

ULSTER COUNTY LEGISLATURE
Committee Meeting

NAME OF COMMITTEE: Community Services Committee
DATE: February 18, 1998
TIME: 6:00 PM
LOCATION: Conference Library
Ulster County Office Building
LEGISLATORS PRESENT: Chairman Alice Tipp, David Donaldson,
Joan Feldmann, Brian Hathaway, Edward Jennings,
Sam Magarelli
LEGISLATORS EXCUSED: Robert Aiello, Robert Wilkins
LEGISLATORS ABSENT: Fawn Tantillo
OTHERS PRESENT: Kathy Puglisi, Office for the Aging
Sue McCarthy, Youth Bureau
Terry Breitenstein, Veterans Service
Juanita Cinclini, Youth Bureau

The meeting was called to order at 6:00 PM.

Kathy Puglisi, Office for the Aging

- Kathy began with the nutrition program. The RFP attracted four interested vendors. They were invited to attend a conference last Friday at which time they were apprised of the issues involving the program and what was required in the way of service and accountability. The closing date has been moved to March 13. Kathy added that putting this out for bid has nothing to do with politics. She invited anyone who has questions to call her. Dave asked who are the interested vendors. They are Community Action, Prestige, Jam Joy and Gateway. Brian asked if this was the Meals-on-Wheels program. Kathy said no, it is known as home-delivered meals. Sam asked how seniors get the service. Kathy said anyone who wishes to receive the meals may call her office and she will send a case worker out to assess the situation and verify that the individual qualifies. Joan asked if there is a cost for the meal. Kathy said they may give a donation, usually \$2, but it is not required. Dave asked if the successful vendor is a for-profit organization would the "donation" be increased. Kathy assured him that the donation goes to her office who pays the vendor. Dave wanted to know how much the meals cost. Kathy responded that congregate meals cost \$7.90 and home-delivered meals are \$5.85. Dave asked why congregate meals cost more. Kathy said it was necessary to factor in the cost of kitchen maintenance and space rental which increased the price. Ed said the site in Ellenville is in a County building. Alice told him the money comes back to the County. Sam asked if the cost is the same at all locations. Kathy said whether it was congregate or home-delivered the price is the same for each category. Brian asked how many meals are provided on a daily basis. Kathy said 300 - 350

are delivered. Joan asked if the vendor was responsible for the rental space. Kathy said they pay for it and include in their charge to the County.

The total cost for the service is \$660,000. The NYS Office for the Aging reviewed the program and pointed out problems meeting required standards of service and accountability. SOFA strongly advised that an RFP be issued to engage a vendor that would meet service and accountability requirements. Other OFAs were contacted for information on how they provided the service. The Health Department was called about their regulations. Community Action, who currently provides the service, was not cooperating. OFA must verify the number of meals served and cannot do so because Community Action does not give them documentation. Dave asked what is the time frame for the RFPs. Kathy said March 13 was the closing date.

Dave was concerned about Community Action. Apparently, there other services they provide in the community and this could be a problem. He felt it might be a good idea to bring them in to discuss the problems and work with them to improve services. Kathy they had done that. Dave asked if they were obliged to accept the lowest bidder. Kathy assured him they were not. They will accept the bidder who can best provide the needed services. Alice added that it depends on the RFP Committee. Kathy reported that Ulster County is paying more than other counties. Bidders will be required to break down their bid to show how the rate was determined. Sam asked how long the service has been offered. Kathy wasn't sure, but about it may be 18 or 19 years. Sam wanted to know how long Community Action had been the provider. Kathy said it could have been for the entire period. Ed Jennings asked if there will be an "escape" clause in the contract. Alice responded that there will be. If the terms of the contract are not carried out, the vendor will not be paid accordingly and the contract may be terminated. Sam asked what the payment schedule will be. Kathy wasn't certain; it could be monthly or quarterly. Dave asked to whom Community Action reports. Alice said they have their own Board of Directors. Dave asked how much of the program funding is paid by the State. Kathy told him the State pays most of the cost. Ed asked who pays the salaries for workers at the site. Kathy said the vendor does that; it is included in their rate. She added that Arlene Kerans suggested OFA pay the rent on the sites. Discussion followed about the cost of renting properties at each site and the condition of the facilities. Dave asked if the new agreement will include rentals. Kathy said it will not. OFA will take control of that.

Kathy said her staff has prepared a five-foot map which depicts areas of the county served by the program. It also provides a visual picture of areas that are not being served. OFA wants a vendor who will change the routes so isolated areas can be visited at least once a week. Sam asked if her office found it necessary to turn down requests from these isolated areas. Kathy responded that they do, which is one of the reasons they are seeking a new vendor.

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Kathy said it has also been a problem when a senior citizen requests the service through a political figure who calls the Community Action office and is then added to the list. The only individuals who are entitled to be included are those who call her office and are approved following an assessment by a case worker.

Sam asked how this program affected the Woodstock program of meals for seniors. Kathy said that although Woodstock has its own program, her office would not reject eligible seniors who apply to OFA.

Dave was again concerned about the effect of the RFP on the Community Action program. Alice said the key person from this organization did not attend the conference at which time the issues were addressed. They sent two representatives but neither had any questions and had no answers to questions asked of them. Kathy said she has tried to help them resolve their problems to avoid the current situation. The bookkeeping has been terrible; accountability is most important. Sam asked if the voucher indicates how many served. Kathy said it must have names of those served. She has a mechanism whereby up-to-date lists are faxed to the provider at 4 PM the previous day. The provider should deliver only to these people and if not, indicate why not.

Dave asked if Dan Alfonso has been involved. Kathy assured he was, as well as Bill Darwak, and they are concerned about compliance issues. Dave wanted to know if the issues are in writing. Kathy said they are not but she could do that. Dave wanted to know when was Dan's last involvement. Kathy said that was in January. Dave wanted to know if he had been approached to talk to the head of the Community Action program. Kathy said Chairman Alfonso had told her to take care of it and Arlene Kerans met with Larry.

Ed Jennings said he went to the Ellenville site on Valentine's Day and found that he was number 38 on the list but there were obviously not 38 diners there. Kathy said if you are over 60 and working on preparation, the meal should be provided free, but those under 60 should pay. Ed asked what happens to leftovers. Kathy said there shouldn't be any because they would have been notified how many to expect. Alice added that they may offer any leftovers to guests. Ed also asked how to handle complaints about site managers. Kathy said they have referred the complaints to Community Action but did not get satisfaction.

Sam asked about the other prospective bidders. Kathy said Jam Joy has an excellent reputation. She thought Gateway may not have realized the scope required and wasn't sure they would be able to provide the service. Prestige is not from within the county, but provides similar services throughout the state. Jean Patton, who works on the program at OFA, was visiting in Otsego County and inquired at their OFA because Prestige is their provider. The Otsego County OFA was thrilled with the service they receive.

- Moving along to the Senior Games, Kathy said the dates have been set

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and they will meet on 2/26 to establish a schedule for the games. MetLife will award a new car (Mercury Marquis) to the senior golfer who makes a Hole in One at the tournament that has been set for June 1 at Stone Dock Golf Course. Members of the Committee are invited to attend the luncheon on June 11.

- The laboratory permit that will allow the Care-A-Van staff to perform finger sticks is expected to be obtained by the end of the month. This is part of the second year of the Department of Health grant which is shared with Kingston Hospital, Benedictine Hospital, and the Ulster County Health Department.
- Kathy spoke briefly about the computers that her office will be receiving. Sam questioned the cost of each. Kathy will get the figures.
- Kathy then brought up the \$1/hour salary increase for the dietician which would change the rate from \$26 to \$27 and result in a total cost of approximately of \$926 per year. Alice reminded the Committee that the Chairman of the Legislature has said that there will be no increases; he will be reviewing the salaries of all department heads later this year. Dave said he would support the raise if the money is in the budget but not if the contingency fund was to be used. He then made a motion to support the increase. The group discussed the means by which the increase could be funded. Kathy assured them that she has the money. Brian suggested that the matter be tabled for six months. Dave said the dietician has not received a raise in three years as had most county employees. Brian reminded him that there are many deserving employees who have not had a raise for five years. Alice asked if the dietician was a CSEA member. Kathy said she was working under contract. Ed suggested that they take a look at it in three months. Alice said that the group had not had time to adequately digest the situation so perhaps they should take a look at it next time. Lacking a second, Dave withdrew his motion.

Sue McCarthy, Youth Bureau

- After distribution of the lists of funded programs and information on funding amounts, Sue asked to be excused because she had another meeting to attend. It was regarding fundraising and important that she be there. She asked the Committee to review the handouts and bring their questions to the next meeting.

Terry Breitenstein, Veterans Service Agency

- Terry began his presentation with the issue of the salary of the department head. He spoke about the public information released concerning salaries of department heads in Ulster County. New appointees in Ulster County are paid \$7,000 to \$8,000 more than he after 13 years of service. He had prepared a memo which compared his salary and appointment date with those of other county employees. Terry requested consideration toward some sort of

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parity. He went on to praise his staff and their service to veterans. He said his is a seven-days-a-week job, that he is called upon to go out into the community, and that he avoids being away from the office for long periods. Veterans often seek his help in matters involving real estate tax inquiries which he handles rather than refer them to the Real Property Office. He said that his department's reputation speaks for itself. Sam asked if there was any money in his budget for an increase. Terry told him there is not. He had approached the subject last year but it was not pursued. Dave asked if his office was funded 100% by the County. Terry said essentially it is. Alice said that she was told by Dan Alfonso that in no way would the matter be discussed now. Joan added that there were to be no individual salary increases. Brian said it wouldn't pass through Finance. Sam said it should have been handled last fall. Terry said he has been waiting for action for a long time. He has been evaluated three times in 13 years and received excellent evaluations, the most recent of which he presented to the Committee at the August meeting when he asked for their support. Dave asked Terry who does his evaluation. Terry said it was Bill Darwak and Alice said she went to him personally. Brian asked Terry what he would like to see. Terry said he was proud of his department and its accomplishments. They have made great improvements since he became the director. They have established good relations with the veterans in the community. He is involved in activities after hours. When to asked to do so, he cut his budget by 10%. He has avoided hiring staff and even shared a secretary with the Youth Bureau. There is no "fat" in his budget. This has not been true of all departments where he has observed new hires and upgrading of positions. There are new appointees whose beginning salary is greater than his after 13 years!

Sam asked what kind of response was received by his previous request for consideration. Terry told him it was positive; the Committee agreed that he was justified in seeking an increase. Terry assured that it was not his intention to belittle the other department heads or the individuals who were listed on the memo. Everyone has a job to do and he is not saying they don't do it well, but the inequities in the salaries need to be addressed. Dave raised the issue of qualifications, particularly educational requirements and experience, for many department head positions. What are the qualifications for the head of the Veterans Service Agency. Terry said that he was required to be a veteran but that the qualifications should be rewritten because the job has changed over the years. Brian asked what the Committee could do to help Terry. Terry said he would like the Committee to make a recommendation in his behalf. Brian said they could do that. Alice said that she had done that earlier today and was rebuffed. Brian said that perhaps they could hasten action on the part of the Chairman of the Legislature if they presented a proposal in support of Terry. The Committee discussed how best to prepare for this support. Terry was asked to compile information that would help his claim for a raise. Terry felt it was unfair to ask him to do this because the criteria doesn't fit across the board. Alice said she knows how hard Terry works and how

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good his performance is. Brian said it needs to be brought to Dan Alfonso's attention. Sam said if the Committee agrees, a strategy should be developed to approach Dan. Brian agreed that they should have input into department head's raises.

- Terry moved to the issue of ambulette service for veterans. His office was reported to ADA because they had no wheelchair-accessible van. They are required to provide van service for wheelchair-bound veterans. They contracted with Regional Ambulette to provide service to Albany at a rate of \$200 (last year) for which there is \$3000 in the line. This is the roundtrip rate from the veteran's home. There are now three veterans on dialysis which is no longer offered in Albany. Terry's office provided transportation for these vets to Catskill and Poughkeepsie even though he is not supposed to do so. This will exhaust the amount of funds in that particular line. He also transports vets to Albany for adult day care. Dave asked how many go and why they don't go to day care in the area. Terry said he has about five or six who go three days a week basically because they prefer to go there and there is no charge. Dave suggested looking into an agreement with a local adult day care agency to keep the money in the area. Brian asked about installing a lift in the van. Terry said that is not possible. Brian said perhaps a new van is needed. Terry said they will need one next year but it would be too expensive to purchase a wheelchair-accessible van. They have looked into grants, including member item grants. Sam asked if the VA hospital had any suggestions. Terry said they were not at all helpful. Alice asked if the opening of the clinic would be of any help. Terry said it would only reduce the volume of regular veterans transported to Albany. Sam asked when the clinic will open. Terry told him the due date for the RFPs had been extended from 2/10 to 2/27.

Brian Hathaway made a motion to adjourn the meeting. It was seconded by Ed Jennings. The meeting adjourned at 7:50 PM.

Respectively Submitted,

Alice Tipp, Chairman
Community Services Committee