

Ulster County Legislature



UC RRA Reform Committee

Meeting Minutes

December 7, 2023 at 2:00 PM

KL Binder Library, 6th Floor, County Office Building, Kingston

Committee Members:

Tracey Bartels, Chair
Ulster County Legislature

Manna Jo Greene, Chair
UC Legislature's Energy, Environment & Sustainability Committee

Laura Petit, Legislator
Minority Designee

Amanda LaValle, Deputy County Executive
Ulster County Executive Designee

March Gallagher, Comptroller
Ulster County Comptroller

Mike Baden, President
Ulster County Association of Town Supervisors and Mayors

Andrew Ghiorse, Chair
UCRRA Board of Directors

PRESIDING OFFICER: Ulster County Legislature Chair Bartels

LEGISLATIVE STAFF: Jay Mahler, Legislative Deputy Clerk

PRESENT: Legislators Greene, Petit; Comptroller Gallagher; Andrew Ghiorse, Chair, UCRRA Board Of Directors; Deputy County Executive Amanda LaValle; Supervisor Mike Baden, President of UC Association of Town of Supervisors and Mayors

ABSENT: None

QUORUM PRESENT: Yes

OTHER ATTENDEES: Legislator Maloney, Legislature Counsel David Gordon, Jim Gordon, UCRRA Vice-Chair, Rakosz Most – HV 1

Call Meeting to Order 2:02 PM

Election of Committee Chair

Chair Bartels serving as Chair for this committee today until the Chair is appointed for this Committee.

Chair Bartels addressed the committee with first order of business being electing a chair for the purposes of the committee's work, which she noted, it's required to be delivered within six months from today, December 7, 2023.

Legislator Petit nominated Mike Baden, stated that they have worked very well together in other projects, and believes he is very hands on and very reliable.

Comptroller Gallagher second the motion to nominate Mike Baden as Chair for the UCRRA Reform Committee. She also highlights the supervisor's unique perspective as a representative of a specific constituency, bringing a fresh perspective to the work.

Chair Bartels nominates herself as the Chair for the UCRRA Reform Committee. She believes everyone knows how much she cares and is invested very much in this work getting done and has the history both having served on the previous commission and several of others and asked the Committee if anyone would consider her for the Chair and Deputy County Executive Amanda LaValle Seconded.

Legislator Greene expressed this would be a difficult decision for her as she has worked for the agency for 10 years with Legislator Petit and is familiar on how it works, she believes Mike Baden would Chair very well and is fair. Legislator Greene also stated that the issues we are about to face and all the tasks at hand, are extremely important to the future of Ulster County. Legislator Greene also suggested of maybe having Co-Chair, so everyone gets a chance to direct the Committee but doesn't know if it is allowed.

Legislator Greene feels that the tone of these meetings is collaboratively seeking solutions. She continued to say there is a lot of history and some of that history is still present. She also believes there shouldn't be any power struggle or a blame game, but it be that model listening to each other is what's best for the County.

Chair Bartels that she has total confidence in everyone in this meeting. She would consider a Co-Chair but doesn't think that is needed, she just wanted to put her name out there as consideration to serve and commit as Chair for this Committee.

Supervisor, Mike Baden thanked Legislators Maloney and Stewart for including the Supervisors and Association in this Committee. He went on to say while the town transfer stations are a smaller percentage of the users of the UCRRA compared to the commercial, they serve a lot more people. The local transfer stations, the end users are residents of the County and the cost of operation to the municipalities is a big chunk of their budget.

Supervisor, Mike Baden would be honored to serve as Chair if this Committee chooses him or not, he stated he will not change his work effort in any way and thanked the Committee for the honor or the nomination.

The group discusses and agrees upon the idea of appointing a vice chair to help manage meetings and ensure continuity in case of absences.

Chair Bartels and Legislator Petit discuss the nomination and election of the vice chair

Chair Bartels called the question on the vote for Chair. By a show of hands Supervisor Baden was elected Chair: Ayes: Baden, Gallagher, Greene and Petit.

Comptroller Gallagher moved and Legislator Petit seconded confirmation of Chair Bartels as Committee Vice Chair. Unanimously approved.

Chair Baden wanted to start with a contract that he hoped that the members of the legislature could help fill in and understand, where to write a report and what is the charge for what the report is supposed to contain. Legislative Counsel Gordon provided information.

Legislative Counsel Gordon provides information on the contract between the counties and RRA, which is set to expire in March 2025, and the need to figure out the way forward for the county's handling of the contract going forward.

Legislator Joseph Maloney highlights the need to update the contract and explore the relationship between different entities, including the reuse center and the innovation center. He suggested going around the table to discuss priorities and develop a timeline for addressing these issues.

Committee member urges updating organizing documents to improve governance and meet objectives.

Legislator Greene stated that Chair Bartels and Legislator Petit and herself and others are working on a zero-waste implantation plan for two years, addressing gaps in the local Solid Waste Plan and hoping for a permanent executive director to move forward.

Deputy County Executive Amanda LaValle suggests mapping out interrelationships between planning docs, public laws, and initiatives to address diversion needs and cost of landfills across state agencies.

Legislator Laura Petit expresses gratitude for diverse group and desire to tighten contract language, particularly regarding fiscal responsibility and review over items and finances.

UCRRA Board Chair Ghiorse expresses concerns about the flow control system, citing examples of how it can be exploited for personal gain. He also suggested that the agency should provide more transparency and accountability in its operations, including installing cameras in the office and clearly defining rules and regulations.

UCRRA Board Chair Ghiorse expressed frustration with the current transfer station system, citing unfairness and lack of control for town residents. He also suggests diverting flow control money back to towns for more economical garbage disposal and better enforcement by county agencies. He expressed concerns about the potential shutdown of Seneca Meadows Landfill and the lack of an alternative contract in place, suggesting the committee should explore other options for waste disposal and also mentions a previous landfill study that was originally proposed but ultimately rejected, and suggests that the committee should look into finding a new location for waste disposal.

Vice Chair Bartels discussed challenges facing the agency and the importance of self-reliance.

Committee members discuss the need to upgrade aging equipment at the Forensic Science Commission, with a lack of autonomy and funding hindering progress.

Committee discusses potential benefits of forming subcommittees to tackle specific aspects of the Zero Waste implementation plan.

Chair Tracey Bartels suggests including a clause in contracts for agency-related field trips to potentially impactful locations.

Legislative Counsel Gordon suggests focusing on future goals and rewriting contracts and legislation to align with them.

Comptroller Gallagher emphasizes the importance of future-focused planning, considering the types of operations needed in the county, and figuring out how to pay for additional responsibilities. She also highlighted the different

needs of commercial haulers and municipalities, and the need to address these differences in the organization's structure and governance.

Chair Baden highlights concerns of municipalities, such as timely pickups and adequate space for garbage disposal.

Legislator Petit suggested developing a "Cadillac vision" for the Solid Waste Authority, including a waste reduction goal and separating discussions into separate groups to avoid long meetings.

Committee member urges timely resolution of missing information to avoid delays in implementing 2024 recommendations.

Committee member expresses concern about dedicating too much time to one topic, the reuse center, and its operational details.

UCRRA Board Ghiorse expresses frustration with the lack of detail in a report on a proposed recycling center, suggesting that the legislature should be involved in the decision-making process and highlighted the importance of accessibility for consumers, suggesting that a recycling center should be easily accessible to serve a wider geographic area.

Comptroller Gallagher highlighted the importance of updating the Solid Waste Plan to address the lack of a central location for waste diversion, which is currently missing from the plan and shared her experience with the free pile in their town, which became too good to throw away and resulted in a significant amount of materials being left behind, causing financial burdens.

Chair Baden suggested setting regular meeting occurrences every two weeks or twice a month to accommodate everyone's schedules, the Committee continue to discuss agreeing on a date to meet again and December 20th was agreed upon.

Before closing the meeting Deputy County Executive, Amanda LaValle suggested using a SWOT analysis to identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats in the context of intergovernmental relationships, disposal, and waste diversion.

Legislator Greene emphasized the importance of including the town in the discussion of the US Innovation Center.

Meeting Scheduled – December 20, 2023 at 10:00 AM

Adjournment

MOTION TO ADJOURN

Motion Made By: Comptroller Gallagher
Motion Seconded By: Chair Ghiorse

TIME: 3:25 PM

Prepared by: Lizvett Bost, Legislative Administrative Assistant
Respectfully submitted: Jay Mahler, Deputy Clerk
Minutes Approved: December 20, 2023