

Minutes
Planning & Economic Development Committee
December 11, 2024, 6:00 pm, Legislative Chambers
Livestreamed on YouTube
Gerace Office Building, Mayville, NY

Members Present: Harmon, Dickey, Gustafson, Penhollow, Larson

Others: Chagnon, McCoy, N. Quattrone, Ihrig, Zafuto, Sharp, Jablonski, Geise

Complete video of meeting can be viewed on YouTube

Chairman Harmon called the meeting to order at (6:00 p.m.)

Approval of Minutes (11/13/24)

MOVED by Legislator Gustafson, SECONDED by Legislator Dickey.

Unanimously Carried

Privilege of the Floor

John Jablonski: Thank you for the opportunity to speak. I am John Jablonski, I live at 213 Spruce Street, Lakewood, New York. I was a long-time member of the Chautauqua County Water Quality Task Force and also served many years reviewing the 2% bed tax waterway applications. And I was surprised and disappointed to learn that the legislature changed that process last month so I'm here tonight to object to that. Originally the legislature commissioned the Water Quality Task Force to establish a committee to review those applications. The Water Quality Task Force, many of you, some of you weren't on the legislature when it operated – was a panel of soil and water conservation professionals and health department staff and others who met monthly to review what was going on affecting the water resources of the county. It was a really important process to learn what each agency was doing, what actions were happening to protect ground water and what actions were happening to protect the surface waters, who had water contamination problems in their community, was that in possibly other communities and to actually have good communications between those officials and several town highway superintendents also participated in the process. So we were able to influence their work as well to try to keep our waterways clean. Originally, the legislature commissioned that task force to provide a review panel for the 2% bed tax applications, which was a very good process because you had people who were looking at these things all around the county reviewing those applications. So, I would ask this committee to reconsider the action that happened last month and to reestablish the Water Quality Task Force and to reestablish that task force to provide the review of the bed tax applications so that we can make sure that we have cross pollination between agencies and that people know what's going on and we have people who do this regularly reviewing these applications and can provide their professional input to the quality of the applications and their scoring and prioritization. Thank you.

Legislator Larson: Under privilege of the floor, before Mr. Jablonski leaves- I'll start over. Tonight we have as routine matters: Confirm Re-appointments to the Chautauqua Counting Planning Board, confirm re-appointments to the Chautauqua County Ag & Farmland Protection Board – this is the normal way we do business here.

Earlier this year we were told that essentially those that were reviewing the 2% occupancy tax money that they were anonymous to us and they were going to remain that way. And this committee passed a motion that prior to this meeting in December 2024, that we simply be given the list of the people – their names and addresses – that were given the authority to review the use of our money. And instead of that, somebody decided to change the process and this legislature did not ask for that. This legislature – at least our committee asked – that whoever was given this authority, whoever they were, that their names and addresses come before us just like every other board and commission comes before us. We didn't even know if some of these people lived outside the county. We knew nothing about them and that was not acceptable, at least to this committee. So, just so Mr. Jablonski knows, all we wanted to know was – people like Mr. Jablonski – I don't think they'd be afraid to have their name and address on a resolution confirming them to advise and make recommendations on how to spend our county tax money. So, I'm glad that Mr. Jablonski came tonight and raised that question. If I could, under privilege of the floor, last month I wasn't very good with my computer and printer. I tried to give the information on what's happened to employment in this county the last twenty years and what's happened to the labor force in this county the last twenty years. So this week I figured out how to get my computer and printer to print what I wanted. Tonight I've given you – and this bold FRED here is not me. It's the Federal Reserve of St. Louis – they go by FRED. I would be honored. One of the reasons I loved teaching eight years at Fredonia, is that you may know, Fredonia hands out all those stickers with just FRED. So, I thought it was nice of them to honor my teaching those eight years. I was impressed with that. Anyway, I got it to work for you. The one called Employed Persons in Chautauqua County, it starts in year 2000 and goes right to a few months ago in 2024. For our Economic Development Committee – why am I bringing this to you? Well, our primary concern as an Economic Development Committee, should be jobs for our people. This shows that for a long period of time, give or take, there were at least 64,000 employed persons in Chautauqua County, right up to 2009. And then it falls off a cliff and to be generous – it's gone from 64,000 employed to 54,000 employed, and that's being generous. The drop is really more like 12,000, let's call it 10,000. That probably is the total of most villages added up in this county, except for Fredonia. So, well what's happened to our labor force? Everyone talks about how hard it is to find workers. The other one shows you the Civilian Labor Force in the county and it's almost exactly the drop of employment. You can see that roughly 68,000 was pretty steady from 2000 to 2010. And then it collapsed. And at best we are 54,000. So, again, being conservative, employment is down 10,000 in just 14 or 15 years and the labor force is right with it. Down at least 10,000. So, that's a backdrop to I hope I can do a part in encouraging this committee if not others in the legislature, to do what the law, our own law says we are supposed to do. The county charter, section 2.05c, says that on at least an annual basis, prior to the County Executive's preparation of the tentative budget, the county legislature shall adopt by resolution a comprehensive financial management policy, an investment policy, and shall adopt by resolution, goals and objectives as well as specific performance measures for those goals and objectives which shall be utilized in the formation of the budget, and in measuring the success of its implementation. Our own County Code then goes a little further, Section 701. The County Legislature shall adopt by resolution on or before June 30th, program

goals and objectives as well as specific performance measurements for those programs, goals and objectives, to be utilized by the County Executive, all other county elected officers, districts, other county entities during the preparation of the tentative budget. Lastly, our legislature rules for this committee said, it's our obligation to study and make recommendations to the Audit & Control Committee and the full legislature on goals and objectives, specific performance measures and budget appropriations for programs associated with planning and economic development under the executive branch of county government. Now, I don't know how many years, this all started in 1998 charter. I don't know how many years it's been since the county legislature or committees attempted to do this. But, as for this committee, confronted with an economic collapse, of employment and labor force, in 2025, starting in January, assuming we are all on the committee next year – we should as a committee, spend some time deciding what kind of goals would we set forth for our county department of economic development and for our county's industrial development agency in terms of the most important thing, which is jobs. Job creation number one, and job retention number two. Do we have a goal that by the end of 2025 or 2026 that there be employment come back up by a 1,000? It's gone down by 10,000 or 12,000 in just fifteen years. What is our goal? And how do we measure that? Employment is easy, the labor force is easy because the state measures it every month. We have not been doing that and I don't know when the last effort was, I have no idea. But obviously in calendar 2024, no part of the legislature, including this committee, has attempted to follow our own law. So, I bring this to you tonight to show that there is a critical need for us to do our part and rethinking what is it that we want our county government to do and our IDA to do to have this collapse stabilize and then go up a little bit? I'm not pie-in-the-sky that anything we come up with is going to bring us back 10,000 employment or suddenly over a few years 10,000 increase in the labor force. But, we shouldn't be content with where we are at, we shouldn't pretend that everything is just wonderful and that because of Wells Ice Cream and because of Cummins Engine and maybe Electrovia and maybe the drug company that everything is cool. It isn't cool. This isn't my opinion, this is black and white – what's happened to us. And I'm convinced that we can do better. How much better? That's for our committee to consider in the coming months. But by June we are supposed to have enunciated in our own resolution, goals objectives and how you measure success of those. And I'm willing to do my part to help this committee meet our legal obligations.

Legislator Gustafson: (*Inaudible*) change of population?

Legislator Larson: Change of population – we were among the worst in the state from 2010 to 2020. We were down 7,000 people just in ten years and I didn't print that, you are right. It tracks, all three of these track almost identically. We went from 140 same start, we went from 140 to 126 – down 14,000. So population is down 14,000, employment is down 12,000-14,000, labor force is down 12,000 – 14,000. None of these are aberrations, they all line up exactly.

Legislator Gustafson: It would be great to see them all charted up on the same thing.

Legislator Larson: Well, that's beyond my ability, but our Planning Department should be able to make all kinds of easy to read charts for us to measure how our county economy is doing.

Legislator Gustafson: Maybe it starts with growth in population.

Legislator Larson: Or does the drop in population start with jobs going away? When Trucklite left our south county- the village of Falconer – 350 jobs, okay? Just one story, and as a lawyer judge, I don't like making decisions on stories. I like facts – numbers. But, someone that I know very well, their son-in-law employed by Trucklite, got moved to Detroit Michigan with Trucklite. His wife and children went with him and my friend (parent/grandparent) she and her husband moved to Michigan to be closer to the family. Six people left this county because of one job being lost. That's not unusual. So, the most logical thing is our drop in employment is why there has been a 14,000 drop in population.

Legislator Dickey: I wanted to ask isn't that consistent with the State of New York as well?

Legislator Larson: No. You hear that a lot in this chamber. And you will. You hear a lot of folks in this chamber blame New York for almost everything. I checked the census data from 2010 to 2020. New York State grew in population. Even upstate grew a tiny bit. Chautauqua County is at the very, very low end of population loss in the state. But again, black and white, New York State gained population as a state from 2010 to 2020, while we lost 7,000 people.

Legislator Dickey: And a lot of that growth was I'm sure down state.

Legislator Larson: Well, New York City, as much as it's maligned in parts like Chautauqua County, in New York City, every borough had a gain in population. Every borough, even the Bronx.

Legislator Penhollow: Mr. Chairman, can we go back to the first topic regarding the watershed? And I agree with Fred. We discussed that and it was kind of an anomaly that we didn't trust. It just wasn't visible and transparent to us. And I wouldn't have any problem revisiting that again because I tend to agree with Mr. Jablonski. I would respect the knowledge and expertise in doing that. I don't know how the mechanisms work to kind of rebridge and remarry those entities (*inaudible*)

Legislator Harmon: (*Inaudible*)

Mark Geise: (*Inaudible*)

Dave McCoy: (*Inaudible*)

Legislator Penhollow: Why could we, as this committee, review those suggestions? When the initial review committee says these are our five or our ten, here's the amount of money and goes to ten recipients before it gets to us to approve or not approve or agree with, why couldn't we perhaps be involved sooner in the process? I, individually would prefer somewhat of a professional opinion and also the men and women who go out every day and work this stuff- our highway department, our conservation department, the operators within our villages and cities. That know those waterways that know how things go. It's just not the educated, degreed individuals – it's sometimes the people actually doing the work. And I'm open to that. I don't want to close the door on that.

Legislator Larson: Well, my answer to our friend from Cattaraugus County is if there were people on this review board that don't want to be made public – find people that are comfortable with being made public. I don't think Mr. Jablonski has ever been afraid of being identified with what his opinion is, with what his judgement is. I mean, we have appointments to the IDA. The IDA board members, very public, they decide whether to give a \$500,000 grant to a hotel project or not. They're on the hot seat all the time. The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away. We have the County Health Board people. They decide whether they are going to fine somebody \$5,000, \$10,000 bucks for defying a County order to put in a new septic system. Those people are all public. We appointment, we confirm their appointments, and that's all we were asking for. So, if the current, some of the current group says no – I want to be anonymous – well then find people that are willing to have their name and address submitted to this legislature and let them be the review committee.

Dave McCoy: *(Inaudible)*

Legislator Penhollow: Would those individuals have to go through all those training requirements and the amount of time sitting in front of a computer? I don't know that question but I can see that's a roadblock but if someone's willing to volunteer, because these are all unpaid, I think if they are willing to volunteer their time I think it's possible we could find those people and I think there is probably in that academia area of what we're talking about, I'm sure there's people, in my opinion, I think, I could be wrong, they may raise hands and say they want to volunteer and to be part of something in the lake, in the streams and all of that stuff. So, I don't know what the next step is?

Legislator Harmon: I think we should discuss it in depth a little further. That's definitely something you need to think about and we can have discussions with Dave and Mark and you see where all shakes out or how we might be able to change something going down the road. So, thanks for bringing that up. I appreciate that.

Tabled Resolution No. 319-24 – Establish Chautauqua County Water Agency Pursuant to Article 5-A of the County Law

MOVED by Legislator Larson to bring off the Table, No one SECONDS

Resolution left on table to die

Proposed Resolution – Confirm Reappointments and Appointment to Chautauqua County Planning Board – *Presented by Lauren Sharp, Junior Planner with the Department of Planning & Development*

Unanimously Carried

Proposed Resolution – Confirm Reappointments and Appointments to the Chautauqua County Agricultural & Farmland Protection Board – *Presented by Lauren Sharp, Junior Planner with the Department of Planning & Development*

Unanimously Carried

Proposed Resolution – Accept State Environmental Quality Review of Agricultural District 8 8-Year Review – *Presented by Lauren Sharp, Junior Planner with the Department of Planning & Development*

Unanimously Carried

Proposed Resolution – Accept Proposed Modifications and Continuation of Chautauqua County Agricultural District 8– *Presented by Lauren Sharp, Junior Planner with the Department of Planning & Development*

Unanimously Carried

Proposed Resolution – Amend 2025 Budget for Snowmobile Trail Development and Maintenance Grant – *Presented by Lauren Sharp, Junior Planner with the Department of Planning & Development*

Unanimously Carried

Proposed Resolution – Authorize Memorandum of Understanding for Chautauqua Lake– *Presented by Dave McCoy, Chautauqua County Watershed Coordinator and Mark Geise, Deputy County Executive for Economic Development*

Unanimously Carried

Other – Lake Management Plan – *Presented by Dave McCoy, Chautauqua County Watershed Coordinator and Mark Geise, Deputy County Executive for Economic Development*

MOVED by Legislator Larson, SECONDED by Legislator Penhollow to adjourn.

Unanimously Carried (6:52 p.m.)

Respectfully submitted and transcribed,
Olivia Lee, Clerk of the Legislature/ Nancy Quattrone, Senior Stenographer