

**WESTCHESTER COUNTY BOARD OF LEGISLATORS
COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS
MEETING MINUTES: FEBRUARY 26, 2008**

In Attendance:

Committee Members: Legislators Kenneth Jenkins, Chair; William Burton, Peter Harckham, Vito Pinto, Martin Rogowsky. Committee Coordinator: Barbara Arrington Dodds

Others: Leg. Abinanti; Rosemary MacLaughlin, LWVW; Doug Colety, Westchester GOP; L. Talt, Lawrence Talt Realty; Thomas Host, CE's Office; Sal Carrera, Director of Real Estate; Ralph Butler, Comm. Public Works; Board of Elections: Reginald LaFayette, Comm., Jeannie Palazola, Deputy Comm. and Steven Levy, Deputy Comm.

Items for Discussion:

24. a—g Proposed bond acts and IMA related to purchase of 450 Saw Mill River Road for use by Board of Elections.

Minutes Approved: February 12, 2008, as corrected

With a quorum present, Leg. Jenkins opened the meeting and welcomed Sal Carrera to discuss 450 Mill River Road. Mr. Carrera said that over a year ago, his office was charged with finding a site to house the old voting machines and the new machines for all of Westchester. At least 60,000 to 85,000 square feet of space was needed. Last year he negotiated on a building at 450 Saw Mill River Road—an 85,000 sq. ft. warehouse and office space (70,000/15,000). It always pays to buy rather than rent. Rent is now being paid for storage of the old machines that are not stored in municipal space. He said the purchase price of \$5.4 million, capital improvements \$7.3 million and the closing cost of \$600,000 are well worth it for a new building over a 20-30 yr period.

Commissioner LaFayette said HAVA keeps changing which may mean changing needs. and this new machine is same size as current machine. The manufacturer will control storage and how the warehouse will be set up. We also have to accommodate the old machines in case this system fails. In November we are going to have in the polling place both the old and the new machines. There is proposed legislation to reduce the number of polling districts per polling place and that may require the County to buy more machines. The officials should be where the machines are and we cannot expand in the present location. The BOE has to have on hand \$3-4.5 million to pay for each election plus contested elections—2 ballots for each voter plus a spare and we have over 600,000 voters. We may have to hire programmers because after the first election, which will be programmed by the manufacturers, we will be on our own. Both Commissioners looked at the space at 450 and felt it was adequate with loading docks and had enough room to keep everything in.

Steven Levy, Deputy Commissioner, spoke for Commissioner Sunderland. They would like to move as soon as possible. One issue is the audit—3% of every of every ballot face that exists has to be audited, a verification that the results are matching up on the canvas sheets. That becomes a major addition to the requirements of the BOE. Comm. LaFayette noted that on election night there are over one hundred people coming to work and they need parking spaces and waiting rooms. Trucks have to deliver the bags the next day. Leg. Burton asked could the 3% be taken to another location and scanned there. No, the audit is a hand count—a two person manual count. Leg. Pinto asked how that count would be recorded. Mr. Levy said it is done manually and reported back. It's part of the statute and must happen.

Leg. Pinto asked Mr. Carrera if he had a chart that compares the properties he has considered in terms of cost, size, etc. It will be provided. He also asked Comm. Lafayette if the requirements are determined by Sequoia, the manufacturer. The state and the manufacturer are going to have to approve the storage space. The risk of stacking is too high for those machines. There is 70,000 sq. ft available for storage and we will need 55,000 sq ft for 1100 machines next year. If we have 1600 machines, we will need more space. The ceilings at 450 are about 12 feet high. Every machine has to be on ground level and plugged in. Leg. Pinto asked is there any kind of floor plan. Mr. Carrera said yes there is but it is not complete. Another advantage to 450 is that in case more space is needed there are 5 acres on which an el could be built onto the building so that everything would remain on one floor. We don't know how many we are going to have to get. You also need a lot more room for everything that goes along with the machines—ramps, signs, bags, etc. At least we have the option to expand if needs be. The villages use the BOE registration book and will have to use the BOE machines in the March 2009 elections.

Leg. Harckham commented that one of the criticisms has been the difficulty of reaching the site by public transportation. He asked if there are plans to have a satellite office in White Plains. Mr. Carrera responded that the anticipation is to have a satellite office in the space currently in White Plains. Our Bee-Line system bus route can be altered to come onto the property and accommodate disabled passengers. The satellite office would be to handle walk-ins which are few. The majority are candidates and supporters bringing in petitions. Leg. Harckham also asked if the cost has been factored in to make the building certified by the Green Council. Yes, it is going to be as green as possible without spending a huge amount of money.

Leg. Rogowsky asked several questions regarding the logistics of the machines themselves. Suppose a municipality wanted to use the old machines while the County is paying to store and maintain the new machines we have taken ownership of. Comm. Lafayette said yes, they can still request using an old machine while we still have them for 18-24 months. BOE experience with scanners for absentee and emergency ballots leads them to believe that a back-up has to be in place in case of failure. Whatever contingencies come up, after 18-24 months the lever machines are going. Regarding constructing a new building at Grasslands, Mr. Carrera estimated the cost would be about \$35 million—at today's prices, \$350 per square foot. That would require a public referendum. Can the machines be stored open or would they be stored in the cabinets the manufacturers are marketing? Comm. LaFayette thought only the scanners, which are the size of computers, could be stacked but there will be back up generators, privacy booths, signs, ramps, the tables that the scanners sit on and all the rest that go along with them. What is the square footage needed for the 3 million ballots? The plans have not been completed by DPW and will be shared by Thursday. The commissioner also said there is a security issue if you have long lines of people waiting to vote. So the machines must have the capacity to handle large numbers.

The bottom line is if we move forward with 450 SMR, and we end up with an extra 15-20,000 sq. ft. of vacant space even three years from now after the lever machines go, we always need space. We have no additional storage space left in the County and we have every department storing everywhere. In Yorktown, for instance, the cost is \$8-12 per square foot for dead storage without electricity, etc. Staff has to be on hand to take full responsibility for the machines and the programming.

Regarding parking—currently the 200 parking spaces at 450 are rented out to car dealerships. Possibly a source of income except at election times and Mr. Carrera thinks the BOE would need no more than 100 spaces.

Leg. Jenkins commented that in the current real estate market, some people think there should be other sites available. Mr. Carrera responded that it is housing not commercial space that is having the problems. In addition, the fall out is not in Westchester County. Today's basic number is in the mid to high 30's for rent and \$200-250 per sq. ft. for construction without major improvements. For approximately \$150 a square foot, 450 would provide class A office space and storage, generators, electricity and a roof.

Leg. Abinanti asked if the driving force was price or location. Mr. Carrera concluded it was location, price and timing because the machines are coming. The building has not been sold yet because it does not have the normal warehouse ceiling of 18-20 ft. height, only 12 to 14 ft. Discussion continued concluding that interior plans and comparisons with other sites should be forthcoming.

Continued discussion will be held on the issue in subsequent meetings with the Committee on Budget & Appropriations. The meeting was adjourned. (End of tape unavailable.)