

ULSTER COUNTY LEGISLATURE
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, HOUSING, PLANNING & TRANSIT COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES - MAY 26, 2009
MEETING HELD AT: UCAT– One Danny Circle, Kingston, NY

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

PRESENT: Legislator Hector Rodriguez – Chair Legislator Wayne Harris
 Legislator Gary Bischoff Legislator Joseph Roberti
 Legislator Peter Loughran

ABSENT OR EXCUSED: Legislator Mary Sheeley - Village Bd Schedule Conflict
 Legislator Catherine Terrizzi – Vacationing out of State

OTHERS ATTENDING:

Dennis Doyle, Director of Planning; Lance Matteson, President of UCDC;
Nancy E.K. Schaef, Director of OET;

Guest: Mike Berardi, Former Legislator, IDA Chairman and Current Railroad Advisory Committee Member

Chairman Rodriguez called the meeting to order at 6:02 pm and asked for a motion to approve the April 22, 2009 minutes. **Motion was made by Legislator Loughran, seconded by Legislator Harris. All were in favor.**

OLD BUSINESS:

None

NEW BUSINESS:

Discussion: At the request of the Committee, Mike Berardi provided an update on the County Railroad relative to his involvement through being a member of the Railroad Advisory Committee. Chairman Rodriguez pointed out that there is both support and frustration within the Committee and the full Legislature in terms of the railroad and lack of progress with its development, pointing out no one is specifically to blame. Mike briefly touched on the following:

- Comprehensive planning with the railroad has been difficult. The Railroad Advisory Committee can only advise on railroad issues and the lines are not clearly defined as to who they should report to. They have typically interfaced with the Public Works Committee but there is not a clear and routine line of communication.

- Catskill Mountain Railroad became frustrated throughout last year as they felt concerns and issues were not being addressed. “Right people were not at the table” that could make decisions and move things along

- Charter government implementation raised questions as to how the Committee would operate in the future and what branch of government would be responsible with issues concerning the railways

- Contract with Catskill Mt. Railroad will be ending in 2016 and the contract is old and outdated now – doesn’t take into account current ways things could/should be dealt with. There

is talk of re-negotiating and Catskill Mt. Railroad has acquired the services of a railroad lawyer now to assist with legal matters in general. FEMA/SEMA reimbursements for flooded tracks and erosion are problematic now due to lease situation. Planning Director Dennis Doyle pointed out the problem lies in the Catskill Mt. Railroad is deemed a private corporation and the lease assigns maintenance to the Catskill Mt. Railroad.

- Lack of inventory on easements and right of ways that exist, that have been asked for, etc. Form was designed, inclusive of a fee for processing; it's not routinely used. As a County asset, this type of inventory should be in place and would be beneficial.

- Feels County Executive needs to make decision as to what will be done with railroad, determining the County position.

Legislator Bischoff brought it to everyone's attention that in Laws and Rules, a request was made for the Comptroller's Office to audit the Catskill Mt. Railroad and it's relationship with the County, the IDA, etc. Also raised the issue that there are individuals who oppose the rails in favor of strictly trails and asked if Railroad people are resistive to trails. After much discussion, it was ascertained you have people on both ends of the spectrum and some in the middle, that feel rails and trails would work. Liabilities always come up with co-existence of trails.

Legislator Harris raised concern that engineering services do not exist that avail themselves to assessing and making recommendations about the rails and trails. He is in agreement that a report of some kind needs to be completed that gives the County a starting point as to what direction to go in with the railroad.

Legislator Loughran, a proponent of railroad development as an economic/tourism initiative, raised concerns as to whether Catskill Mt. Railroad should continue to be the lead. Their private for profit status creates issues with obtaining certain funding, etc.

Planning Director Doyle indicated it is a County asset therefore County funds can be invested. Suggested IDA be asked for a report on the condition of the asset as the agency who holds the lease with the County. RRAC is referenced in lease so it needs to be in existence, should have a varied membership and be utilized on railroad issues.

Announced that a million dollar earmarked state grant obtained by Assemblyman Cahill has been offered to the County to develop trails on the rails in the route 28 corridor. Trails Committee is considering what to do with this funding.

Chairman Rodriguez raised concern that a current problem that exists is that we continually wed ourselves to the Catskill Mt. Railroad group, which comes with a number of problems. He feels we should be open to looking at other Railroad groups if necessary and that may have more capabilities in developing the railroad. Mike Berardi acknowledged that the Catskill Mt. Railroad people are now admitting that the goals they set may have been too lofty and grand – that they don't have the resources to do what they would like. They are well aware that they have not been able to live up to their lease. Perhaps we should look at other potential Railroad entities.

Chairman Rodriguez feels there is a need for individuals to keep the development of the railroad as a separate issue from the problems that exist with Catskill Mt. Railroad.

Planning Director Doyle raised the need for parties on both sides to come together and see what each side is looking for and where agreements and disagreements can be reached. Priorities need to be established and ideally it bears out you can have rails and trails co-exist. As for eliminating the Catskill Mt Railroad, perhaps they should be directed to have discussions with other groups that they can partner with and experience success.

Chairman Rodriguez requested Planner Doyle have some discussion in the morning with County Executive Hein about the railroad issues and then Chairman Rodriguez would call County Executive Hein in the afternoon. Chairman Rodriguez will do some research as to what other Railroad Companies exist. Legislator Bischoff suggested some steam companies be looked at.

Chairman Rodriguez would like to see the Railroad Advisory Committee have an Economic Development Committee member appointed to the RRAC. Legislator Bischoff has some civilians he would like to recommend for membership as well.

Legislator Loughran informed the Committee that in the Public Works Committee there is currently a resolution being considered which would set up to 20% of construction costs to go toward development of trails when roadways, bridges, etc. are repaired and/or newly built. Planning Director Doyle indicated it's not unreasonable to consider such ideas as it saves money to do it as upgrades are being made or new pathways are being implemented rather than have to go back later on. Legislator Roberti brought up that there are ways to calculate costs based on standardized figures that exist.

RESOLUTIONS:

Amending the 2009 Ulster County Budget – Office of Employment and Training for Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) – 2009 NYS Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance – Department of Employment and Training. . **Motion was made by Legislator Harris, seconded by Legislator Loughran. All were in favor.**

Discussion: Nancy E.K. Schaefer explained the above resolution pertained to a grant and was the TANIFF Program which is approved yearly for summer employment of youth. OET Board will meet tomorrow (Thursday) to discuss program and United Way will do payroll.

Nancy took this opportunity to relay that the Legislature will be seeing a second resolution pertaining to Summer Youth Employment and temporary work which came about due to the availability of stimulus monies. It's a much larger package that will be listed on the abstract for the Legislature to consider at the June 10th meeting. The contract will be managed with the assistance of UCCC due to its size and the urgency to get things in place rapidly. The College has components readily available and can quickly set up the program that needs to be initiated.

Motion to Adjourn:

Upon Legislator Bischoff needing to leave, Chairman Rodriguez called the meeting as there was no longer a quorum. Meeting adjourned at: 7:30 PM

Submitted by: Mary L. Carey, Clerk of the Legislature