

**COUNTY OF OSWEGO  
STRATEGIC PLANNING & GOVERNMENT COMMITTEE**

February 22, 2010 – 10:00 a.m.  
County Office Building, Oswego, NY  
4<sup>th</sup> Floor Conference Room “E”

**PRESENT:**

Leg. Milferd Potter, Chair  
Leg. Michael Kunzwiler, Vice Chair  
Leg. Mark Fruce  
Leg. Robert Hayes  
Leg. John Proud  
Leg. Doug Malone

**STAFF/GUESTS:**

Legs. Kastler, LeClair, Wilbur, Lockwood  
Hon. Barry Leemann, Chairman of the Legislature  
Phil Church, County Administrator  
John Kruk, County Treasurer  
Richard Mitchell, County Attorney  
Myron & Sue Pringle  
Wendy Falls, Administrative Secretary

**EXCUSED:**

Leg. James Oldenburg

**MEDIA:**

Carol Thompson, Valley News

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Committee Chair Potter called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m.

**1. Minutes of January 25, 2010:**

**Motion to approve:** Legislator Kunzwiler

**Second:** Legislator Malone

**Vote:** Unanimous, motion passed

**2. Resolution Designating Oswego County Appointee to the Board of Directors of the Western Regional Off-Track Betting Corporation:**

Leg. Malone asked if this was a paid appointment. Committee Chair Potter stated that the appointee could be paid up to \$4,500 per year. Leg. Hayes responded that he knows Ronald Darrow, has worked with him in the past and is an upstanding individual and would do a good job. Leg. Malone suggested that the position should have gone out to bid. Chairman Leemann responded that Mr. Darrow was a good qualified candidate and that the previous appointee had been in the position since 1997 and hadn't reported back to the legislature since appointment. Leg. Kunzwiler stated that the appointment is a legislature appointment through the Chairman of the Legislature. Leg. Malone suggested putting the appointment up for bid in the future, maybe there are other applicants interested who would apply.

**Motion to support recommendation:** Legislator Fruce

**Second:** Legislator Hayes

**Vote:** Unanimous, motion passed

**3. Review of Strategic Plan - Discussion:**

County Administrator Church reported that five (5) years ago Strategic Planning was given to the Strategic Planning and Government committee and should be reviewed periodically. Leg. Hayes asked if this document has changed the way the budget process worked because things seemed to be done differently last year. Leg. Kunzwiler remarked that it didn't and Administrator Church stated that this year's budget process was compressed due to the time frame. Leg. Proud mentioned that the CGR provided a report in 2005 when the Strategic Plan was created and stated that the budget process was not as efficient due to loyalties some legislators had to certain departments and recommended a process that took out the camaraderie and was more administrative driven. Leg. Hayes remarked that it seems to eliminate the legislators from getting involved in the budget process. Leg. Kunzwiler

stated that it was more to stream line the process and take the personal aspect out of the process. Administrator Church explained that the department heads look at their budget needs and bring budget requests to the administrator, then the administrator makes recommendations taking the whole county budget in to consideration and presents the proposed budget to the committee. The department head can disagree with the administrator and take their request to the committee. Leg. Hayes remarked that it seemed like it was a done deal when presented to the committee. Leg. Proud suggested distributing the CGR report to committee members so it's understood why the process was created. The following updates to the strategic plan were presented by Administrator Church:

**A. Finance**

i. Stabilization of property tax rates is imperative: The County is fulfilling this recommendation through long range budget planning, control of spending and managing reserves and fund balances.

ii. The County needs to maintain a 10% unappropriated balance in the general fund: The County has been maintaining above 10% reserves in the general fund to keep things stable during these rough times. Administrator Church recommends continuing this practice. Leg. Malone inquired how much it was currently at. Administrator Church responded that the final numbers weren't back from the Treasurer's office yet. County Treasurer Kruk mentioned that the final numbers should be available by the Finance & Personnel Committee meeting. Leg. Proud explained that the fund balance percentage was first created because the county was coming off a year where the balance was really low and a lot of thought went in to the percentage amount. Mr. Kruk explained that the fund balance was created to pay bills that were due like payroll and heating until tax money came in at the end of January, thereby alleviating the need to borrow money. Leg. Kastler inquired if the percentage limit could be higher. Administrator Church responded by saying there was no upper limit on how much could be maintained in the general fund. Leg. Kunzwiler mentioned that the county should start to focus on financial wellbeing due to the impact of unemployment rate and other key indicators. It was explained by Administrator Church that the general fund gets moved to reserves and is used for large capital projects. Committee Chair Potter stated that the goal of maintaining 10% balance in the general fund has been met.

iii. The Legislature needs to take an active role in establishing guidelines for issuance of Payment in Lieu of Taxes Agreements: Administrator Church explained that the intent of the goal is for the committee to review policies of the IDA regarding PILOT agreements, which is a uniform tax exemption policy. The IDA actually negotiates the final agreement, but the legislature can review how that policy is done. Leg. Malone expressed a concern that it seems the committee has no say once the agreement is brought to them. Leg. Kunzwiler stated that the intent was for there to be more involvement, with the committee being brought up to date on agreements.

iv. The Legislature needs to support efforts to adopt a uniform sales tax throughout the County: Oswego County entered into a sales tax agreement with the City of Fulton. The County collects all sales tax in the city and then pays the City of Fulton six (6) million dollars annually. The City of Oswego still collects their own sales tax and doesn't want to enter into an agreement because they have room for further business development. Leg. Fruce questioned the possibility of sales tax renegotiations with Fulton due to the loss of business in the city. Mr. Church responded that there weren't any negotiations pending. Leg. Malone asked what the process was to give Fulton more money, with Mr. Church responding that a renegotiation would have to go through the committee. Leg. Proud stated that when agreement was originally made the City of Fulton understood it was a long range agreement and anticipated it being in place for a number of years. Mr. Kruk stated that six million annually was a good average for Fulton in the past. Leg. LeClair asked if it looked like the City of Oswego would enter into an agreement on the horizon. Leg. Kunzwiler responded by saying that the City of Oswego is willing to talk and once they know

where they are going to be in the future they may be more willing to enter into an agreement. A sales tax agreement would take away a lot of the revenue they count on. Leg. LeClair remarked that a newspaper article stated that the city lost a lot of sales tax revenue last year. Leg. Proud stated that the economic development zones are done by the state and as long as Oswego has room for further development they are not going to be willing to enter into a sales tax agreement. Goal has been half met.

v. The County should have a greater focus on pursuit of grants; the Planning Department is uniquely qualified to respond to this need: The Planning Department has not been formally charged by the legislature for responsibility of all grants. At this time it has been informally assigned by the Administrator and he will look into further and bring a recommendation to the committee. Leg. Hayes responded by saying he always thought there was a need for a grant writer and asked whether the grants would pay for the grant writer. Mr. Church stated that some, not all grants do include administrative costs which would cover the grant writer. Chairman Leemann mentioned that the Planning Department has worked well with the CNY Planning & Development Board to receive grants for the Green Team Committee projects. Leg. Kastler said that the towns could use a grant writer on occasion and using a county grant writer would be cheaper for them. Leg. Potter stated that this goal was still a work in progress.

vi. The County should continue to employ a budget development process consistent with County Law: Committee Chair Potter stated that the budget process was discussed earlier in the meeting. See page 1.

## **B. Operations**

i. The County should be prepared to rethink the rationale for providing non-mandated services as circumstances warrant. Examples of departments that warrant this kind of examination are Planning and Promotion and Tourism: County Administrator Church suggested that the committee question the rationale for any decrease or increase of non-mandated services. He also suggested taking a look at mandated services to see if they could be run at a lower amount. Leg. Fruce remarked that it was a good idea and should be made a high priority. Leg. Hayes asked for a list of mandated and non-mandated services, which would be provided by Administrator Church. Leg. LeClair advocated for Oswego County Tourism, stated that tourism has now overshadowed farming and she would hate to see tourism cut because the county gets a lot from tourism. Leg. Proud mentioned that the state closing Fort Ontario will cut down on tourism.

ii. The decision whether to provide certain functions by county staff or through contractual arrangement needs to be made on a case-by-case basis: Very little change since 2005. Administrator Church stated that once the financial software is online it will be easier to see trends. Leg. Kunzwiler commented that the county may start seeing bold things occurring such as municipalities merging due to costs and that this should be on the committee members' minds.

iii. There are significant opportunities for improving the effectiveness of government and lowering its cost throughout Oswego County through greater cooperation among governmental organizations. The Legislature should designate a specific entity to serve as a catalyst for intermunicipal cooperation: Since 2005 the committee was renamed the Strategic Planning and Government Committee and given responsibility of overseeing implementation of the recommendations contained in the Strategic Plan. Chairman Leemann has also started an annual Municipal Summit and the county has begun collaboration of services with other municipalities. Leg. LeClair inquired how the municipalities are notified of bids. Administrator Church responded that they are all posted on the county website, that they are not notified by mail on every bid. Leg. LeClair expressed concern that not all municipalities are aware of this and that it would be good service to send an email of all bids to municipalities. Leg. Hayes would also like to see this service done as he has been contacted in the past regarding this matter. Chairman Leemann also stated he would bring the subject up at the annual summit.

iv. Funding for authorized agencies should be based on effectiveness in addressing core County responsibilities: This policy was revised when Mr. Church was appointed Administrator and has become more stringent regarding funding decisions.

v. The County plays a key role in promoting economic development. A favorable climate for business investment includes a well-developed infrastructure, stable tax policy, and safe communities: Tax rates have remained stable since 2006. An economic development project fund was established in the 2010 budget to conduct site assessment studies and other research to support development efforts.

vi. The county Airport is a valuable resource and an asset for economic development efforts. A more entrepreneurial management arrangement is needed to allow for fuller utilization of the airport: In 2005, funding was provided to create a business plan, which was completed in 2007. The plan centered on attracting corporate aviation; developing hangar space; and establishing aviation and flight management training at the facility. In 2009, the Airport Advisory Council was reestablished by the Legislature Chairman to identify ways to fulfill the plan and guide airport development.

vii. The County's solid waste management system is at a crossroads and the Legislature needs to take steps to ensure its viability over the long term: The County was in the middle of a Solid Waste Management study when Strategic Plan was developed. The options were to stay status quo, operate as an enterprise fund, privatization, or operating as a public authority. Since then the study has been completed and the legislature chose to go with the enterprise fund, where Solid Waste is a separate business on its own. It has become self sufficient with an operating fund, now needing to generate enough revenue to establish capital reserve. Leg. LeClair inquired about current status. Administrator Church reported that solid waste ran in the black this year.

Treasurer Kruk suggested taking a closer look at county growth and be ready for development. Leg. LeClair mentioned that the county needs to have sewer and water available in the whole county to bring in new business. Leg. Hayes agreed, stating we need the businesses to pay taxes and county should get more involved with municipalities to accomplish this. Leg. LeClair mentioned that implementation of the 911 system worked well with involvement of municipalities and grants were easier because it was such a huge project. Leg. Kunzwiler also expressed a need for the county to work with municipalities more in the future. Treasurer Kruk mentioned it would be a good idea to ask the needs of the towns during the annual summit. Leg. Proud stated that infrastructure is happening and being done by individual communities; there is a need for a larger focus from the county than we currently have. Leg. Lockwood said that more communication is needed and mentioned that the Airport Advisory Committee was made up with legislative representatives and local individuals and is working well.

Committee Chair Potter made the suggestion to review the Strategic Plan annually. Leg. Hayes suggested taking a topic each month to discuss in depth.

**Motion to support request:** Legislator Hayes

**Second:** Legislator Malone

Motion amended to review the Strategic Plan annually during committee down times.

**Motion to support amended request:** Legislator Hayes

**Second:** Legislator Malone

**Vote:** Unanimous, motion passed

#### **4 Motion made to adjourn meeting:**

**Motion to support request:** Legislator Kunzwiler

**Second:** Legislator Malone

**Vote:** Unanimous