



# ULSTER COUNTY LEGISLATIVE NEWS

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## **DONALDSON DELIVERS FINANCIAL ANALYSIS OF RRA COMPOSTING PROGRAM TO ENERGY & ENVIRONMENT**

**Kingston, NY** – Legislative Chairman David Donaldson delivered results of a financial analysis of the Ulster County Resource Recovery Agency's (UCRRA) composting operation to the Energy & Environment (E&E) Committee at their Thursday night meeting. The analysis was done by the Legislature's Deputy Clerk/Financial Analyst using information requested from the UCRRA. Donaldson said the RRA was cooperative and forthcoming with the information requested.

"We all have a job to do and I am not threatened when someone else is doing a parallel audit. I welcome input and information," said Donaldson. "This type of targeted analysis is what we routinely use to evaluate programs and policies. This is a tool for our continuing oversight of county operations, contract agencies and the county budget, to ensure tax dollars are used wisely. It is part of the checks and balances of county government."

He noted the Legislature has been sensitive to the current lawsuit against the RRA while continuing ongoing oversight of operations. When the Legislature received complaints regarding the composting program, he immediately began to collaborate with Manna Jo Greene, Chair of Energy & Environment, and Tracey Bartels, the Vice Chair of the Legislature to gather information.

"I had a frank discussion with RRA Staff and Board representatives where we discussed allegations and concerns that cut to the heart of the matter," reported Donaldson. "Then I directed our staff to confirm facts and examine financial records for this targeted report."

Donaldson noted that sometimes these evaluations uncover issues that can be addressed directly by the agency or corrected through Legislative policy.

Donaldson said this detailed analysis confirmed the need for the RRA to develop a clear policy regarding the sale of compost to employees and others. While one employee was buying much of the compost, he was paying the same as any other customer.

"In this case, we want to see the RRA Board, an independent authority created in NYS Law, establish an appropriate and fair policy and we will be monitoring their progress," promised Donaldson.

The Legislature's analysis notes that the RRA's fledgling composting program was initially focused on setting up the operations, obtaining and diverting raw materials and creating markets for the finished product. The agency's plans to expand the program to make it more profitable were delayed due to COVID.

Chairman Donaldson also discussed odor complaints and shared a letter from the RRA detailing their ongoing efforts to mitigate and manage this problem that included: upgrades to the facility timing and frequency of aeration, increasing filter layers and plans to purchase an Orion Weather Station to maintain a database of weather conditions for analysis of odor complaints.

“The agency is working on mitigation and have made some strides but it has not been enough,” said Donaldson. “With COVID all but behind us, they need to make this a priority.”

UCRRA Board Chair Katherine Beinkafter and Board Member Charles Landi also attended the E&E meeting Thursday night and reported that in addition to the day-to-day operations, the RRA is: educating the public and businesses about waste diversion and composting, continuing electronics and household hazardous waste drop offs, looking at alternative waste treatment technologies and finding a long-term solution for residual waste.

Donaldson commented that these are all critical discussions Ulster County needs to address. He added “Good, respectful working relationships go a long way in collaborating and delivering quality, cost effective programs and services Ulster County residents need and deserve.”

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