PUBLIC HEARING

Wednesday, December 4, 2019

PUBLIC HEARING ON LOCAL LAW NO. C OF 2019 – A LOCAL LAW TO ESTABLISH THE POSITION OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OF THE COUNTY OF OTSEGO

The Board Chair called the public hearing to order.

The Clerk of the Board read the Notice of Hearing as follows:

NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING

NOTICE is hereby given that there has been duly introduced before the Board of Representatives of the County of Otsego, New York, a Local Law entitled: A Local Law to establish the position of County Administrator of the County of Otsego as amended.

NOTICE is further given that the Board of Representatives will conduct a public hearing on the proposed Local Law in the Representatives Chambers at the County Office Building in the Village of Cooperstown, New York on Wednesday, December 4th at 9:30 a.m. at which time all persons interested will be heard. The location of the public hearing is accessible to persons with mobility impairment.

Copies of the Local Law are available for viewing at the Clerk of the Board’s Office, County Office Building, Cooperstown, New York during regular business hours.

Dated: November 21, 2019

Carol D. McGovern
Clerk of the Board of Representatives
Otsego County, New York

The Board Chair asked if anyone wished to speak on the proposed Local Law.

Several people from the community spoke about the benefits, advantages and negatives of the proposed Local Law on the position of County Administrator. Most people commended the local government and how well run it is currently, however, now is the time to take advantage of this opportunity. Other people felt there is no need for another layer of bureaucracy, complicating things and costing more money.

Representative Clark expressed thoughts and concerns from Representative Frazier’s letter (who was absent). The letter stated as follows:
Colleagues,
As stated previously, I will not be able to attend this month's Board meeting. I wanted to weigh in on the administrator proposal.

This is severely flawed. There is absolutely no way that this office will be implemented for less than $250,000 per year. Greene County has had an Administrator and the job description is eerily similar to what is proposed here. The legislature there has found that their Administrator CAN NOT fulfill all of the duties assigned to him, so, they hired a deputy. The personnel line for the office is now over $350k. Please re-read the job duties and as Andrew Marietta stated "Be realistic about what this person can do".

Think about the achievements and progress that have been made with the current system:
budgets continuously under the tax cap, labor peace with 3 unions, M/C raise structure, continuous 911 upgrades (towers as well as backup center and primary center), increased road and bridge repairs and replacements, new highway outpost buildings, infrastructure (both software and hardware) in our IT department, Munis software upgrade, Purchasing Arrangement (other counties are copying this now), Enterprise Fleet management, Addiction and mental health treatment in our jail, Fire training center upgrades, Jail upgrades, Risk management award from NYMIR, exit from MOSA, Manor sale, the privatization of Economic Development (Otsego Now) and the Tourism (Destination Marketing) departments, major investments (millions of dollars) in equipment and trucks in our highway department, the "Tiny Homes" project, the driver diversion program.

These are worthy accomplishments where we have brought service and value to our residents and visitors. Is the committee system perfect? Hell no. Neither is the centralized leadership model. If there are problems, redundancies, let's fix them. If you think that DH's coming to multiple meetings to get a vacant funded position advertised is problematic, then change the requirements for the DH to fill it. Why can't Admin change the policy to "For all recently vacant funded positions, the DH needs the personnel officer, treasurer and either Board Chair or parent committee chair to sign off". Make the committee chair report to his/her committee that month that the action was taken. If you don't like the spending limits (minimum or maximum) have the debate and change them. We can fix a lot of problems if we choose to do the work. We do not need to spend hundreds of thousands of dollars a year to achieve these successes.

It has been stated that if we had an Administrator that maybe the jail wouldn't have been shuttered. The Commission on Corrections in 2018 issued a report regarding the 5 worst jails in the state. Rikers Island, the Greene County jail (this jail has been closed since last year), Erie County Holding Center and Correctional Facility, the Dutchess County Jail, and the Onondaga County Justice Center and Penitentiary were the five listed. What do they all have in common? They are all in counties (city of NY for Rikers) with centralized leadership. Greene County has an administrator and the others all have county executives. Point being, ALL forms have problems.

An argument that has been used in favor of the Administrator is that we as a board are so tied up with the day-to-day operations of the county that we can not focus on the "30,000 foot view". Two points, regarding this. First, if we are pushing all of the daily operations on to the Administrator, how is he/she going to be able to look at any of the long range planning? If 14 of us couldn't do the job, how is one person going to achieve it? Second, if we are not involved in the "mundane" daily operations of the county, how do you fully come to comprehend and understand all that the county does? We will not
be discussing daily operations at parent committee meetings. If you do not know of the way the departments function, can you truly chart a course for the future of that department? Case in point, Representative Koutnik's successor has expressed interest in serving on the Human Services Committee. Very admirable. My question is, if he is not allowed to see the daily operations and go thru the committee meetings with Eve and her very dedicated and knowledgeable staff explaining "what they do, why and how they do it, and where they get the money to do it", how will he ever begin to comprehend what any type of long range plan should look like for DSS? The argument is that we as a board can not implement long term planning because we are too busy with operational duties. The County Administrator can? How can he/she do ALL of the operational tasks and have the 30,000 foot view for long term planning? How can any of us Reps, especially the newly elected, learn about the full scope of services and operations of the county if we do not experience and understand the daily happenings?

Lastly, the Department Heads. One IGA committee member stated "The DH's have some wonderful ideas, and we should make time to listen to them". I agree 100%. The DH's all voted, first or second, to work inside the present system and fix what may be problematic. A large majority of them feel that moving forward with this proposed Administrator will cause many more problems than it will fix. And in case anyone is doing the math, at $115k year salary, the Administrator position eats up the entire COLA increases for ALL of the M/C employees in that year. Do you think that the Administrator will cut the COLA raises or his/her position in a tight budget year?

I truly hope that you all reconsider this position. It is not needed.

Have a good week,
Ed
Edwin J. Frazier, Jr.
District #1 Unadilla
Otsego County Board of Representatives

In conclusion, Representative Clark stated that the Board needs to be fiscally responsible; and hiring the right person is imperative, the wrong person will be disastrous.

Since no persons present wished to be heard, the Board Chair declared the public hearing closed.