ULSTER COUNTY LEGISLATURE

DAVID B. DONALDSON, Chairman TRACEY A. BARTELS, Vice Chairwoman JONATHAN R. HEPPNER, Majority Leader KENNETH J. RONK, JR., Minority Leader VICTORIA A. FABELLA, Clerk



P.O. Box 1800 KINGSTON, NEW YORK 12402 Telephone: 845 340-3900 FAX: 845 340-3651

MINUTES

NOVEMBER 12, 2020

PUBLIC HEARING

6:00 PM

Powered by Zoom. Meeting ID: 986 6581 1600, And By Telephone (646) 558-8656

MEETING CALLED TO ORDER BY CHAIR: 6:05 PM

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE TO THE FLAG AND MOMENT OF SILENT MEDITATION: Lead by Legislator Peter Criswell.

ROLL CALL: Present: 21 Absent: 2 (Legislators Roberts and Fabiano)

Note: Legislators Fabiano and Roberts arrived at 6:15 PM.

6:00 PM - CALL OF THE PUBLIC HEARING BY CLERK: Tonight's third and final Public Hearing is on the Proposed 2021 Ulster County Budget and the Proposed 2021 – 2026 Capital Program

PUBLIC COMMENT: There were seven speakers signed up for public comment. (See transcript)

- 1. Brian Doyle, CEO Family Services
- 2. Joan Crawford, Chief Program Officer Family Services
- 3. Hanna Calhoun, Director UC Youth Advocate Program
- 4. Barbara Stirewalt, GM Mohonk Mountain House
- 5. Samantha Turk, Rocking Horse Ranch
- 6. Susan Mack, Executive Director YWCA of Ulster County
- 7. Tamara Murray, UC Lodging Coalition/Marketing & Sales Director Emerson Resort & Spa

MINUTES PAGE 2 NOVEMBER 12, 2020

Motion by Legislator Litts, Second by Legislator Gavaris to adjourn the public hearing. All in favor.

PUBLIC HEARING ADJOURNED: 6:30 PM

NEXT MEETING:

The next Regular Meeting of the Ulster County Legislature will be held **Tuesday**, **November 17**, **2020** at **7:00 PM.** Further Meeting details shall be forthcoming.

The Proposed 2021 Ulster County Budget and Proposed 2021 - 2026 Capital Program will be voted on at a Special Session of the Legislature on Tuesday, December 8, 2020 at 6:15 PM. Further Meeting details shall be forthcoming.

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J	Notes	Sent: Thursday, November 12, 2020 11:14 AM To: Victoria Ann Fabella <vfab@co.ulster.ny.us></vfab@co.ulster.ny.us>
	New folder	Subject: Comments for Nov. 12 Public Hearing
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		Attached please find comments I wish to have submitted to the Legislature for tonight's public hearing on the Proposed 2021 Budget.
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November 12, 2020

Ulster County Legislature PO Box 1800 Kingston, NY 12402

David B. Donaldson, Chair Tracey Bartels, Vice Chair Jonathan Heppner, Majority Leader Abe Uchitelle, Majority Whip Kenneth J. Ronk, Jr., Minority Leader Craig Lopez, Minority Whip Distinguished Members of the Ulster County Legislature

Dear Victoria A. Fabella, Clerk of the Ulster County Legislature,

I'm requesting to have the following included as record in the Public Hearing on the Proposed 2021 Ulster County Budget.

My name is Tamara Murray and I'm the marketing and sales director for the Emerson Resort & Spa and a board member of the Ulster County Lodging Coalition. The Ulster County Legislature has heard from several of my colleagues in the tourism industry over the course of the public hearings regarding the proposed 2021 budget.

Increasing the occupancy tax, a \$100,000 cut to the tourism budget, the elimination of the print travel guide, the relocation of the county's Visitors Center and Proposed Local Law #16 to eliminate the tourism department from the county charter suggest a deliberate dismantling of marketing and promotion for the county's third largest industry. I'm at a loss in attempting to understand the reasoning behind a complete reversal of support for tourism by the current administration. Especially now, when we need to capitalize most on encouraging and retaining tourism to build back revenue streams.

My colleagues have addressed in more detail the devastating affect an occupancy tax increase would have on our industry, even more so in light of the disastrous losses we have suffered due to COVID-19. This letter serves to address the negative impact of the additional proposed changes to the tourism department.

It's been said the travel guide would not be eliminated, but instead made digital. The Emerson Resort & Spa is located in the Catskills. The majority of our area does not have adequate broadband or cell service. The award-winning travel guide is the most requested source of information when guests arrive at the Emerson. Without cell service, printed material is the only way for tourists to map out places

5340 Route 28, Mt. Tremper, NY 12457 tel 845-688-2828 | fax 845-688-2655 | emersonresort.com



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Ulster County Legislature Proposed 2021 Budget Page 2

to visit, and be able to find them. We've had many instances where guests were not aware of the lack of cell service, some of these instances could have been dangerous without a printed source to refer to. The elimination of the print guide also means the elimination of distribution at throughway stops and other tourism distribution centers, which is another promotional mechanism relied upon not only for the travel guide, but also for the circulation of rack cards and pamphlets advertising the numerous fairs, festivals and special events held in the county. Additionally, with the recent influx of people relocating to Ulster County, the Kingston Barnes and Noble began distributing the travel guide as they were not able to keep enough local maps in stock to meet the demand.

To recently learn of Proposed Local Law #16 was another complete blow. Despite comment to the contrary, it appears the intent is to use the tourism budget for economic development purposes, effectively eliminating dedicated tourism promotion and support.

As you may know, the premier resorts and hotels in the County are all family or privately owned. We do not have large corporations backing us. Throughout the COVID-19 shutdown and subsequent occupancy restrictions, not to mention millions of dollars collectivity spent on safety protocols, we have battled through. It is our industry's destinations, hotel properties and re-imagined activities that are bringing tax dollars back to the county. I urge you to revoke these short-sited policy and occupancy tax decisions that ultimately have the potential to put the tourism industry out of business.

Sincerely,

Jamara Muray

Tamara Murray Marketing & Sales Director Emerson Resort & Spa

Ulster County Lodging Coalition

Ulster County Legislature 2021 Budget Public Hearing

Meeting Transcript November 12, 2020

Chairman Donaldson

Right, I'll call the meeting to order.

Deputy Clerk Mahler

Yes, sir.

Chairman Donaldson

Knock on my table. No, I wasn't knocking to get in or anything, it would. Would you say? Yes, sir. Anyway, okay.

Chairman Donaldson

I'm going to call the public hearing to order. This is on the proposed 2021 Ulster County Budget and the 2021-2026 Capital Program. This is our third and final Public Hearing on the Budget. Vicky?

Clerk Fabella

Do you want to do the pledge and then I'll do roll call? It's up to you.

Chairman Donaldson

Ok, lets due the pledge first and then will do roll call. And Peter Criswell, can you lead us in the Pledge?

Legislative Members

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 Donaldson

Please be seated. All right roll call.

Clerk Fabella Roll Call

Clerk Fabella Archer. **Chairwoman Archer** Here.

Clerk Fabella Bartels.

Legislator Archer Here

Clerk Fabella Bruno.

Legislator Bruno Here.

Clerk Fabella Cahill.

Chairman Cahill Here.

Clerk Fabella Corcoran.

Legislator Corcoran Here.

Clerk Fabella Criswell.

Legislator Criswell Here.

Clerk Fabella Delaune.

Legislator Delaune Here.

Clerk Fabella Donaldson. **Chairman Donaldson** Here.

Clerk Fabella Fabiano. (absent at time of roll)

Clerk Fabella Gavaris.

Legislator Gavaris Present.

Clerk Fabella Greene.

Legislator Greene Here.

Clerk Fabella Haynes.

Legislator Haynes Here.

Clerk Fabella Heppner.

Legislator Heppner Here.

Clerk Fabella Litts.

Legislator Litts Here.

Clerk Fabella Lopez. (absent at time of roll)

Clerk Fabella

Maio.

Legislator Maio Here.

Clerk Fabella Parete.

Legislator Parete Here.

Clerk Fabella Petit.

Legislator Petit Here.

Clerk Fabella Roberts. (absent at time of roll)

Clerk Fabella Ronk.

Legislator Ronk Present.

Clerk Fabella Uchitelle.

Legislator Uchitelle Here.

Clerk Fabella Walter.

Legislator Walter Here.

Clerk Fabella And Wawro.

Legislator Wawro

Here.

Clerk Fabella Twenty present and three absent.

Deputy Clerk Mahler

And Madam Clerk, I just admitted Legislator Lopez. I apologize.

Clerk Fabella

For the record, we will correct tonight's roll call. And there are twenty two legislators present and two absent.

Clerk Fabella

Tonight's public hearing, as the Chairman said, is on the proposed 2021 Ulster County Budget and the Proposed 2021-2026 Capital Program.

Clerk Fabella

So, we're going to run these Public Hearings the same way that we have. Our Deputy Clerk has already checked in a lot of the speakers. Tonight worked out beautifully. We're getting way too good at this. And, Mr. Chairman, I think you still want to stick with two minutes.

Chairman Donaldson

But they can go on for a little longer than that. I'll just try to wrap them up after that and go on. I mean, depending on how many speakers there are, they should be okay to speak for like three.

Clerk Fabella

All right sounds good. Jay, if you want to go ahead.

Deputy Clerk Mahler

All right, Mr. Doyle, if you would like to kick off the public hearing?

Brian Doyle

Oh, certainly, I'd be happy to. First of all, thank you for the opportunity. And secondly, I want to thank those people with whom I've been in touch over the past couple of weeks. And I'm thinking specifically, Chairman Donaldson, and also Amber and

Vicky, as well as Marc Rider in the County Executive's Office, around a great concern that we have pertaining to a service that we provide through Family Services.

Brian Doyle

I am the CEO for Family Services, a not for profit that has had a long standing, positive, very fruitful relationship with Ulster County. And of course, we continue to, to have that relationship in a very positive manner.

Brian Doyle

More to the point though, the work that we have done has been to the benefit of many families living within Ulster County. These are families who have had struggles with either neglect or abuse, and in sometimes instances where that is connected to substance use disorders and other traumatic impacts that had been faced by families.

Brian Doyle

Our work has been to strengthen families and to make sure that those families stay together as opposed to be broken apart by out of home placement. This makes all the sense in the world both from the standpoint of serving the humanity of these families, serving the well-being of the children, and the parents, and at the same time saving taxpayer dollars. Because prevention is such a big part of the work that we do. And so important in working with these families who have such great difficulty with many of the barriers they face.

Brian Doyle

Many of these parents, they have never had good parenting themselves. And so, with our support, with our services, with the curricula that we provide to them, we have been very successful in being able to help them stay together, to grow as a whole family, as a whole and healthy family.

Brian Doyle

We received alarming news that the contract for our work has been proposed as being reduced from \$544,000 to \$272,000 in 2021. This is alarming, certainly primarily, in terms of our work with the families, and the extent to which our capacity to address these needs will be undercut tremendously.

Brian Doyle

And secondly, the impact on the workforce that we employ and the extent to which we would have to put layoffs into place and cut expenses, that would be very difficult for the services being provided, and also, our workforce. Our workforce always puts front and center though, the well-being of the families, the children, the parents that we serve.

Brian Doyle

My understanding is that the 2021 proposed budget is, as a matter of fact, places an increase in that line. Under Family Assistance, we don't know all of the ins and outs of what makes up that line. But we are certainly a part of that line. And for us to have to endure a \$544,000 to \$272,000 reduction, a 50% reduction in our capacity to serve these families and individuals, is alarming, to say the least.

Brian Doyle

Now I'm told that part of this calculation is that the Department of Social Services will be able to pick up the slack by the way of their internal resources. What puzzles me and troubles me is that how is that going to be possible when it has not been possible in the past. And now going into 2021, how will it be possible given the fact that Department of Social Services staff, of its own, will be cut by 36 positions? It seems to me that that's untenable, but I need to be open to any explanations that are provided there.

Brian Doyle

I am urging the Legislature to reinstate that \$272,000 in cut that has been introduced as a proposal. And I implore all of you to be in touch with me if you need any further information. My information is available through either Amber, or Chair Donaldson, or Mr. Rider, for that matter.

Brian Doyle

I hope that's helpful in kind of outlining our concerns. It's a grave concern for the families who are at risk of being broken apart without the services that we provide.

Chairman Donaldson

Thank you. Thank you, Brian.

Deputy Clerk Mahler

Miss Calhoun, would you like to address the body?

Deputy Clerk Mahler

And that's *6 to unmute. Hannah Calhoun, would you like to address the Legislature? We can come back around to Hannah and move on to Ms. Crawford.

Joan Crawford

Thank you so much. Many of you heard from me on Tuesday, I too work for Family Services. And I'm deeply concerned about the proposed reductions to the Family Education Program, that \$272,000 reduction that Brian Doyle spoke about.

Joan Crawford

And Brian shared with me that there has been some talk about DSS picking up some of those services. But I can tell you that what I have heard directly from the Department of Social Services, particularly in our home visiting component, as well as the supervised visitation component, of our services, which means that families whose children are not currently living with them, still have visits with their children. That's really important to keep that bond with the parents, knowing that those families will be reunified.

Joan Crawford

Historically, the DSS had provided some of that supervision to families, but they did it in the DSS offices. So, caseworkers would have the family sit in their office, the caseworker would sit out in the hallway and do their work while the family got together.

Joan Crawford

DSS contracted with Family Services, because they knew that that was not sufficient to strengthen families. They needed professionals in the room with the parents and the kids, giving that feedback about how to strengthen that relationship, and how to build those parenting skills.

Joan Crawford

And as Brian Doyle mentioned, prevention saves money in the long run, right? If we can prevent these families from being disrupted and taken apart, that also saves taxpayer money. We know how much it costs to put children in care, both human toll of that, the trauma it places on the family and the children. But just simply dollars and cents. Prevention costs less than intervention.

Joan Crawford

Family Services is providing these critical prevention services to families who have multiple, multiple stressors. These are families that have had substance abuse issues, mental health issues, they're experiencing poverty. These are some of the neediest families in Ulster County. And to reduce services during a pandemic makes no sense at all to us.

Joan Crawford

And I think we'll be more-costly from a taxpayer perspective, then funding prevention services fully. So, we request that that \$272,000, for that contract, is restored. And I thank you for your time.

Chairman Donaldson

Thank you, Joan.

Deputy Clerk Mahler

All right, Miss Calhoun, would you like to hit *6 and address the body? Or were respectfully declining? Oh, there you go.

Hannah Calhoun

Hi, sorry. I was trying to do that earlier. My apologies. My name is Hannah Calhoun, I'm the Director of the Ulster County Youth Advocate Program. Just wanted to piggyback off of the two speakers who just went.

Hannah Calhoun

We work with high risk teams in the community to reduce out of home placement. So, we are also a preventative program. We have about a 90% success rate. And we serve currently we're serving about just under 30 families. So, our budget is also getting cut 50% in 2021.

Hannah Calhoun

So, that would mean discharging more than half of the families that we're working with, without proper completion of goals. These are youth who are, you know, very high risk of residential placement. We are often a lifeline, we provide food, clothes, supervision, community supervision is huge. We're currently offering in-house tutoring for several the youth who are unable to do online learning due to financial constraints. So, there's a wide range of services that we provide.

Hannah Calhoun

And ultimately, this is going to have huge lasting effects on, you know, not only the youth that we serve, but the staff that we have, and the community at large. So, I would just like to point that out. And I want to thank you for allowing me to speak.

Chairman Donaldson

Thank you. Thank you, Hannah.

Hannah Calhoun

Thank you.

Deputy Clerk Mahler

Next, if we could hear from Barbara Stirewalt. I apologize for butchering your last name.

Barbara Stirewalt

That's quite alright, you did it very well. Thank you very much. I am the General Manager at Mohonk Mountain House and I would like to make these remarks on behalf of Tom Smiley. Unfortunately, he's in a location where his Wi Fi is not cooperating for him.

Barbara Stirewalt

First of all, we would like to appreciate... to express our appreciation for being able to comment. As I'm sure many of you can imagine we are experiencing quite a bit of stress and it's day-by-day for us at this time. We did receive a note from Legislator Archer this afternoon. And we would like to express our appreciation for her message and the commitment to include us, and any future plans that would impact lodging businesses, including occupancy tax.

Barbara Stirewalt

And the second point with any Legislators, we would certainly invite the opportunity to meet, either with our properties or with the Ulster County Lodging Coalition, of which we are also a member, and have a first-hand conversation on what our industry, particularly, is going through with the current stress. And with that, I say, thank you very much for allowing us to have public comment.

Chairman Donaldson

Thank you. Thank you.

Deputy Clerk Mahler

Thank you. Next, if we could hear from Samantha Turk.

Samantha Turk

Hi. I'll be brief. My name is Samantha Turk and I am third generation Rocking Horse Ranch. My family has been rooted in this community since the 1950s, when my grandparents Toolie and Gloria first opened the ranch.

Samantha Turk

I trust and I know that there are Legislators present who do care for the businesses that support this county and who want to keep them alive. I thank you for your service to this county.

Samantha Turk

I'd also like to thank the Legislators for hearing our pleas around the occupancy tax. We truly appreciate your understanding in this completely unprecedented time. I implore you all to continue to be thoughtful about the hospitality businesses that have supported this county for decades. And I'm asking you to continue to invest in tourism in Ulster County to preserve your cash flow for decades to come. Thank you. And thank you for allowing me the chance to speak.

Chairman Donaldson

Thank you.

Deputy Clerk Mahler

Thank you, if we could next hear from Susan Mack. Ms. Mack, you'll need to hit *6 to unmute your phone.

Susan Mack

Thank you. I'm here. And I'm the Executive Director of the YWCA of Ulster County and on a separate phone listening in is Tracy Dumigan the Families Now director. And we hold the Families Now contract with the county. And we are a piece of the puzzle, missing puzzle, of Family Services is involved in.

Susan Mack

And we often go in first two families, to the homes of families where children are in imminent danger of being removed from their homes. And I will, because we've already talked about the need of that population and the dire straits that our community would be in if those services were cut. I'm going to just spend a couple of minutes talking about the data, the financial aspect.

Susan Mack

This year, year-to-date, Families Now served 153 children and only two were placed in care. And the families that we serve, when there's kids are removed from their home, they're mostly placed in congregate care, which is a group home. And the cost to the county, per week, of placing a child in congregate care is \$1,070.

Susan Mack

Now this year, year-to-date, and that's per kid. Yeah. And this year, year to date 151 children were kept out of congregate care by Families Now program. And the cost of that per child is \$162,000 total.

Susan Mack

Looking at 2021, where our budget is supposed to be cut by 50%, as are many of the other organizations on tonight. Our budget for this year is upwards of \$450,000. When they look at the state reimbursement rate of 2021, that reduces it by almost \$110,000 in terms of cost to the county.

Susan Mack

What we're looking at is a savings of hundreds of thousands, if not millions of dollars to the county, in this same budget year, like keeping kids out of placements and in their homes. And that's in addition to of course to the humanitarian aspect of it, the kids going through trauma, and the families undergoing off in generational cycles of abuse and neglect, and not knowing how to parent effectively, and how to keep their homes effectively.

Susan Mack

So, these services again, appear to be a savings in line items. But that the cost of having those kids placed is much more expensive. Again, our Families Now program, if all our kids who were not pleased this year, we're to go into foster care, or rather, congregate care, the cost to the county would be \$8,400,000, as opposed to the \$450,000 that our budget costs, less even the New York State reimbursement rates.

Chairman Donaldson

Susan, can you wrap it up a little, please.

Susan Mack

That's my piece of it. So, I just want to thank you very much for your time tonight. And I hope all those numbers didn't make your head spin. And just thank you for your dedication to the community.

Chairman Donaldson

Thank you, Susan.

Deputy Clerk Mahler

Chairman Donaldson, the last speaker that we have signed up is Tamara Murray.

Tamara Murray

Thank you. Thank you, Jay.

Tamara Murray

My name is Tamra Murray, and I'm the Marketing and Sales Director at Emerson Resort & Spa. I'm also a board member of the Ulster County Lodging Coalition. You've heard from several of my colleagues in the tourism industry over the course of these public hearings. And I want to thank the Legislature for the chance to be heard.

Tamara Murray

Increasing the occupancy tax, and by the way, also thank you to Legislator Archer for the email she sent earlier today concerning this. A \$100,000 cut to the tourism budget, the elimination of the print travel guide, the relocation of the counties Visitor Center, and Proposed Local Law number 16 to eliminate the Tourism Department from the county Charter, suggest a deliberate dismantling of marketing and promotion for the county's third largest industry.

Tamara Murray

I'm frankly at a loss to understand the reasoning behind a complete reversal of tourism support by the current administration. My colleagues have addressed in more detail the devastating effect on occupancy tax increase would have on our industry, even more so in light of the disastrous losses we have suffered due to COVID-19.

Tamara Murray

I'm speaking tonight to address the negative impact of the additional proposed changes to the Tourism Department. It's been said the travel guide would not be eliminated, but instead made digital. The Emerson Resort and Spa is located in the Catskills. The majority of our area does not have adequate broadband or cell service. The award-winning travel guide is the most requested source of information when guests arrive. Without cell service printed material is the only way for tourists to map out where they want to visit and to be able to find it.

Tamara Murray

We've had many instances where guests were not aware of the lack of cell service. Some of these instances could have been dangerous without a printed source to guide them. The elimination of the printed guide also means the elimination of distribution at Thruway stops and other tourism distribution centers. Additionally, with the recent influx of people relocating to Ulster County, but Kingston, Barnes and Noble began distributing the travel guide, because they were not able to keep enough local maps in stock to meet the demand. So, clearly print is not dead.

Tamara Murray

I recently learned a proposed Local Law No. 16 was another complete blow. Despite comment to the contrary, it appears the intent is to use the tourism budget for economic development purposes, effectively eliminating dedicated tourism promotion and support. The premier resorts and hotels in the county are all family or privately owned. We do not have large corporations backing us.

Tamara Murray

Throughout the COVID-19 shutdown and subsequent occupancy restrictions, not to mention millions of dollars collectively spent on safety protocols. We have battled through. It is our industries destinations, hotel properties, and reimagined activities that are bringing tax dollars back to the county.

Tamara Murray

I urge you to revoke these short-sighted policy and occupancy tax decisions that ultimately have the potential to put the tourism industry out of business. Thank you. And thank you for your service.

Chairman Donaldson

Thank you.

Deputy Clerk Mahler

Chairman Donaldson and Madam Clerk, those are all the speakers that I had signed up.

Chairman Donaldson

Alrighty. Could you, Vicky, just quote what the next meetings are? I do not have that stuff in front of me?

Clerk Fabella

Yes, no problem at all. I know, also, I just want to say, Legislators Roberts and Fabiano, both joined us. We have a full house. Our first... might be our first ever hearing with a full house for one of these budget hearings. So, that's great.

Clerk Fabella

The next regular meeting of the Ulster County Legislature will be held on Tuesday, November 17, 2020, at 7pm. And Mr. Chairman, you've already said that'll be by Zoom.

Chairman Donaldson

Alrighty. Having heard that I'd entertain a motion.

Legislator Litts

I'll make a motion for adjournment, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman Donaldson Okay. Thank you, Legislator Litts.

Legislator Gavaris Second.

Chairman Donaldson Seconded by...

Legislator Gavaris Gavaris.

Chairman Donaldson Gavaris. Thank you, Legislator Gavaris. And all those in favor?

Legislative Body Aye.

Chairman Donaldson All right, Public Hearing is adjourned. Thank you.

Legislator Litts

Have a good evening. Stay safe and healthy.