

**Economic Development, Tourism, Housing, Planning & Transit Committee
Committee Meeting Minutes**

DATE & TIME: July 7, 2020 – 6:30 PM
LOCATION: Powered by Zoom Meeting by Dialing (646) 558-8656,
Meeting ID: 928 4991 6737
PRESIDING OFFICER: Chairman Brian Cahill
LEGISLATIVE STAFF: Victoria Fabella, Jay Mahler, Laurie Lichtenstein
PRESENT: Legislators Lynn Archer, James Delaune, Herbert Litts, III, Mary Beth Maio
and Abe Uchitelle
ABSENT: Legislator Thomas Corcoran
QUORUM PRESENT: Yes

OTHER ATTENDEES: Legislator Laura Petit; Deputy County Executive Evelyn Wright; Director Sajaa Ahmed, Ulster County Area Transit (UCAT); Director Dennis Doyle and Deputy Director Chris White – UC Planning Department; Members of the Public: Kevin Smith, Steve Rice, Kathy Nolan, Maxanne Resnick, John Grossbohlín, Mary McNamara, Stuart & Susan Auchinclos, Lee Kalish, and Ernest Hunt and unidentified caller 315-350-4381

Chairman Cahill called the meeting to order at 6:32 PM and lead the Pledge of Allegiance.

Motion No. 1: Motion to Approve the Minutes & Transcript of June 2, 2020

Motion Made By: Legislator Maio
Motion Seconded By: Legislator Litts

Discussion: None.

Voting In Favor: Legislators Cahill, Archer, Delaune, Litts, Maio and Uchitelle

Voting Against: None

Votes in Favor: 6

Votes Against: 0

Disposition: **Minutes Approved**

Chairman Cahill called upon Ulster County Tourism Director Rick Remsnyder to provide the members with an update of the Departments activities.

See attached transcript.

Chairman Cahill called upon Ulster County Area Transit (UCAT) Director Sajaa Ahmed to provide the members with an update of the Departments activities.

See attached transcript.

Resolutions for the July 21, 2020 Session of the Legislature

Resolution No. 232 - Calling For Issuance Of Extended Moratorium On Evictions And Rent Relief During State Of Emergency

Resolution Summary: The resolution calls for a temporary moratorium on evictions, and the enforcement thereof, in Ulster County effective until 30 days after the date the declared state of emergency in New York ends.

Motion No. 2: **Motion to Postpone Resolution No. 232**
Motion By: Legislator Archer
Motion Seconded By: Legislator Uchitelle

Discussion: See attached transcript

Voting In Favor: Legislators Cahill, Archer, Delaune, Litts, Maio and Uchitelle
Voting Against: None
Votes in Favor: 6
Votes Against: 0
Disposition: **Resolution Postponed**

Resolution No. 246 - Authorizing Track Removal For The Ulster County Midtown Linear Park (PIN 8761.82) In The City Of Kingston – Department Of Planning

Resolution Summary: The resolution authorizes the removal of remaining railroad track for the Ulster County Midtown Linear Park from Downs Street to the east side of Cornell Street in the City of Kingston.

Motion No. 3: **Motion to Discuss Resolution No. 246**
Motion By: Legislator Litts
Motion Seconded By: Legislator Archer

Discussion: See attached transcript

Motion No. 4: **Motion to Amend Resolution No. 246 to include milepost numbers**
Motion By: Legislator Litts
Motion Seconded By: Legislator Archer

Discussion: See attached transcript

Voting In Favor: Legislators Cahill, Archer, Delaune, Litts, Maio and Uchitelle
Voting Against: None
Votes in Favor: 6
Votes Against: 0
Disposition: **Amendment Adopted**

Motion No. 5: **Motion to Adopt Resolution No. 246 as amended**
Motion By: Legislator Litts
Motion Seconded By: Legislator Archer

Discussion: See attached transcript

Voting In Favor: Legislators Cahill, Archer, Delaune, Litts, Maio and Uchitelle
Voting Against: None
Votes in Favor: 6
Votes Against: 0
Disposition: **Resolution Adopted As Amended**

Resolution No. 247 - Scheduling A Public Hearing As Required Under Article 25AA Of The Agriculture And Markets Law, On The Addition Of Lands To Agricultural Districts, To Be Held August 11, 2020 At 6:30 PM, Or As Soon Thereafter As The Public Can Be Heard, And Providing Direct Notice To Affected Municipalities – Department Of Planning

Resolution Summary: The resolution schedules a Public Hearing on Tuesday, August 11, 2020 at 6:30 PM to allow for public comment on applications for inclusion in Ulster county Agricultural Districts.

Motion No. 6: **Motion to Discuss Resolution No. 247**
Motion By: Legislator Archer
Motion Seconded By: Legislator Litts

Discussion: See attached transcript

Motion No. 7: **Motion to Adopt Resolution No. 247**
Motion By: Legislator Litts
Motion Seconded By: Legislator Uchitelle

Discussion: See attached transcript

Voting In Favor: Legislators Cahill, Archer, Delaune, Litts, Maio and Uchitelle
Voting Against: None
Votes in Favor: 6
Votes Against: 0
Disposition: **Resolution Adopted**

Chairman Cahill extended an opportunity for members of the public in attendance to speak.

See attached transcript.

New Business

Chairman Cahill asked if there was any New Business

Old Business

Chairman Cahill called upon Deputy County Executive Evelyn Wright to provide the members with an update on the Housing Committee.

See attached transcript.

Chairman Cahill asked if there was any other business, hearing none;

Motion to Adjourn

Motion Made By: Legislator Litts
Motion Seconded By: Legislator Uchitelle
No. of Votes in Favor: 6
No. of Votes Against: 0
Time: 7:14 PM

Respectfully submitted by: Jay Mahler & Laurie Lichtenstein (transcript)
Minutes Approved: August 4, 2020

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Chairman Cahill 00:01

I will call this July meeting of the Economic Development, etc. Committee to order. Could we please stand for the Pledge of Allegiance?

Committee Members 00:12

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one Nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

Chairman Cahill 00:35

Thank you. I'll accept the motion to approve the minutes from the previous meeting of June 2, 2020.

Legislator Archer 00:50

So moved.

Legislator Heppner 00:51

Second.

Chairman Cahill 00:52

Any discussion on that? Okay, all in favor?

Committee Members 00:57

Aye.

Chairman Cahill 00:59

Anybody opposed?

Great. Okay, so, tonight I just since we have quite a few people as guests in our meeting tonight, I just want to go over how we're going to do the meeting. We have reports from a couple of county departments that we're going to do first, and then have a few resolutions to look at. And then we'll take any public comment after that.

Just want to let everyone know that Resolution 232, has been requested by the sponsor, to be postponed. So, we'll only be looking at Resolutions 246 and 247 tonight. Anyone have any questions about that?

Okay, so then we'll go right in. And I think our first scheduled presenter tonight is going to be Mr. Remsnyder from the Tourism Department. Good evening, Rick. How are you?

Richard Remsnyder 01:55

Great, Mr. Chairman, great to see you and the rest of the committee.

Chairman Cahill 01:58

Thank you. So, I guess basically what I want to do is, I'm going to be calling, asking folks to come in over the course of, you know, the time as we go through the year from the different departments in the county, and kind of give us an update on how things are going. And I thought that I would... there's a couple I've had some, you know, constituents call specifically about Tourism and about UCAT. So, I thought you guys would be the first, a good first two for this meeting.

Specifically, for tourism. I think one of the things that I keep hearing is, what is the outlook look like for the county? What are you guys projecting as far as normal or, you know, obviously won't be normal, but as far as tourism dollars, kind of thing coming in. And if you have an idea about that. And I'll turn it over to you, Rick. And thank you for coming, I appreciate it.

Richard Remsnyder 02:45

Sure, and anybody want to interrupt me at any time for questions, please do. Yeah, let's start with some of the figures.

The first quarter Occupancy Tax for this year was [static, audio dropped out] \$288,000, it's down 20.58% from 2019. I guess the silver lining was that the 2020 first quarter figures were still 7.9% higher than [2018] [static, audio dropped out].

The second quarter Occupancy Tax figures are not complete yet. But we anticipate another drop because obviously a lot of our properties were not open. So, we're expecting the second quarter to be down also. [static, audio dropped out].

The tourism [static, audio dropped out] hospitality businesses are reopening, or have been reopened. Quite frankly, though, however, you know, there's continued uncertainty about what the pandemic will bring both here and around the country.

Tourism [static, audio dropped out] are continuing to plan for multiple scenarios. In a Zoom call last week with County Executive Pat Ryan, Deputy County Executive Evelyn Wright, Lisa Burger, myself, and over 70 Ulster County tourism businesses.

A mall [static, audio dropped out]. Mountain House CEO Tom Smiley indicated that they had reopened with about 50% occupancy under the social distancing guidelines. And they were doing well in the early going, particularly on weekends. They've only been open for a couple weeks. [static, audio dropped out] However, there will be some

challenges since there will be no, or little group business, or weddings, during the pandemic. Some planned visitors have canceled due to the Governor's quarantine order for some out of state visitors too.

On a plus side, [static, audio dropped out] Joy [Liu] reported during that Zoom call that the pedal-powered operation during the Esopus, in Phoenicia, was often an encouraging start since they opened Memorial Day weekend. I have to say, some businesses have done well during the [static, audio dropped out] pandemic, and golf courses have reported brisk businesses.

Golf courses report record numbers since it was an outdoor activity that was allowed opened early on under the state guidelines. For example, Joe Steckler Memorial Golf Course, [static, audio dropped out] which used to be Shawangunk Country Club, reported a profit in recent weeks, according to Mayor Jeff Kaplan, and the club was on the brink of closure before the village took it over. So, that's a good sign.

Many restaurants have reported [static, audio dropped out] business with indoor dining now available after several months of curbside and take out business.

Our office has continued to work hard to promote businesses during the pandemic. For instance, on the homepage of our website, there is an interactive map [static, audio dropped out] of 100 listings of restaurants offering curbside takeout, dining, and indoor dining. We've promoted all available activities such as dining, campgrounds, golf, hiking and biking, and numerous virtual events that have been organized by arts and cultural venues, and other tourism businesses.

We have been in constant contact with our tourism and hospitality businesses through Zoom calls, and phone calls to assist them in promoting their businesses and answering any questions relating to the pandemic guidelines, protocols and reopening dates. [static, audio dropped out]

You may know, [audio dropped out] Travel Guide. And since we have, we've received more than 60 Travel Guide requests per week since June 1. So, there has been a lot of interest [static, audio dropped out] in the county. People visiting the county. That's kind of my synopsis. I'd be happy to answer any questions from the committee.

Chairman Cahill 07:37

Go ahead, Legislator Archer. Please unmute yourself, thank you.

Legislator Archer 07:41

Yeah. Rick, at one point. I know when we were talking about the Guide, you're going to take a step back and look at opportunities to maybe cut back save some money, defer distribution, etc. Can you give us an update on what was done?

Richard Remsnyder 07:57

Sure, Lynn. For example, there [static, audio dropped out]. So, we used to distribute at Stewart International Airport, for instance. We decided that since, obviously, the international people coming in from Stewart, we'd expect a lot of international flights [static, audio dropped out] coming up to Ulster County. So, we did we cut that distribution out. We've also, we were, there's a lot of places that in the past that we've done, upstate distribution centers, going almost all the [static, audio dropped out] Canada. We've cut a couple, we printed 20,000 less this year, 100,000. So, you know, there were some examples of ones that we have cut back and save some money on distribution.

Legislator Archer 09:00

Do you have any sense of how much we've actually saved as a result of some of those efforts?

Richard Remsnyder 09:08

Well, those I'd say, a ballpark figure about \$4,000 or \$5,000 per distribution. I'd have to take a look at it. I could certainly take a closer look at it and be happy [static, audio dropped out] to share that with the committee, but that's pretty [static, audio dropped out] the estimate?

Legislator Archer 09:28

One more follow up if I may. Chairman. I noticed that you have an RFP out for advertising. Can you share what that is?

Richard Remsnyder 09:38

Sure. That's the [static, audio dropped out] our advertising agency, we had them under Cubic. It's our main advertising agency. We had them under a one year contract. So, it expires at the end of this year. So, we put out an RFP to solicit bids on for [static, audio dropped out].

Legislator Archer 10:03

So, this is for next year's advertising contract? I'm sorry, you keep breaking up. So, forgive me if I'm reading something you already said, you thought you said.

Richard Remsnyder 10:14

I'm sorry. Yeah.

Legislator Archer 10:15

No, no, it's okay.

Richard Remsnyder 10:17

It's for 2021.

Legislator Archer 10:19

Great. Thank you.

Chairman Cahill 10:23

Anyone else have any more questions?

Richard Remsnyder 10:25

I'm sounding good on my end. I'm sorry.

Chairman Cahill 10:29

We always sound good on our side.

Legislator Archer 10:30

We're hearing every third word, so, we're piecing it together.

Richard Remsnyder 10:34

Okay. Thank you.

Chairman Cahill 10:36

Any other questions for Mr. Remsnyder, related to the Tourism Department? Okay, thank you. And Rick, thank you very much for taking some time out of your evening to visit with us. I appreciate it. And we will be in touch and stay in contact. And anything we can do to help you out, please reach out to us and we'll do our best to help you keep moving forward there. I know you guys are going to have a little bit of an uphill battle this summer. And, you know, we want to be here to support you. Actually, the Fall and Winter too. And, you know, I want you to know that we'll do what we can to support the Tourism Department because we know how important that is Ulster County's economy. Thank you.

Richard Remsnyder 11:14

Thank you. I appreciate that Mr. Chairman. Okay.

Chairman Cahill 11:17

Okay. Take care, Rick.

Next up we have UCAT and Ms. Ahmed, how are you tonight?

Sajaa Ahmed 11:25

I'm doing great. How is everyone?

Chairman Cahill 11:27

Good. I just really quickly, I just want to let you know, one of the reasons that I think that maybe Deputy Clerk Tantillo called and let you know why I requested you to come in. If not, I will give you just a little bit of a heads-up. I have received a couple of calls with concern as to what the policy and the process is going to be for the UCAT buses as far as sanitizing and decontamination them during the day. And now, I know that you guys announced just yesterday, or today, that you're going to be expanding even more service. So, if you wouldn't mind giving us just a high level of what your plan is to take care of the buses going forward, here, in the future?

Sajaa Ahmed 12:12

So basically, we, for the month of April and May, and the end of March, we were on a severely reduced schedule. Really serving essential workers only. We only ran three routes. And in June, we kind of went back up to 60% of service. And as of yesterday, in fact, we're running 12 out of 14 routes between the hours of eight and seven, roughly.

And what we're doing in terms of sanitizing is, right in the beginning, we were very fortunate to be looped in with the Emergency Operations Center. So, we executed are kind of emergent cleaning contracts. So, we have cleaners that come every day and sanitize and use the CDC and EPA approved products, sanitize the buses. Right now because we're still running reduce services, there are additional drivers that are available, that are on hand, to sanitize the buses. And this is also all posted. I'm going to pin after I finish, in the chat for the Zoom, on the COVID website, all of this information is there.

But the cleaning, the additional cleaning is... There's a deep cleaning every weekend. The buses are cleaned, wiped down every day. We also have one of those foggers that are used. So, they're cleaned throughout the day. And then in

terms of actual riders, every other row is kind of cordoned off. Because there are on some routes now two drivers. The second driver kind of assists people to help them maintain that social distance. And we try to run as much as possible at half capacity. That's kind of changing, every day, because more and more people are starting to venture out obviously. And so, that's our procedures in terms of cleaning sanitizing.

And then in terms of masks, you're required to use a mask if you're on the bus obviously can't social distance. If you don't have a mask, we provide the masks we have extra and we'll just, you know, hand it to the passenger. And we were also fortunate that we were invited to be part of a Rural Transit Task Force with New York Public Transit Administration, which is kind of like similar to NYSAC. So, we got to get together with some of the other transit agencies around the state to figure out best practices. So, those are our procedures in terms of riders and PPE.

And we also conducted a thorough training of all of our employees. It was about three hours long. That kind of educated them about COVID. Because a lot of our drivers had been at home for, you know, they were coming into work only once a week. And I don't know what information they had during that time. So, they were educated about PPE, about mask usage, about how the virus actually spreads. And our goal, now, is to kind of slowly ramp back up to full service. I had hoped that we would go back to full service by August, but I, we are severely short-staffed. So, that's kind of a concern of mine.

But we were also lucky to receive almost \$5 million in federal aid through the CARES Act. Those grants have just been approved by the Department of Labor, today. So hopefully, we can start drawing that money down and, you know, get some liquidity back to the county and that is going to be for any operating expense incurred by UCAT starting on January 20. So, we intend to hopefully draw this whole year's budget down from this federal aid that we were lucky to get. And then, hopefully, some of it will flow into next year. My budget is actually due on Thursday, so, I'm very deep in it.

But the last thing I have is about passengers. Our ridership is obviously substantially down for the first two months of COVID. For April and May, we were at less than 10% of our usual numbers. And last month, we were back up to about 6000 riders, usually we have around 35,000. So, you can see kind of the vastness of the gulf that we have to bridge to get back up to full service. But at the same time, I'm in a catch-22 because we don't want to go back to full service. That means people aren't social distancing or staying home.

Chairman Cahill 16:49

One quick question. You mentioned that you said you were short-staffed. Would you mind elaborating about that a little bit as to where it was specifically, you were short-staffed.

Sajaa Ahmed 16:59

Yeah. We're short-staffed with drivers, actually We have been short-staffed for some time. I mean, before COVID we were in a very tight labor market. And that's obviously changed now. And I do have an idea that I, you know, can't follow through with at the moment. But if school is, indeed, you know, closed or limited in the fall, I would like to get together with the school bus companies to see if there's something we can do. Because there is a need for us to go back to full service. We are starting to get complaints where people have to go to work and they can't get to work in the same way they would have. So, we have right now, I believe we have 10 part time driver positions open. So, those are non-CSEA positions and that actually helped me achieve my 10% budget decrease.

Chairman Cahill 17:55

Thank you very much. Legislator Archer. Please unmute.

Legislator Archer 17:59

Didn't you get a number of drivers from the commingling with the Kingston bus system ?

Sajaa Ahmed 18:10

From Kingston, we got three full time drivers, they were part of the memorandum of agreement. Got one part time driver, that's it. So, it's the part time positions that you have open. I have right now, I have one full-time driver position that is... all of these things are part of part of the hiring freeze. And so, I have one full-time position open. And I have about eight part-time positions. And even as I was doing my budget when I looked at the overtime for the first quarter of the year, it was just astronomical. Because you're having to rely on the contract provisions where the senior-most drivers getting the overtime and making you know \$35 an hour, which ends up a lot. So, we had actually burned through a third of our overtime budget. So, I'm just looking for ways to get kind of creative, too. I think everyone is. So, I don't think I'm alone in that.

Legislator Archer 19:11

Thank you.

Chairman Cahill 19:13

Legislator Uchitelle.

Legislator Uchitelle 19:16

Yeah, this is not so much a question as it as a statement, I just want to recognize that, you know, Sajaa, you've done an incredible job, in my view, stepping into this role during this crisis. You know, we just heard Rick. Rick, let's just say this wasn't Rick's first year on the job here and, and in the helm there. And I think, you know, stepping into the helm here at UCAT, you've done a great job. And at the onset of the pandemic, in March, you helped me deal with a constituent issue that involved UCAT, and involved COVID, and you were very responsive. And I just want to thank you personally for that. I know that my constituent that, you know, I heard from also really appreciates it. So, thank you

Sajaa Ahmed 20:01

Thanks, Abe, that's much appreciated. Just so the group knows, the issue that Abe, that was very, very early on. And it was when we didn't know much about testing and how we were going to get testing to people. And the Department of Health has just been absolutely amazing in getting us what we need, whether it's PPE, disinfectant.

You know, it's been a real quick crash course and learning the ins-and-outs of all the other county departments. Because we've had to work with OSA, with Emergency Management, Public Works, Department of Health, obviously. And just everyone has been so supportive of our staff because they recognized immediately that UCAT is really the staff that's interacting with the... it's one of the most public facing departments. And because the governor considered our department essential, we had to remain open as things changed, you know, every day. And it's really a testament to my staff. Who has been absolutely amazing and flexible. And hasn't gone through something like this before. And unfortunately, Toni Roser, my deputy, couldn't be on the call tonight. But I've really leaned very hard on all of the, especially her, because she has those years at City Bus and, you know, has lived through flooding and hurricanes, and brought that knowledge to the table.

But just to step back one second. So, our drivers have access to free testing, they can go up to Golden Hill and get tested right away. And we do have the same procedures as the county does. In terms of, you know, temperature checks every day. And, you know, making sure people are reporting whether they've been in contact with anyone who's COVID positive. Just to make sure there's that extra level of safety. The challenge that we're facing, the challenge of the week, as I like to call it, is people going on vacation out of state. That's definitely been difficult.

Chairman Cahill 22:04

Well, thank you very much. I appreciate you taking some time. Anyone have any other questions? No?

Okay. Again, thank you very much. You guys are doing a great job there. And I know it's a very difficult circumstance that you started your career here as the director of UCAT. And, you know, it's just going to make UCAT stronger and better going down the road with the experience we're gaining now. So, again, thank you for taking the time to come and visit with our committee. I do appreciate it. Anything we can do to help along the way, please just pick up the phone. And I know all the other legislators on this committee feel the same way. You can contact any of us at any time and we'll do what we can to help.

Sajaa Ahmed 22:43

Absolutely. Thanks for having me.

Chairman Cahill 22:44

Okay, thank you. Okay, so, we're going to move on to resolutions we have again 232 has been asked to be postponed by the sponsor.

Legislator Archer 22:58

I'd like to make a motion to postpone Resolution 232

Legislator Uchitelle 23:01

I'll second that.

Chairman Cahill 23:07

Okay. All in favor?

Committee Members 23:10

Aye.

Chairman Cahill 23:11

Any opposed? Okay, thank you. So, the next one is going to be Resolution 246, which is: Authorizing Track Removal For The Ulster County Midtown Linear Park In The City Of Kingston – Department Of Planning.

Well, I guess we'll be handling that control of that specific operation. I'll entertain any motions for that. Legislator Litts.

Legislator Litts 23:41

Yeah, I'll make a motion for discussion.

Chairman Cahill 23:46

Okay.

Legislator Archer 23:46

I'll second.

Chairman Cahill 23:47

Okay. Thank you. Thanks. For discussion, Legislator Litts.

Legislator Litts 23:52

Yes. I'm two things I'm requesting. One is we continually have ambiguity in these resolutions. We, for some reason, don't put mileposts down. Instead of having, you know, somewhere close to this intersection to that one over there. Let's nail it down. Let's put in the resolution, what the mileposts are where we're removing this track. And then I also request that all Legislators get a copy of a map where it's annotated where this this is being removed.

Chairman Cahill 24:35

Thank you just for your information. I absolutely... I just got this information prior to the meeting. And I will ask that it be amended to the resolution, and it's the exact milepost is 2.98 to milepost 3.23. Thank you, Legislator Litts.

Legislator Litts 24:54

Thank you, Kathy.

Deputy Clerk Mahler 25:01

To amend the resolution, Legislator Litts?

Legislator Litts 25:07

I don't know if it has to be amended, but it just has to be clarified. I mean, you can have it stated the way it is and then just in parentheses, or put the milepost in, and then put parentheses then the street name or the location name, but from this point forward, it needs to be...

Chairman Cahill 25:29

Okay, Vicki. Vicki looks like she has something she wants to say or...

Clerk Fabella 25:35

Yeah. Legislator Litts. That was a motion to amend. That's exactly what you did. And that was correct. Good job.

Chairman Cahill 25:43

We have a second on the amendment?

Legislator Archer 25:45

Second.

Chairman Cahill 25:46

All in favor of the amendment to add the exact milepost of the track to be removed? All in favor?

Committee Members 25:54

Aye.

Chairman Cahill 25:54

Any opposed? Great, thank you.

Legislator Litts 25:56

And they'll also supply a map to all the legislators as to the location annotated?

Chairman Cahill 26:03

Will do. Thank you. On to the amended resolution. I'll take a motion.

Legislator Litts 26:12

I'll make a motion for the amended resolution, or resolution as amended.

Legislator Archer 26:18

Second.

Chairman Cahill 26:19

Thank you. Okay. All in favor?

Committee Members 26:23

Aye.

Chairman Cahill 26:24

Opposed?

Okay, thank you. So, then we'll move on to 247, which I am assuming is a public hearing required for this. Mr. Doyle.

Legislator Archer 26:40

I'll make a motion.

Legislator Litts 26:43

For discussion, I'll second that.

Legislator Archer 26:44

For discussion, yeah.

Chairman Cahill 26:45

Okay, thank you.

Chris White 26:46

For the Ag Districts not for the railroad

Dennis Doyle 26:49

This doesn't relate to the railroad. It relates to ag districts.

Chairman Cahill 26:51

Okay, because usually do them right next to each other when there's a public hearing required. So, thank you for clearing that up. Yeah. So, would you like to talk about this at all? Mr. Doyle?

Dennis Doyle 27:01

Sure. Agricultural District ad-ins are a provision in the state statute under Ag and Markets Law. The county has an Ag District add-in process, which essentially begins on March 30, excuse me, March 1. And it runs through March 30. We need to hold a public hearing from a process standpoint. Between the public hearing and the legislative vote, the county's Ag Farmland Protection Board will be providing recommendations to the Legislature. The Legislature, when it gets those recommendations, can either accept them, or it can reject them, or can modify them. After that vote is taken, it goes to the Commissioner of Agriculture. And the Commissioner of Agriculture can certify. And he can also add, subtract, or modify the district additions as proposed.

Chairman Cahill 27:49

We do this every year then?

Dennis Doyle 27:51

Yes, we do. Okay, thank you. We have a large...

Chairman Cahill 27:54

Go ahead. Sorry.

Dennis Doyle 27:56

We were a large crop this year. We have... no pun intended... we have 16 applications, going through about 10 towns. And about, a little over 600 acres being proposed to be added to the district?

Chairman Cahill 27:56

Well, that's good news. That's always good news.

Dennis Doyle 28:13

Yep.

Legislator Litts 28:14

Legislator Litts. Dennis, in years past, we would accept additions by Ag District. Now, are these applications for all districts, or is it going to be for Ag District 1, or Ag District 6, or...

Dennis Doyle 28:31

The Districts, the applications come in for all Districts, and then we assign them to the nearest District. So, when they're actually recommended, when you see the report for the recommendations, the report will basically go through and recommend them for various districts as they come in. But they're geographically diverse right now. But you're correct. As it finally gets adopted, they would be added to specific districts.

Legislator Litts 28:53

I mean, years ago, we would amend, one year, Ag District 1. And then next year, we'd do Ag District six.

Dennis Doyle 29:02

Yep. Let me explain...

Legislator Litts 29:03

Now we're doing all the Districts, all at one time?

Dennis Doyle 29:06

No. Let me explain, let me explain the difference. These are, these are annual additions. And so, they can be applied for to be, essentially, put in any district. And we go through that process, as I described.

The process you're describing, we actually have an eight-year review function. Districts come up for review, in their totality, every year. And we just completed all of our reviews. So, we probably got another three or four years before we'll see Districts come back in for individual District review. And it'll start with District 1, I believe, down in the Marlborough, southeastern corner of the county. And we used to have, we used to have 16 Agricultural Districts. Many years ago we consolidated them into four.

Legislator Litts 29:54

Thanks, Tom.

Chairman Cahill 30:01

Any other questions on this? All right, I'll take a motion to move it for the vote.

Legislator Litts 30:08

So moved.

Legislator Delaune 30:09

Second.

Chairman Cahill 30:11

Okay. All in favor?

Committee Members 30:13

Aye.

Chairman Cahill 30:14

Opposed? Okay, thank you. That concludes our resolutions.

I'm going to now give the floor to Dr. Wright, Deputy Executive for the county to give us a brief overview of how things are going on our newly established Housing Task Force that we worked so hard on in this committee to get going over the past three, four months. Thank you.

Deputy Executive Wright 30:35

Thanks, Legislator, Cahill. So, I'm pleased to let you know that the Housing Advisory Committee had its kickoff meeting on June 18. I think we've got a really great group of nine folks, really engaged. Lots of thoughtful discussion at the first meeting. You know, we basically went through what the schedule for the project is, the scope of the study with Pattern (Pattern for Progress) We're going to be... Pattern is going to be working on data, and demographics, and profiles of the housing situation, and affordability by municipality over the summer. And we're going to review those in September, then we're going to start a public input process, be looking at both how to talk about that data and what it means about the affordability picture throughout the county. As well as strategies that we can pursue to address that. So, we'll be doing that process in the fall, with the committee reviewing the final report and the final strategies in December. And the report out by the end of the year. So, I think we're just feeling really positive about that group and about that process. Dennis, I don't know if you've got anything you want to add about that?

Dennis Doyle 31:50

No, I think you're absolutely correct. It was very heartening to see a committee come together so quickly, with a lot of support and a lot of knowledge. And that was really good. And I also would say that Patterns have hit the ground running, so to speak. They have actually provided a substantial number of demographics. We started off with two, both the town, the two towns to look at, just to see what that what the makeup of the demographics were whether the committee was comfortable with the data that we're providing. Interestingly, the county planning board had a review, an inclusionary zoning provision for the City of Kingston, at its at its June meeting. And we were able to we were able to use some of the demographics from Patterns report, and some of the sources and Patterns report, as part of that response back to the city in terms of what constitutes an affordability for the City of Kingston.

Chairman Cahill 32:49

Right. So, I just got a really couple of quick questions in regard to that. So, we know now that there's a plan to use the former jail as housing.

Dr. Evelyn Wright 33:00

Yeah.

Chairman Cahill 33:00

I think that's a great utilization of that site and spot. I think that's really probably, you know, one of the best things that we're going to do here going forward. Is there any... I know you guys just got the bid stuff together on that? How's that going?

Deputy Executive Wright 33:15

Yeah, so we, you know, the Legislature had asked us to look at county owned properties that might be suitable for housing development, and we picked out the site of the former jail as the first really most obvious place to do that. So, we're really pleased that we got five responses to the RFP. All from you know, reputable, qualified firms. We are in the process of working with the Legislature to put together a Local Development Corporation, that will be the ones to receive that property from the county, form the agreements with a developer, review those submissions to the RFQ process Assess, and work through that whole process with the selected developer. So, we're looking to get that process underway and to have a developer selected by the end of the summer.

Chairman Cahill 34:11

Right. Great. Thank you. And my second question, and of course, any other Legislator has questions, feel free to chime in anytime. I know I call into the Patterns meetings they have, they're very focused on housing right now. And the rebound of the economy based on the COVID situation. So, I mean, are you are you going to be looking at, you know, the projected, you know, everybody's talking about this big worry about people being evicted, and sometime late in the summer and early fall, based on what's happened here. And are you guys going to be like trying to get that data folded in, at that point. You know, how are you going to approach that?

Deputy Executive Wright 34:54

Yeah, so we put a task into the scope to basically look at whatever data we could, on the impact that COVID was having on the housing situation. You know, most of the data that they're working with is going to be older data. Any data they're getting from the federal government, it's going to be on the pre-COVID picture. So, we asked them to both work with us to identify what data they could to illuminate what was happening, as well as to look at some scenarios, you know, where we don't have the data to say, you know, these are some of the trends that we're seeing. And if this continues, what's the implications for the affordability situation?

Chairman Cahill 35:35

So, do you guys have a hook into the Civil Division of the Sheriff's Department that will be executing evictions, right? Will you guys be checking in with them to see if there's an uptick, or anything like that, to get that data to throw in there? Because it's a big fear. There's a lot of people worried about that. I'm one of them, you know, that, that that's going to happen. And, you know, everybody hasn't been paying their rent, or trying to, you know, to be able to pay their rent, and they haven't been able to, and it's still going to be due. And so, we'd like to really make sure that we're addressing that need when it does eventually arise. So, thank you.

Dennis Doyle 36:11

So one of the things that we did do is we were able to essentially repurpose a housing rehabilitation grant that we had, to do, make emergency payments for rent for various individuals, at and below an 80% income level. And we stood that program up and it started. They took applications and we have about 50 families now that will be making whole... up to \$3,000 for three months' rent, outside the City of Kingston. Because of the funding source. We can't work within the City of Kingston. So, that program is up and running, and it's going to make those payments.

But I think you're right Legislator. We're concerned about what happens after the, if the unemployment runs out, and other things run out. We're concerned about what happens in August, rather than what whether than what happened currently. The state has stood up a program called... it's \$100 million dollars for rent relief, emergency rent relief. We're looking at that program to see what's out there.

In addition, the state has \$29 million in additional community development block grant funds, and they haven't released... those are for non... what I would call non-entitlement counties, which Ulster County is one. As compared to other counties in the region, such as Orange and Dutchess, which are entitlement counties, which are going to get what they call Emergency Solutions Grants. So, we would anticipate that we're going to, when they decide how they're going to use that money, that the county would apply for it. And I can't imagine that the money won't be used for housing. A portion of that money won't be used for housing.

Chairman Cahill 37:58

Right. So you said there's 50 Families are getting... who's administering that, those funds?

Dennis Doyle 38:03

We amended the contract that we had with RUPCO.

Chairman Cahill 38:06

Okay, thank you.

Dennis Doyle 38:07

RUPCO had an existing contract. So, we amended that contract. They had a lot more administrative work that they had to do with respect to this. But they didn't... the monies were the same, they kept the administrative monies the same. So, they're, they basically set, we went through a whole process of getting that approved from the state, we have the criteria approved by the state, through the Office of Community Development. We went through that entire process, and then we were able to release, release that, and do a press release on it. We also did releases through the Chamber and businesses, etc.

And they had a, they had, quite frankly, what we thought was a lukewarm response, given what we thought the need was. And some of the work that you talked about, hooking up with the Sheriff's Department. It's the nonprofit's that own housing, and the for-profit, subsidized housing folks, also have a pretty good handle on who's paying rent and who's not. And what they're telling us, essentially, is that, for the month of April and May, their rents actually went up, their rent collections actually went up, as compared to what happened in March. And a lot of that they think is the fact that the unemployment and stimulus checks that came through.

Chairman Cahill 39:16

Right. I believe that to be true. Right. Thank you. Is there any questions for Mr. Doyle or Dr. Wright?

Okay, thank you again, Dr. Wright. You seem to be here every month with us, you know, maybe next month we'll give you a month off. And I do want to just thank you again for taking the time, because you do not hesitate to pick up your phone when I call, and it seems like things are really going in the right direction there. And you know, I know that for Legislator Petit, who is on the call as well, I know that this was a big thing for her, and for Legislator Parete, as well in the previous Legislature. And I just, so, I'm very happy to see things are moving in the right direction. And we're, you know, really, you guys feel good with the folks that you're working with. So, again, thank you We can do just this, let us know.

Deputy Executive Wright 40:02

Well, thank you. And we're really delighted with the collaboration that we have and the progress that we're making. Since you mentioned it, I will be away the first week of August.

Chairman Cahill 40:12

So perfect.

Deputy Executive Wright 40:13

I can give you any highlights to present for me.

Chairman Cahill 40:17

Okay, great Thank you. Okay, so that's all we have on our agenda. Hold on one second. I just got a couple of chats here. Okay. That's what we said. I just want to check our agenda real quick. I believe that's all we have...

And so, does anyone have any new business?

Okay, at this at this time, I'll open it up for I know there are several people from the public on the call. And if you would like to say something, I'll ask Deputy Clerk Mahler to unmute the folks somehow or another we should be able to find out maybe through the chat function. If you'd like to make a comment.

So, Jay, why don't you just unmute everybody real quick. And then if someone wants to speak, we'll let him speak. So, does anyone have a public comment at this time? Okay, great. Thank you very much.

Okay. I'll entertain a motion...

Legislator Litts 41:26

Hearing none. I'll make a motion for an adjournment.

Chairman Cahill 41:28

Okay. Second from Legislator Uchitelle.

Chairman Cahill 41:35

Okay, folks, all in favor?

Committee Members 41:37

Aye.

Chairman Cahill 41:41

All right, thank you guys very much for a quick meeting. And I appreciate the other folks coming in and giving us some information.

Legislator Litts 41:48

Have a good night. Be safe and healthy.

Chairman Cahill 41:50

Thank you, everyone.

Legislator Uchitelle 41:51

Good night everyone, take care.

Legislator Heppner 41:52

Thank you, you too.