

COUNTY OF OSWEGO
COMMUNITY AND CONSUMER AFFAIRS COMMITTEE
January 28, 2009

PRESENT:

Kevin Gardner, Chair
Jack Beckwith, Vice Chair
Clayton Brewer
Robert Hayes
Louella LeClair
Phillip Vasho

STAFF/GUESTS

Philip Church, County Administrator
Peggy Bickford, Sec. to Board of Elections Commissioner
Art Gearsbeck, Legislator
David Hastings, Director of Real Property Tax
Richard Hogan, Director of Central Services
John Kruk, County Treasurer
Barry Leemann, Chairman of the Legislature
Robert Lighthall, Undersheriff
Linda Nagel, Central Services
Paul Santore, Legislator
Bill Scriber, Elections Commissioner
Donald Wart, Elections Commissioner
Jeanette Woodland, Administrative Secretary

EXCUSED:

Mary Flett

Attendance:

Committee Chair Gardner called the meeting to order at 2:00 p.m.

Employee Recognition:

Peggy Bickford, Secretary to Board of Elections Commissioner, a 10-year full-time employee of the Board of Elections, and Elaine Kerfein, Motor Vehicle Clerk, a 10-year full-time employee of the County Clerk's office were presented certificates in recognition of their service with the County. The members of the Committee along with Don Wart, Elections Commissioner and George Williams, County Clerk, offered their congratulations and a photo was taken.

Old Business:

Committee Chair Gardner asked for a motion to approve the November 26, 2008, minutes.

Motion: Legislator Brewer

Second: Legislator Vasho

Minutes were approved, with all in favor.

Committee Business:

1. Central Services

A. Computer Purchase – Sheriff's Department

Richard Hogan, Director of Central Services, brought forward a request to purchase computer equipment. Robert Lighthall, Undersheriff, advised committee members that LETPP Homeland Security Grant funds is being used to purchase 6 laptop computers at a cost of \$27,145.74 for patrol cars. Money to purchase the laptops is 100 percent grant money.

Motion: Legislator Beckwith made a motion to approve the request to purchase computer equipment, as presented.

Second: Legislator Brewer
Vote: All in favor.

Legislator LeClair asked how many cars the department has. Undersheriff Lighthall advised that there are 40 cars, and 20 of them have laptops. The laptops enable the Patrol Officer to stay in the field while accessing and inputting information as well as printing out tickets. The plan is to eventually equip another 14 cars with laptops.

2. Board of Elections

A. 2009 Work Schedule Compliant with State and Federal Court Orders

Bill Scriber, Elections Commissioner, told committee members that the department has been using project management software that was purchased with federal funds. This software helps with scheduling tasks and a timeline as to what has to be done and when. The department was also updated on where the department is in the process of updating their equipment per State and Federal orders. The new equipment must be tested by labs to make sure that they operate correctly. The lab that was being used lost its certification to conduct the testing because of inadequate methods they were using. Until they are recertified by the federal government to conduct the testing the County is on hold as the machines cannot be used uncertified. As of right now it looks like it may be August, which does not leave enough time to do training, etc. The department has not gotten rid of the automatic voting machines which they may have to use again this year.

3. Real Property

A. Property Buyback

David Hastings, Director of Real Property Tax, reported that the buyback exemption brought forward by Legislator Santore has been paid in full. The property was sold to the prior owner.

Motion: Legislator Vasho made a motion to accept purchase by prior owner for back taxes in the full amount of \$16,053.07.

Second: Legislator LeClair

Vote: All in favor.

Motion Carried.

B. Senior Exemption Impact

As requested at the November meeting Director Hastings prepared examples of the Senior Sliding Scale Exemption which was adjusted for review so that more seniors could benefit. On the scale that is currently used a person 65 or over needs to make less than \$24,424 in order to qualify. Mr. Hastings brought forward three more examples (copy attached) which would qualify a greater number of seniors. It is too late for the 2009 assessment role, but the Committee does need to make a decision as to whether to change the income limits. Legislator LeClair asked how long ago the exemption scale was changed. Mr. Hastings said that it has been the same for several years but would check to see the last time it was changed. Chairman Gardner said that the Committee should bring this to caucus and discuss further. Legislator Beckwith commented that the senior exemptions would take in most of the Veterans and a decision should be made to go with one or the other.

C. Cold War Veterans Summary

The Committee discussed Cold War Veterans' exemptions (copy attached). The maximum benefit that they would receive is \$86. Legislator Hayes said that he had served for four years

and saw active duty. He advised that it is not about the money but the recognition is what the Veterans want.

Both the Senior Exemption and the Veterans Exemption will be brought to caucus for further discussion.

D. Auction Discussion

Mr. Hastings went over the timeline for the tax auction. He said that the schedule in place has worked well in past years with the sale in late September with the cut-off date for buyback being 30 days prior to auction. The committee voiced approval for continuation of this general timeline.

E. Assessment Study Grant Update

Mr. Hastings said that he is currently working on a draft with the vendor and will bring it to committee in February in preparation for presentation to the Legislature in March. Formal presentation to the Legislature in March is a condition of this grant to qualify for the second \$25,000 payment to the county.

4. Request from Town of Hastings Regarding Victory Bible Church

A letter was received from Jim Weatherup, Supervisor, Town of Hastings requesting that fees and penalties accrued from nonpayment of water bills by the Victory Bible Church be returned to the church. While the church is exempt from property taxes, it is not exempt from water district charges which are automatically added to the property tax bill. The church had an unpaid water bill for \$624.60 with additional penalties of \$354.80 for non-payment in 2007 and 2008. The letter indicates that the church has been in the process of making the full payment of \$979.40 to the County. John Kruk, Treasurer, reported that he told the Town Supervisor that the county had made the Town whole and also incurred expenses for enforcement of the unpaid bill and therefore, the full amount is due the county. After committee discussion the consensus was that the County would not take any action and would expect full payment. Mr. Kruk will send the Town a letter indicating the decision of the Committee.

5. Legislator Beckwith indicated that with the State's situation and car sales having sharply declined in the County that perhaps the county sales tax could be reduced from 4 percent to 2 percent on car sales only. John Kruk said that he would make a call to see if this can be done.

Adjournment

Motion: Legislator Vasho motioned to adjourn the meeting at 3:04 p.m.

Second: Legislator Brewer

Vote: All in favor.

Motion Carried.