

**WESTCHESTER COUNTY BOARD OF LEGISLATORS
COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS
Joint Meeting with Committee on Legislation
Tuesday, May 5, 2009, 1:00 pm
MEETING MINUTES**

In Attendance:

GO Committee Members: Leg. Ken Jenkins, Chair; Legislators Lois Bronz, William Burton, Peter Harckham, Judy Myers, Martin Rogowsky. Committee Coordinator: Barbara Dodds

LEG Committee Members:

Others: Bill Randolph, OCE; IT: Marguerite Beirne, Sam Wear; Brian Connolly, Planning; David Jackson, Tax Comm.; John Wolham, NYS ORPS; Rosemary MacLaughlin, LWVW; US Census Bureau: Peter Fiumefreddo, Rosemarie Fogarty, Patrice Johns; Linda Cooper, Village of Ossining; Rick Pezzullo, BOL. Sal Carrera; DOC: Clyde Blay, Jos Spano, Greg Stay.

Item for Joint Meeting Discussion: Census 2010 presentation

With a quorum present, Leg. Burton opened the meeting for both committees at 1:15 pm. He invited representatives of the Bureau of Census 2010 regional office to introduce themselves and to tell the legislators what has changed since the last census, ten years ago. Rosemary Fogarty, Information Specialist for the NY Regional Office described the three components of the census: the master address file to be updated; the short form asking 10 basic questions including race; and the longer American Community Survey that will give social, economic and health characteristics. This is the 23rd US census and the aim is a complete and accurate count of all residents, citizens and non-citizens, in the states and territories. The results are important for apportionment in the House of Representatives and for federal funding.

The timeline for Census 2010 includes:

January 2008—opening of Regional Census Centers

2008-2009—partnership staffing for outreach, recruiting and promotion

April-July 2009—100% address canvassing

March 2010—Census questionnaires are sent to households

April 1—Census Day

April-June 2010—census workers visit households that did not mail back a questionnaire.

Dec. 31, 2010—US population totals are due to the president.

They are urging community based organizations to form committees to spread the motto "It's In Our Hands." Brian Connolly of the Planning Department is the County government census coordinator.

A motion to adjourn the Committee on Legislation was made by Leg. Bronz and seconded by Leg. Myers. All voted in favor.

Government Operations only:

Minutes Approved: March 25, 2009

Leg. Jenkins made a motion to approve the minutes of March 25, 2009; was moved by Leg. Bronz and seconded by Leg. Harckham. All voted in favor.

Collaborative Assessment Resolution

Leg. Jenkins welcomed David Jackson, Exec. Dir. Of the Tax Commission, Alfred Gatta, the Collaborative Assessment Study Committee Chair, John Wolham, Regional Director, Southern Region, Office of Real Property and Sam Wear, of GIS. The discussion was to

continue and clarify the process started under the collaborative assessment study, including a resolution for the Board of Legislators to approve.

In an email, Mr. Tasch expressed concern about parts of the draft resolution suggesting that the proposed assessment commission would be directed by the tax commission and executive director. Leg. Jenkins said that the county, as funding sponsor of the effort, needs to have representation and oversight.

The three resolutions recognize the completed work of the study. One of the key recommendations was to update property data to help assessors do their jobs. There is in place funding budgeted for aerial oblique photography. An amendment is proposed which would add funding for street level photography. Although they have different values, Mr. Jackson said, both give the assessors the ability to see more and use fewer field assessments. The imagery makes it easier to make the case for backing up or challenging taxation appeals. Providing the imagery is another tool to make assessment faster but still does not represent getting everything done for all of Westchester. The data collection makes for better mapping but more resources are needed. Mr. Wear said of IT, their component is the technical part that will create the same baseline data of the same quality for all municipalities. It is not a big leap for IT to get involved because of the mapping activities of GIS with software vendors.

Leg. Jenkins asked if there is anything specific, such as an IMA, needed in order to share with the municipalities. Does a municipality have to vote in order to share the county data and will they have to purchase specific software in order to access the data? Mr. Wear and Mr. Jackson explained that there is a procedure in place where GIS data is shared with municipalities. The software vendors they are talking to are prepared to provide the assessors with viewers, instructions and compatibility with the systems they now use.

Regarding the financing, since it cost Yonkers \$240,000 to do their oblique aerial and street level photography, the \$50,000 grant from the state is clearly not enough. But \$180,000 for aerial photography was approved last year to update GIS. With the additional costs for oblique aerial and street level photography the total cost will probably be around one million dollars—a significant county investment. Mr. Wolham said that all of the elements for inventory recommended by ORPS would not be accomplished by the acquisition of this baseline data through photographs except for maintenance of data. If the intention is to be a substitution of the data collection process, then additional processes would have to be put in place. The standards of the International Association of Assessing Officers may not find it appropriate to use photography alone for data collection.

Leg. Rogowsky suggested hearing from municipalities directly—if they are not planning on moving forward with re-assessment why should we give them data they won't use. Perhaps there should be carrots and sticks if we are using taxpayers' money and keep track of who is doing what with data. If municipalities need more money just to use the photos, they may not want to do it. We need to know where we are heading.

Leg. Myers wanted to know why we have to pay for photography that is on the web for free from Google Map. Mr. Jackson said Google does not collect consistently, certain areas are not covered and it is not quality controlled. Mr. Wear said although Google is a great viewing tool, it is only a street map and does not have the assessors tools and measuring data from 4 sides.

Mr. Jenkins remarked that it does not appear that the legislators or municipalities are ready to take the step towards complete revaluation. When we get this baseline data collecting done first we will have the factual data with which to help make a decision. Meanwhile, a \$1 million investment is worth it to save more millions from certioraris. Leg. Bronz pointed out that since we wanted to do this for land use, it makes sense to add the assessment usage. Leg. Harckham

said the municipal and school districts can't afford to do reassessment now even if they wanted to.

Ms. Cooper remarked that the assessment study was a compromise to avoid political stalemates. She suggested that even if the BOL cannot move forward, it should figure out a way to get there because there is rationality and economy of scale to all doing reassessment together. It will take 3-5 years to gather the data in the system and then it becomes another tool for the assessors to bring fairness, transparency and equity into the system. Mr. Jenkins added that from a county perspective, we need to have a centralized data base at the business level to control the millions of dollars the county loses in certiorari losses and have reliable and predictable revenues for the municipalities.

Mr. Jackson said that from his preliminary research, the \$50,000 should pay for the data collection for the centralized commercial database. Maintenance might cost the county \$5,000 a year. He also warned that there may be some hesitation among members of the original assessment committee regarding the county housing the database. He also requested that the heads of the professional organizations be automatically included for notices and participation in Government Operations discussions. Mr. Harckham suggested that to deal with the debate about the commercial database, common parameters can be set up and let the municipalities sort it as they want. Similar to the septic database being set up.

The principal Interest is in having a standard methodology as well as having a common database. Leg. Jenkins said the resolution would state that we understand there are costs involved. The county is the driver of what would be a collaborative effort. When asked what role the study committee would have, Leg. Jenkins said that technically the study committee had a function that continues on.

Mr. Wolham said that the role from ORPS has been education and to lead discussion on issues to improve methods of assessment. There have been varying levels of understanding among the municipalities. For some municipalities there has been little interest and because there is so much sensitivity and reticence about reassessment, it may help to have groups of municipalities together and continue discussion on a larger basis later. The professional groups could help with that.

Leg. Bronz said that in a sense the public meetings that were hosted by school districts took the politics out of the discussion and that might be replicated. Some of the feedback from the town meetings was that someone needs to get it together, perhaps the county. As a regional government, we have the power to do it. Leg. Myers suggested that the School Boards Assn. may be in a better position to take the lead in such discussions since the school districts are taking a big hit in certioraris. In her district there is a huge disconnect between the schools and taxes. School boards think that they should only deal with education and leave all the tax reviewing and certiorari challenges up to the town assessors. Perhaps the GO Committee should convene a meeting of school boards and superintendents to discuss how they fit in. Leg. Harckham said the county doesn't want to be seen as the bullying arm but lead by example and we have the size, the resources and the power to do it yet we are the one common denominator that overlaps all of them. School districts and municipalities don't have the money or the staff and the county has the infrastructure in place. Leg. Myers suggested that an approach similar to the flood mitigation issue meeting put together by the Planning Dept. at the County Center. The county put up \$50 million dollars in grant money but municipalities would have to pay half of the cost for regional flood mitigation.

More tweaks will be made on the resolution so that everyone can work and live with. We need to make sure we are showing the county taxpayers that we are moving down the road--regional government taking the lead. Leg. Jenkins asked Ms. Beirne and Mr. Jackson to work up some numbers for operational costs. Will the county clerk have anything to do with this effort? Not at this time --The meeting was adjourned by Leg. Jenkins. Moved by Leg. Harckham and seconded by Leg. Myers.