leaving people in the dark for a week or more.

Recurring problems include the over-reliance on mutual assistance, inadequate in-house resources and personnel, and woeful communications. The companies seem to be unaffected by the large state fines, viewing them merely the cost of doing business.

Things must change, and we will continue to press the companies, and the New York State Public Service Commission, which has regulatory authority over the companies until things DO change. ■

SUPPORTING POLICE REFORM

The first half of 2020 saw us dealing with another crisis – responding to the calls for police reform sparked by the killing of George Floyd by a police officer in Minnesota.

At the Board of Legislators, we felt we had a moral imperative to raise our voices. In a letter to officials in Minneapolis, I was proud to sign along with all of my colleagues, as we urged justice for Mr. Floyd.

County Executive George Latimer has also convened a Westchester County Police Reform and Reimagining Task Force to examine police practices and training in Westchester County. I serve on the Taskforce along with my colleagues, Legislators Colin Smith, and Damon Maher. The Task Force will develop a plan to reinvent and modernize police strategies and programs based on community input, in accordance with an Executive Order from Governor Cuomo.

Recommendations from the Task Force are expected to be before the Board of Legislators for review and public comment and approval by the beginning of the new year. ■

RESTORING OUR ROADS AND BRIDGES

We have continued the work of restoring roads and bridges throughout the County after years of neglect.

Although Westchester faces difficult financial circumstances due to the COVID-19 pandemic, making capital improvements now, when interest rates are historically low, is a smart investment in Westchester's future.

This year we've approved County road and bridge restoration projects for major thoroughfares across Westchester. Locally, Lincoln Avenue in Pelham, leading up to the Hutchinson River Parkway, was long overdue for restoration. It is a heavily traveled route residents from New Rochelle and Pelham use daily.

As we move forward with our recovery from the pandemic, we must ensure that we build a strong foundation upgrading our 21st-century infrastructure. ■

PROTECTING OUR ENVIRONMENT

This year we've made significant advances in creating a sustainable future for Westchester's environment.

FOOD SCRAP RECYCLING: This year, we approved a dramatic, expanded food scrap recycling program for Westchester County. Food scraps are one of the most significant components of the material sent to landfills. Instead of discarding them, by recycling them into useful compost or converting them to energy, we can reduce greenhouse gases and saving money on trash disposal for our local municipalities.

Municipalities are now able to join in a new County-sponsored program, which will collect and transport food scraps to our private partner for composting. The procedure is designed to minimize the number of truck trips, reducing the environmental cost of the program. The financial price will be lower than the cost of garbage disposal for nearly all of Westchester's municipalities. In addition, the State Department of Environmental

Conservation is offering grants that will cover up to 50% of the startup cost that includes sealed bins to prevent leakage for municipalities looking to begin food scrap collection.

The project also includes constructing a food scrap recovery and information center at the County's Household Material Recovery Facility in Valhalla.

With this exciting new program, I hope Westchester will lead the way for other counties in New York and across the nation.

ELECTRIC VEHICLES: We've also worked this year to encourage the use of electric vehicles and to prepare our mass transit system for a cleaner, electric future.

We approved a plan to replace more than 100 Bee-Line diesel buses with new, hybrid electric ones.

This plan will provide the County with safe and clean transportation. We are on track to reduce our carbon footprint by mitigating greenhouse gas emissions with

this environmentally sound investment.

The clean hybrid-electric buses and the fully electric buses the County has already purchased have been credited with already saving the County over 1 million gallons of fuel while preventing 18,400 tons of greenhouse gas emissions from polluting the environment. I hope that this important environmental project will continue in 2021, recognizing the immediate need to act in the face of global warming.

We also approved the installation of a new charging station to support our environmentally friendly hybrid and electric bus fleet as we prepare for a cleaner County transportation system.

For residents driving electric vehicles, we approved public-use electric vehicle charging stations in County parking facilities to make cleaner cars more accessible and reduce carbon emissions throughout the County. Look for more spots throughout County parking facilities and lots where you can pull up and plugin! ■



Showers of Hope event with Hope Community Services and Shiloh Baptist Church



Town Hall Event with Jennifer Ryan Safsel, Senator Andrea Stewart-Cousins and Shelley Mayer



New Rochelle YMCA Caleb Persanis who's in Pelham Eagle Scout Troop 1 helped YMCA during a time of uncertainty due to COVID-19



New Rochelle YMCA with Chief Executive Officer Jennifer Ryan Safsel



Mayor Chance Mullen, Omar Small Village Administrator, Deputy Mayor Peter Potocki and Lieutenant Danny Green. Pelham Giving Mask