

**Ways &  
Means Committee  
Special Meeting Minutes**

**DATE & TIME:** May 13, 2021 – 5:00  
**LOCATION:** Powered by Zoom Meeting by dialing 1-646-558-8656,  
Meeting ID 940 9584 5993  
**PRESIDING OFFICER:** John Gavaris, Chairman  
**LEGISLATIVE STAFF:** Natalie Kelder, Amber Feaster, and Jay Mahler  
**PRESENT:** Legislators Kenneth J. Ronk, Jr., Lynn Archer, Heidi  
Haynes, and John Parete  
**ABSENT:** Legislators Tracey Bartels, Mary Beth Maio, and Eve Walter  
**QUORUM PRESENT:** Yes  
**OTHER ATTENDEES:** Minority Counsel Nicholas Pascale; Legislative Counsel  
Victor Cueva; Comptroller March Gallagher; Deputy  
Comptroller, Alicia DeMarco

- **Chairman Gavaris called the meeting to order at 5:00 PM**
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Chairman Gavaris opened the floor for discussion on the use of Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds.

Legislator Ronk expressed desire to ensure investments do not require recurring costs. Further, Legislator Ronk acknowledged the eligibility of Environmental Remediation and Public Safety projects, expressing interest in reviewing the tax foreclosure list for properties which have been determined to contain possible environmental issues. Legislative Chairman Donaldson agreed with Legislator Ronk, raising concern over environmental issues at the Tech City site. Legislator Gavaris cautioned against the time period for breaking even on such investments.

Legislator Haynes suggested investing a portion of the money to those with intellectual and developmental disabilities, emphasizing the impacts that COVID has had on this population.

Chairman Gavaris proposed investing in electronic charging stations, stating that there is a four year pay back period, that they are revenue generating, and that they contain no reoccurring costs. Further, Chairman Gavaris suggested paying cash for Capital Projects rather than bonding for them to save on interest costs.

Legislative Chairman Donaldson noted previous conversations proposing a crisis center, noting that this requires a facility with upfront and reoccurring costs but opens opportunities for programs which qualify for State reimbursement. Chairman Gavaris suggested outsourcing such services.

Legislator Parete emphasized that the term infrastructure should include the people and members of the community, especially the youth, noting the opioid epidemic and the lack of preventative programming, asking that the Committee consider programming which cautions youth against the severe effects of opioid usage.

Further discussion pursued on software investments and the possibility of joint municipality agreements.

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**Old Business:** None

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**New Business:**

Chairman Gavaris noted the memorandum received from the Legislative Programs, Education, and Community Services Committee requesting the 2022 Departmental Budget Request for Non-County Contract Agency Funding be equal to the 2021 Adopted Budget.

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Chairman Gavaris asked the members if there was any other business, and hearing none;

**Adjournment**

**Motion Made By:** Legislator Parete  
**Motion Seconded By:** Legislator Ronk  
**No. of Votes in Favor:** 5  
**No. of Votes Against:** 0

**Time:** 5:22 PM

**Respectfully submitted:** Amber Feaster  
**Minutes Approved:** June 8, 2021

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**Chairman Gavaris:** Alright, so the purpose of tonight's meeting was for, you know the Chairman had tasked each one of the different committees to discuss and come up with ideas for using the money for the American Rescue Plan, so I guess this is our chance to sort of discuss, so.

Leader Ronk.

**Legislator Ronk:** Thanks, um, you know, the the number one, you know, criterion that in my head, I think that we should put on the use of this money is that it should not be used on items that are going to cause recurring costs. I understand, I understand that there's no way to make sure that none of the things that we do are going to have recurring costs, but I'm talking about, you know, investing in things like personnel, or increasing services, you know, are, are things that I would be opposed to using the money for, because that's the way that, you know, New York State ended up in a huge budget deficit this year is that they've had several large infusions of cash to the tune of, of, like, you know, \$10 billion or so in various major settlements, that they did not use on things that were one-time costs, but more, you know, increasing programs and services, and then ended up in the hole that they were in prior to this federal bailout. So I, I just, I don't want to see us, you know, break the budget, you know, five years from now, because we have grand plans to use this, you know, two sets of \$17 million.

I have one more thing to mention that I you know, in our Audit Committee, our independent auditors, talked about some of the things that it can be used for and one of them is environmental remediation and public safety. And I think that one thing that we should do is take a really hard look at the tax foreclosure list, with specific interest on properties that we have

historically not taken title of, because of potential environmental risks, we may want to take some of those properties, which we've not. You know, there's one in my district that owes almost a half a million dollars in back taxes, but we haven't taken because it's a former junkyard. You know, and it would be, you know, a poor idea for the taxpayers, if we take that. In other districts, there are gas stations, service stations, things of that nature, where we could, you know, reasonably conclude that there could be, you know, environmental remediation needing to be done, you know, this set, this set of money is, I think, a really good opportunity for us to, to take some of those risks on behalf of the taxpayers, and put some of these properties back on the tax rolls, while also improving the environment. I think it goes both with taxpayer protections, and, you know, environmental responsibility, which I know that the county historically has been, you know, both of those things. So

**Chairman Gavaris:** Thank you. Chair Donaldson and then Parete.

**Legislative Chairman Donaldson:** Yeah, I concur with most of what the Minority Leader said. I mean, it is also like, for instance, a prime example. I don't know if people know the Cake Box. It's a small bakery on the corner of Greenkill Avenue and the crazy streets of, they all meet there, there's like five different streets meeting in one corner, actually six. But that one was, for 20 years laid dormant before he took it over, because it was a former gas station, and then they were able to get that thing cleared. But I concur with that. With this situation, then if we take a look at even Tech City, right now, Tech City, the Ginsburg owns the, the properties that he is paying the taxes on is the infrastructure part of the roads. Making it if we turn around and take over some of the other positions that are that are due for taxes, we may not be able to get to where, we won't be able to use these roads basically. It's a crazy scheme that they've done. And maybe that's another thing that we need to maybe just decide that we're going to bite the bullet bring him to court and take over the entire spot. But they have environmental issues there also and it's a significant piece of property. So and I'm sure there's a number of gas stations that are similar to that, you know, you can see them when you ride up and down and throughout some of the roads in Ulster County. An abandoned gas station and it's just sitting there. And it's not doing anything because nobody, you know that it's that paying taxes and people are afraid to take over. So and I think that that environmental remediation is a pretty good idea.

**Chairman Gavaris:** Legislator Parete.

**Legislator Parete:** You know, in, in commenting on the conversation that you just heard, I believe that from 4, 5-6 years ago, there is legislation on the books that was passed, to very specifically have a plan and a direction to invest county interests in environmental remediation of contaminated prop, properties. And it does, it really makes sense, since probably not an oftentimes a huge amount of money just more than maybe we can afford at a given time.

**Chairman Gavaris:** Anyone else? I'll just comment on that, you know, the, the, I would just be cautious, I don't think we should have a blanket statement that we're going to look at every single property that's up for grabs, because if the return on investment is 20 years away, because

the cost of the remediation far exceeds anything we would receive back in taxes or economic benefits, then we're upside down on the deal. And that was a big waste of money. And somebody benefited, but it certainly isn't us or the taxpayer. So if there are cases where we just haven't done the investigating work of determining how bad or if at all, if an area because you said gas stations are automatically assumed to be a hazardous waste, contaminated site. And they don't bother to go any further than that, if there was a way to do it, where we tested for to see if it truly is a problem, because it may not be one and then go ahead and do the minor work that is required, like removing a tank or something, or removing at least some soil. But I think before we should do it, I think they need each one of those situations needs to be vetted carefully, to make sure we just don't throw money down the drain.

**Chairman Gavaris:** Anybody else?

**Legislative Chairman Donaldson:** Does it?

**Chairman Gavaris:** It's going to be a quick meeting.

**Legislative Chairman Donaldson:** Does anybody have any specifics that they have been looking at in other committees or what have you? I know, you know, a lot of people have been talking about mental health issues, of course, and housing issues. But I'm not sure if they've had some other discussions with, you know, with the other issues.

**Chairman Gavaris:** Legislator Haynes.

**Legislator Haynes:** Yeah, you know, I've been thinking a little bit about, you know, providing some support to our most vulnerable populations. And that being people living with ID and DD, intellectual and developmental disabilities. They've been severely impacted by COVID in many ways. I tried to do some research without actually having to reach out to any of the agencies, the one agency that's at the forefront of my mind on a local level, is RCAL they provide so many services and supports to our county, and I, and you know, I felt awful, you know, this past session that when we had to cut their request, also. I just don't know exactly how we can help them, but I do know that they are in need, and that they have definitely been impacted by it. So a little bit more research would be, you know, definitely required and maybe hearing from them. And, you know, this is like the Pakora Center. The Arc of Ulster-Greene, you know, they're, they're still shut down there, you know, no one's going in for their programs, vans aren't running. Many of these residents are still in the group homes, nobody's doing their programs right now. And I just, I'm certain that this has impacted them on a level that's really needs to be better explained by somebody who's on the other side of it. So that's one of my thoughts on how to help one of our most vulnerable populations.

**Chairman Gavaris:** Thank you.

So I mean, I'll just chime in a couple things I've said to people individually. And, but I've said them also, you know, in a couple of group settings. I think that, you know, this is an opportunity. And I think the Minority Leader Ronk sort of alluded to the possibility that we could be spending money on something now that's going to cost us later. And that concerns me greatly. I don't want to see us incurring something with ongoing costs that you know, gotta pay the piper at some point on I don't want to see us turn a good thing into a bad thing. That, you know, I mentioned, I think at the last meeting, Ways & Means meeting earlier in the week about doing you know, supercharger stations for electric vehicles. That's something, that's its infrastructure, it would be an investment. And the payback, or at least as of two years ago, prior to COVID, was about four years. And then everything after that is profit from the sale of electric back for the customer. So that's something that is now a generating revenue project rather than a cost center for us. Some of the other things is and, and Amber has helped me with this about getting the, any of the bonds that we have outstanding currently, that are anything above I would say 3% interest, we should be paying that off, and go ahead and use that interest savings now towards funding other projects. And we're just, we're buying a bus, we've got building projects to do, we've got road projects, let's pay cash. We don't have to bond everything, especially now that we've got money out there. Let's not bond it, the interest that we're saving, use that money and reinvest it into other programs. But I think we need to look at projects that will have a long term financial benefit back to the county, not just the short term programmatic benefit.

Chairman Donaldson.

**Legislative Chairman Donaldson:** But, yeah, I don't think they we are allowed to pay off our bonds with the rescue money, are we?

**Chairman Gavaris:** For infrastructure, we don't have to have them.

**Legislative Chairman Donaldson:** Yeah, they're meant to, I mean, we can do infrastructure without bonding. But if we already have a bond, I believe they, in other words, it's not, you know, they, they want us to spend the money not not to use it to pay off debt, they want us to spend our, spend that money did for economic development purposes, that's you know.

**Chairman Gavaris:** I, I wasn't referring to past projects, more, more referring about bonds that we we've going to do, we haven't actually done the work yet.

**Legislative Chairman Donaldson:** Right, well, there's also issues that I know that was brought up by some in reference to mental health issues. And, you know, like, for instance, you know, having, you know, people talking about getting beds back here, but you know, they may not be the best way of dealing with it. If we had some type of a crisis center, but that would cost an upfront money. And sometimes you need to have a physical building. And once you have the physical building, that you may end up having to pay for, that cost, but then once the programs are run, programs can be run and reimbursed through the state, you know, through various, you know, you know, departments within the state. I know that Eve and, and Criswell was looking at

some of those and they went down to Poughkeepsie and they seemed to look like it would be able to be self-sustaining once you got the building and got the thing running, which would you know, that's that's the money. And I think that may be something another item that could be looked at.

**Chairman Gavaris:** And, and to that point Chair Donaldson, I haven't had a chance to reach out to Legislator Walter yet to talk about this. But, you know, there's a slightly different way you can get the same goal accomplished, and it doesn't cost us as much money. And it gives a lot more flexibility and choice. And that is come out with an RFP for clinical social work, psychologists, psych psychiatrists, whatever it is that we need to fill the gaps of mental health in Ulster County. Just like insurance companies do with a private provider, they agree to a set hourly amount. And any provider who wants to join on to that amount can be a provider for the county. Now you've got throughout the entire county, you've got private practices that are getting additional business, and people have a choice. It's not one location as to where to go, that's probably going to want to be in the Kingston area, let's be frank. And you have the ability to access that, those resources closer to home. And if you don't like the person that you're seeing, you have a choice because there's potentially 2, 3, 4, 5 others close enough to you that you can go to instead who will accept the per diem rate that you're willing to offer. And this way, we're not the employer, we let the professionals do this job on their own. We're just having a way to fund, what we, what we would be funding privately anyway, if we do it ourselves.

**Chairman Gavaris:** Chairman, sorry, Legislator Parete.

**Legislator Parete:** Um, you know, we just heard a presentation on maybe how complicated is gonna be before we get down the road. It's kind of mind boggling to me. But since we're dealing with 'what ifs', what if maybe a good project. You know, I have for many, many years supported or advocated for investment in the infrastructure. I have always included and maybe expanded in most people's minds. My definition of infrastructure was also the people, members of the community, especially the young people in our community, are part of the infrastructure, we get roads and bridges, we wouldn't need roads and bridges, and sewer systems if we didn't have people. And, you know, there was a Local Law passed in 2013. Local Law No. 1, which I think I did mail out everybody, we still have a serious epidemic of opioid abuse. And I have said many times that I do think the county and the state have done a good job in trying to save those who have difficulties have problems. Some would say they could do better, but that's always the case. But I see nothing, in prevention, not just awareness, but prevention. And back in 2013, some of us saw this thing coming. And there is legislation on the books to cooperate, and maybe now the schools that didn't want to do it back then, and other members of our, of our government didn't go on to cooperate, maybe because they didn't think of it. But to identify youngsters of needs, well, maybe it's time to look at these youngsters as part of the infrastructure and start introducing them at the very earliest stages, to the, to the terrible, terrible burden that these opioids and the, and the, the the addiction is doing. Um, I'm really not being critical of anybody. But the state and the county has done a good job of trying to help me if I, if I've got myself a problem. But they're not doing anything for the little kindergarten kids through first

and third and seventh and into the high school. Say don't do it pal, because you're gonna ruin yourself. And I think maybe some of you wouldn't agree with bodies, people, real lives are part of the infrastructure. But we wouldn't need what I expanded on before if we didn't have these people. And I think it's something that we could certainly think about, and see if it even fits into parameters. I don't know if it does or not.

**Legislative Chairman Donaldson:** The um

**Chairman Gavaris:** Legislator [inaudible]

**Legislator Parete:** Thank, thank you, Mr. Chairman.

**Legislative Chairman Donaldson:** John?

**Chairman Gavaris:** Yes.

**Legislative Chairman Donaldson:** Yeah, I don't know if Natalie or Amber or whomever that's looked at, in other words, using money dealing with the financial systems that we have, and where we would be able to invest in that to make them better for us for operating in the future. I you know, I know, we've ever already been, done some investments in those. Have you guys thought about your dream financial system?

**Legislator Parete:** You are you asking me Dave? Or, or

**Legislative Chairman Donaldson:** No, I was asking Amber and Natalie.

**Legislator Parete:** Oh I'm sorry. Okay.

**Amber Feaster:** I will say, in, in my experience with fund accounting systems, I do feel like we have one of the best that is out there. I've seen some pretty bad fund accounting software's. And this is, this is by no means bad. I do think that the payroll system should be or could be integrated. And I know that's been a discussion in the past, but I'm not sure where that is currently.

**Chairman Gavaris:** I just wanted to point out, though, that if, Legislator Parete, if, if Chairman Donaldson is asking you about technology, then I'm very concerned, if that's who he was going to.

**Legislator Parete:** Yeah, and, and, and rightly so sir. You should be concerned.

**Chairman Gavaris:** Comptroller Gallagher.



**Comptroller Gallagher:** I have a couple of thoughts on that. Um, one is that we don't allow electronic payments right now in most categories. And many of the towns do allow, certainly on the tax side, electronic payments, and we had actually considered going to RFP. I'm sure you guys recall right before the pandemic and it was a large number. But I do think that would be something worth looking at, again, to have a revenue collection system fully integrated with what we're, you know, with our financial system. I think we might want to consider something like OpenGov. Um, you know, it's not the only platform, there's a number of them. But there's a level of transparency that we don't have that Dutchess County has, that many other communities have. It does take an initial upfront investment, you know, that could be sizable. So, you know, not, not millions of dollars, but probably \$100k or more. So I think that's worth looking at. And on the payroll side, there is discussion right now that finance is looking at a way to set up a system where employees can access information on their own, you know, pay stubs, and that sort of thing. But I agree 100% with Amber, I think she's right on. We should have a fully integrated payroll system that would really, I think, make a big difference and probably create a lot of efficiencies, because you're seeing a lot of payroll changes, and, you know, imports and, you know, stuff that has to happen, because we use Time Force and Munis going into New World. So those are my thoughts. Thanks.

**Chairman Gavaris:** Again, unrelated that I can tell you if they, if there's a way to do it as a, a joint group purchase through the other towns, I know Wawarsing they, they would love to do a contactless payment system, but don't have the ability to fund it right now, themselves, so and Village of Ellenville as well.

Anybody else?

Wow. Okay.

All right. I'm just a heads up and if you can think about it, I did mention at the end of last Ways & Means meeting, but we'll talk about it again at the next one, the Legislative Programs is requesting \$908,000 and change. So just give some thought as to what direction you'd like to go with on that for the next meeting. If nothing else, I'll entertain a motion to adjourn.

**Legislator Parete:** I'll move to adjourn.

**Legislator Ronk:** Second.

**Chairman Gavaris:** Second, Leader Ronk. All those in favor?

**Group:** Aye.

**Chairman Gavaris:** Opposed? Thank you all.

**Legislator Parete:** Thank you, sir.