

**Ways &  
Means Committee  
Special Meeting Minutes**

**DATE & TIME:** November 16, 2021 – 2:30  
**LOCATION:** Legislative Chambers, 6<sup>th</sup> Floor, County Office Building  
**PRESIDING OFFICER:** John Gavaris, Chairman  
**LEGISLATIVE STAFF:** Natalie Kelder, Amber Feaster  
**PRESENT:** Legislators Kenneth J. Ronk, Jr., Lynn Archer (via zoom), Tracey Bartels (via zoom), Heidi Haynes, John Parete, and Eve Walter  
**ABSENT:** Legislator Mary Beth Maio  
**QUORUM PRESENT:** Yes  
**OTHER ATTENDEES:** Legislator Abe Uchitelle; Clerk of the Legislature, Victoria Fabella; Deputy County Executive Rider; Commissioner of Finance Burt Gulnick; Comptroller March Gallagher; Deputy Comptroller Alicia DeMarco; Sheriff Juan Figueroa; District Attorney Dave Clegg; Deputy Director of Budget Chris Kelly; Financial Analyst – Budget Tosca Sweeney; Patricia Doxsey, Daily Freeman

- **Chairman Gavaris called the meeting to order at 2:33 PM**
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**District Attorney Clegg** – District Attorney Clegg spoke from 2:33 PM to 2:38 PM.

*Assistant District Attorney Salary Adjustments* - District Attorney Clegg stated that this amendment is for salary adjustments that would make it easier to hire while setting two entry level positions to be equal, all being nearly budget neutral.

*CSEA Personnel Adjustments* - District Attorney Clegg explained that he consulted his employees and the Ulster County Personnel Office, and it was determined that two employees were eligible to be under the title ‘Legal Secretary’ while one could be a ‘Legal Aide’.

Legislator Ronk asked if a desk audit was completed to verify if the work performed qualifies for these Title Changes and if not, would the District Attorney be open to completing a desk audit with Personnel. District Attorney Clegg agreed that a desk audit would be fine.

*Office of Violence Against Women Grant* – District Attorney Clegg explained that this is a \$500,000 grant from the Department of Justice and will not cost the county any money but will help the response to domestic violence across the county.

**Commissioner of Finance Gulnick** – Commissioner Gulnick spoke from 2:38 PM - 2:41 PM.

*Deputy Directory of Environment* - Commissioner Gulnick stated that the proposed increase to the Deputy Director of Environment is due to the compression issues within the department and the internal candidate being considered for this position would make more with the new union contract than under the current Deputy Director salary.

*Sheriff Discovery Personnel Upgrade* - Commissioner Gulnick stated that a desk audit was completed with personnel and an IT Specialist should move from a grade 15 to a grade 17.

*Sheriff COSSAP* – This was determined to be submitted in error.

*Sheriff Port Security Grant* – Commissioner Gulnick stated that the Sheriff applied for a Port Security Grant, but it was not awarded to Ulster County. Therefore, it is requested that the Capital Project be removed from the Capital Plan.

*Sheriff UCSEA Union Settlement* – Commissioner Gulnick explained that this amendment is the increase associated with the recently settled Ulster County Sheriff's Employee Association (UCSEA) agreement and is a \$1.3 Million increase to the County Executive proposed budget and will come from fund balance. The resolution associated with this agreement is currently before the Legislature.

**Chairman Gavaris** – Chairman Gavaris spoke from 2:41 PM – 3:07 PM.

*ARPA Positions* – Chairman Gavaris explained that this amendment brings the salaries of these vacant positions down to the amounts that were approved by the Legislature when these positions were created in August 2021. Commissioner Gulnick noted that the process of giving raises to all positions in the MGT / Non-Union Group is the same procedure as the unionized employee groups. Legislator Ronk requested information on the individuals in which offers have been extended for these three positions and Commissioner Gulnick agreed to provide it.

*Clerical Pool* – Chairman Gavaris explained that this amendment creates a pool where individuals can be cross-trained to work in multiple departments and share staff throughout the county. The idea is that during less busy times in one department, an employee could be shifted to a busier department. Deputy Budget Director Kelly stated that the county already works this way and was proven during the pandemic but suggested having a more in-depth conversation regarding this topic and looking at specific areas such as grant management. Legislator Walter noted that many of the positions presented are within her committee and there are specialties within each of the departments, such as the District Attorney and Probation. However, Legislator Walter stated her support of the concept of shared services. Chairman Gavaris reiterated that this would only be for the times when a department can spare an individual.

*Energy Consultant* – Chairman Gavaris noted that the HVAC system is not optimized in the County Office Building and most likely is not in other county properties as well, explaining that there are contractors who will do an evaluation and get paid out of the savings that are created from the implemented measures. Budget Director Kelly stated that the Department of

Environment completes energy assessments and should be engaged in the conversations as there is a current Capital Project to replace HVAC systems throughout the county.

*Inflationary Adjustment* – Chairman Gavaris stated that prices are increasing, and he was originally informed that inflation is not considered while creating the budget. Commissioner of Finance Gulnick informed the committee that fuel, electric, and gas all include inflation in the proposed budget plus the professional services lines are based upon the actual upcoming contracts.

*Information Services Evaluation* – Chairman Gavaris stated that this amendment is for an evaluation of our IT needs and the current system. The cost would only be a portion of the actual savings that the county receives.

*Sales Tax* – Chairman Gavaris expressed concern that the 2022 sales tax projection would not be realized. Commissioner of Finance Gulnick stated that the 2021 Actual Sales Tax will exceed the 2022 Budgeted value but does expect that growth to slow down.

*Unsettled Labor Union Contracts* – Chairman Gavaris stated that there are several labor unions contracts that remain to be settled and would like to reserve money for when these ultimately do become finalized. Legislator Ronk expressed concern regarding putting a number on the unsettled labor contracts and would prefer to leave the money in fund balance adding that the opinion of the Labor Attorneys is that it could be considered negotiating in bad faith. Commissioner of Finance Gulnick added that PBA could go to binding arbitration, which inherently has additional costs.

**Legislator Ronk** – Legislator Ronk spoke from 3:07 PM to 3:53 PM.

*Communications Specialist Position* – Legislator Ronk stated that he does not view this position as something that is vital to the operation of county government and has submitted two amendments involving this position. This amendment removes the position completely. Deputy Budget Director Kelly stated that communicating to the public and timely dissemination of critical information is an essential part of the duties of the County Executive's Office and they do not support the removal of this position.

*Communications Specialist Salary* – This amendment is restoring the salary to the 2019 Adopted Value and adjusting for days and the 3% 2022 COLA (cost of living adjustment). Deputy Budget Director Kelly stated that they do not support lowering the salary of this position.

*Constituent Service Navigator* – This amendment removes the newly proposed Constituent Service Navigator division. Legislator Ronk explained that it is modeled after the Recovery Service Center, which was created out of Covid. Deputy Budget Director Kelly informed the Committee that when there was a lull in the number of Covid cases, the provided services were starting to transition away from Covid. Legislator Ronk asked if there was a way to quantify the number of constituents that would not have been served through the traditional phone tree or direct calls to departments.

Legislator Archer requested the data that was used to make the decision to create this division and noted that most entities are moving to automated systems as it is more cost effective than adding staff. Deputy Budget Director Kelly explained that though this new system there will be an ability to geolocate, categorize and collect data.

Legislator Walter questioned if this was separate than the Covid hotline and expressed apprehension in the added efficiency and effectiveness of the county government. Deputy Budget Director Kelly explained that this is the same model as the Covid hotline and an extension of 2-1-1 or 3-1-1 systems.

Legislator Haynes confirmed that the Covid hotline also received the ERAP (Emergency Rental Assistance Program) and LRAP (Landlord Rental Assistance Program) phone calls.

Legislator Archer asked what the average intake of calls per day was. Deputy Budget Director Kelly stated that it has fluctuated based upon what is going on within the community and have been as many as 500-600 per day.

Legislator Ronk noted that the county could save money on the Constituent Service Navigator by replacing clerical staff within the individual departments.

Legislator Walter requested the data on the phone calls that were not vaccine / Covid related and suggested using ARP (American Rescue Plan) money also noting that she would prefer to ensure departments, such as the Department of Social Services, are staffed appropriately.

*Director of Budget & Innovation* – This amendment defunds the Director of Budget & Innovation position. Legislator Ronk questioned if by creating this position, it would remove the budget duties from the current Commissioner of Finance who is also the Budget Director. Deputy Budget Director Kelly stated that this position is not replacing the Budget Director, it merely reflects the combined name of the department.

Legislator Ronk asked what the expected innovations would be from the new Director of Budget & Innovation. Commissioner of Finance Gulnick noted that there was more transparency in the 2022 County Executive Recommended Budget and expects that trend to increase, while acquiring additional data from the departments.

Legislator Walter questioned how this position would interact with the 3 ARPA (American Rescue Plan Act) positions. Deputy Budget Director Kelly answered that innovation is based on internal consulting, performance measurements, performance management, and creating a system to use data to better inform policy making decisions. Commissioner Gulnick stated that the three ARPA positions that were added this year will be doing all of the work but the project will be overseen by the Chris Kelly and himself. ‘

Legislator Ronk noted that this position could be better suited in the Comptroller’s Office or the Legislature.

Legislator Walter added that she would like to see how the County will be saving money by the existence of this position and questioned what new data the Legislature will receive.

*Commissioner of Finance* – This amendment is to give a raise to the Commissioner of Finance. Legislator Ronk noted that the Commissioner has likely saved the county millions of dollars over his tenure and even with the raise it is still lower than the Dutchess County Commissioner of Finance

Legislator Haynes echoed the praise for Commissioner Gulnick.

*Mental Health Personnel* – This amendment removes the newly added Commissioner of Mental Health and creates two new Mental Health Specialist positions. Legislator Ronk expressed his uncertainty in fixing a clinical problem by creating administrative positions and felt that clinicians may be more useful. Deputy Budget Director Kelly referenced the groundwork laid out in the report from the Behavioral Taskforce and preferred to defer to the experts in the field.

Legislator Walter noted that this is a field where she has a lot of experience and this project will need strong administrative oversight which will ultimately improve clinical services. The administrative staff at the county will help individual providers learn how to work with payers. Legislator Walter also commented on the strong vision and focus of the team.

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*The committee took a brief recess*

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Legislator Uchitelle spoke from 5:24 PM to 5:32 PM.

*Adjustments to Social Services Contractual* – Legislator Uchitelle explained that this amendment increases the amount of money allotted to various Family of Woodstock contracts to accommodate the Living Wage Law recently enacted by the Ulster County Legislature, noting that those who help the most needy deserve to be paid a living wage.

Legislator Ronk confirmed that about half of the amendment is being offset by Staid and Federal Aid while the other half is coming from fund balance.

Legislator Walter asked if the Executive's Office was able to separate out which of the programs were covered by State / Federal funds or grants and how many individuals are impacted by this funding. Deputy Executive Rider responded that this amendment would increase the per diem rates at the two shelters, Washburn House and Family House, while providing \$50,000 to their three outreach centers – which is for the Living Wage.

Legislator Uchitelle noted that there is a retention problem at Family of Woodstock due to the current low wages and expressed hope that this situation would now improve.

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**New Business:**                      None

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**Old Business:** None

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

**Adjournment**

**Motion Made By:** Legislator Walter

**Motion Seconded By:** Legislator Ronk

**No. of Votes in Favor:** 6

**No. of Votes Against:** 0

**Time:** 5:32 PM

**Respectfully submitted:** Natalie Kelder

**Minutes Approved:** December 7, 2021