

**OFFICE OF THE ULSTER COUNTY LEGISLATURE  
MEETING MINUTES**

**NAME OF GROUP:** Commission On Reapportionment

**DATE:** January 19, 2011

**TIME:** 3:00 P.M.

**PLACE:** UCOB, Legislative Chambers, 6<sup>th</sup> Floor

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** Vernon Benjamin, Paul Benkert, Michael Catalinotto, Cynthia Lowe, Rich Messina, Dare Thompson, Bill West

**MEMBERS EXCUSED:** None

**OTHERS ATTENDING:** Dennis Doyle, Planning Director; Robert Leibowitz, Sr. Planner; Clinton Johnson, First Assistant County Attorney; Geraldine Romano, Legal Secretary; Laura Walls, Assistant Comptroller; Hugh Reynolds, Reporter; Tom Kadgen, LWV; Victoria Fabella, Deputy Clerk, Legislature; Beth Murphy, Saugerties Resident; Mike Harkavy, Saugerties Resident

- The meeting was called to order by Bill West at 3:04PM.
- Oath of Office

Bill West told the Commission that Bea Havranek contacted the Legislative Office and suggested the members of the Commission sign an oath of office.

Mike Catalinotto explained that his research showed that one of the indicia of being a public officer is the taking of an oath. As you know, you can't be a member of this group if you are a public officer. Are we creating a problem for ourselves by doing it? Mr. Catalinotto does not see a need for it. He said the group can agree as a whole to sign the oath, but he is just raising the point.

The Commission Members unanimously agreed to not sign the oath at this time. The subject can be revisited should the County Attorney provide ample reason for doing so.

First Assistant County Attorney Clinton Johnson explained that there is a 30 day window for completing oaths. Therefore, he believes Bea Havranek will clarify relatively quickly whether taking the oath is a necessity or not.

Bill West commented that Legislative Counsel is aware of the County Attorney's suggestion to have oaths signed by Commission Members and will provide further advisement should it be necessary.

- Member Introductions

Cynthia Lowe explained that the Commission is a group of equals. There is no official Chair of the Commission. All members may add to the agenda or comment as to what's going on. Bill West is acting as a de facto chair. Despite this, all members are encouraged to speak up and express his/her opinion at any time.

Vernon Benjamin- Former County Legislator from the 1980's. Applied for this position because he heard it on NPR and was struck by what Gerald Benjamin said; just the way he used the word "fair" in talking with Dr. Chartock on that day. Vernon thought that if he didn't apply he might be kicking himself later. There is no other motivation for serving on this Commission. Vernon is proud to be here and would like to reiterate that we are here to get a job done and do it in a way that satisfies the people of Ulster County. If anyone doesn't think we will accomplish this, they might as well leave the table now.

Cynthia Lowe- She have no past, current or future political aspirations. Cynthia is involved in this because she feels the Charter is a valuable change in the way we govern ourselves in Ulster County and she wanted to contribute to that process. She believes that if the group makes this a thoughtful and nonpartisan process, we'll succeed in what we are trying to do. While Vernon thinks that we are going to satisfy the residents of UC, I think that the best transaction will be if everyone is slightly unhappy. We don't want everyone to be completely satisfied or we haven't really done our job. In my day job, I'm the Director of the Community Foundation in UC. This is all part of making UC a better place.

Rich Messina- Rich is a Marlboro resident who is married with three children. He works full-time as a sales manager for a construction company. Rich is very active in the community. He has been involved in the Lion's Club, Fire Company, Make a Wish, the local chapter of the National UNICO organization; just about every organization out there. Rich got involved with this Commission because he felt it was his time to give back to the County.

Paul Benkert- Born and raised in Kingston, now lives in Highland. Paul is married and has three young children. He has been involved with the Rotary for 15 years and is currently in his second term as President. Paul got an email about the Commission on Reapportionment from the County Executive's Office and he thought it sounded interesting. He was involved in politics as a city committeeman 15 years ago. Looking at the districts the way there are now doesn't make sense to him. Paul wants to get the job at hand done and he wants to do it right.

Michael E. Catalinotto- Michael is an attorney with the firm Maynard, O'Connor, Smith & Catalinotto. He is a former Chair and member of the Kingston Hospital Board. He has been on the Council of the SUNY New Paltz institution. He was the Chairman of the Republican Committee in Saugerties, but is no longer active in politics. Michael took this opportunity because it is something novel. It's never been tried before to have a citizen's committee don the actual reapportionment of a county for county legislature purposes. On top of that, we have the added responsibility for downsizing which makes the problem a little more complex and more challenging. We have a golden opportunity to show that citizens can participate and come up with a plan that is not politically involved.

Dare Thompson- A career League of Women Voters person; currently President. Redistricting and reapportionment in a fair way is as basic as it gets for us. We fought for the Charter and are very happy to see this included. Several of us signed up for the selection process. Dare believes one of the reasons she

was selected was her location, as she understands there was an interest in geographic spread. She thought it was a good sign that everyone knew she was on the LWV and still let her join the Commission.

Bill West- Woodstock resident, former Chairman of the County Legislature, Town Supervisor, semi-retired. Bill believes this is a historic occasion. We are the first group under the Charter to fulfill this obligation. We are the first group to reduce the Legislature to 23. So this is pretty unique and hopefully we can set the tone for all future endeavors of this type. Bill hopes that people look back and think this group did a good job. Bill believes to date it has been a very collegial experience and expressed his appreciate to all members for their willingness to serve.

- Review Materials Available to Commission Members

The Commission reviewed the following handouts:

- 1) Map showing towns, 2000 census and projected 2009 census
- 2) Section C-10 of the Ulster County Charter
- 3) Map showing towns and election districts with the number of enrolled voters
- 4) Brennan Institute Published Report on Process to Consider for Reapportionment sent into the Legislative Office via e-mail from Beth Murphy of Saugerties. Vicky will e-mail a copy to all Commission Members.

- Census Data:

Bill told the Commission that he spoke with the Planning Board and the Census data will probably not be available until the end of February, possibly March, worse case the end of March. If we get the data in the middle of March, we are on a very compressed time frame to get this done because in fairness to all of the parties, they have to get their candidates and they have to know where the candidates are living. In June comes the convention for parties and they start carrying petitions.

Dennis Doyle- We have been tasked to provide technical information to the Commission and we are a census data affiliate so we have direct access to the census bureau and agencies that deal with the bureau. One of the things that may be helpful to the Commission is to understand the structure census data which is not just based on municipal basis. Beyond the municipal level it goes down to something called census tracts. Beyond census tracts it goes to census block groups, beyond census block groups it goes to actual census blocks. That's the kind of data you may be looking at in terms of your divisions of where district lines run. Dennis said his department would be more than happy to do a presentation or bring individual members up to speed on what census geography looks like. The Commission should also know that the Legislature in working with the County Executive has set money in our budget to provide technical assistance outside the resources that are available in UC should you request it. We intend to act as staff to the Commission. We therefore hope that you develop a communications protocol.

With the census information we hope will be released in February, worse case March, we will get total population. We will not get group quarters counts until sometime in May. Group quarters counts are important because there is a state law that is going to require for reapportionment purposes that prison populations need to be brought back to their last area before they were incarcerated. So, even when we get the census data we will have to pull out the prison population associated with it. There is a really good website that gives an overview of NYS re this issue: [prisonersofthecensus.org](http://prisonersofthecensus.org)

We do have population projections in estimates for the municipalities. There is software out there that will essentially do the population distributions for various districts based on what you plug into it. We do not currently own the software but we can purchase it.

Another thing to think about is how you are going to communicate to the general public. Do you want to develop a website?

- Future Meeting Dates:

The Commission Members agreed to schedule meetings for every Wednesday from 3PM to 5PM until their task is complete. The meeting will be canceled if there is no business to conduct during a particular week, or the Commission may choose to meet more frequently if necessary.

- Venues for Public Meetings:

Michael Catalinotto said the Commission is tasked with allowing for timely input from the County Legislature and its members and the maximum of public participation and comment.

The Commission would like to hold approximately 10 public meetings around the County. The meeting in Kingston can be held in Legislative Chambers, with all Legislators invited. Vicky will develop a list of potential venues and contacts for the Commission to consider. The Commission would prefer to hold Public Hearings on Wednesday evenings beginning at 7PM.

- Opinion on Plan Adoption Process

There were questions raised as to whether the Legislature would vote on the plan the Commission presents. Does the Legislature plan on making changes to the plan or will it be accepted as presented? The Commission agreed to write a letter to the Majority and Minority Leaders of the Legislature requesting Legislative Counsel's opinion on the Reapportionment Plan adoption process. Bill will write the letter and circulate it via e-mail amongst the Commission Members before Vicky sends out the official request.

- Communication Process:

The Commission agreed to communicate with departments or put in requests for information as a unified group instead of making individual requests.

- Presentation Request for Next Meeting:

The Commission is interested in communicating with the public via a website. Vicky will arrange to have Sylvia Wohlfahrt from IS present at the next meeting re: the website and any other services that may be available to the Commission. Dare Thompson expressed interest in the software Dennis Doyle briefly mentioned. Cynthia Lowe suggested Dennis present information about this software at the next meeting. Vicky will arrange to have Dennis present to the Commission at the meeting next Wednesday, 1/26, at 3PM.

- Adjournment:

The meeting was adjourned at 4:51 P.M.

**Respectfully Submitted,**

**Victoria Fabella, Deputy Clerk, Ulster County Legislature**