

**PERSONNEL COMMITTEE MEETING
HELD IN ROOM 318
PUTNAM COUNTY OFFICE BUILDING
CARMEL, NEW YORK 10512**

Members: Chairwoman Nacerino, Legislators Jonke & Montgomery

Wednesday

5:30P.M.

June 19, 2019

The meeting was called to order at 5:30PM by Chairwoman Nacerino who requested that Legislator Jonke lead in the Pledge of Allegiance. Upon roll call Legislators Jonke, Montgomery and Chairwoman Nacerino were present.

Item #3 - Approval/Standard Work Day and Reporting Resolution

Chairwoman Nacerino made a motion to move the Standard Work Day and Reporting Resolution to the Full Legislative Meeting; Seconded by Legislator Jonke. All in favor.

Item #4 - Approval/ New Position Classification Confidential Secretary, Planning, Development and Public Transportation Department/ Personnel Director Eldridge

Personnel Director Paul Eldridge stated Planning Commissioner Sandra Fusco requested a Confidential Secretary because she does not have one. He stated the Personnel Department's responsibility is to classify any new position. He stated this measure is supported by the County Executive and it is now up to the Legislature to fund the position.

Commissioner Fusco stated Putnam County is a member of the New York Metropolitan Transportation Council (NYMTC) and Putnam County receives funding through the Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) for specific tasks that are assigned to each NYMTC member. She stated the Planning Department has grown exponentially over the past few years with various projects. She stated in order to manage those projects, UPWP provides funding for the administration of the projects. She stated the Planning Department received an additional \$50,000 for administrative assistance. She stated she has been doing it all herself but is no longer able to keep up with it.

Chairwoman Nacerino stated support staffs are the wheels that keep most departments moving forward. She stated she understands the rationale and the need for this position.

Legislator Albano stated he supports creating this position. He stated the grants that the Planning Department is involved with are imperative and he would not want the County to miss out on any grant funding due to being short staffed.

Chairwoman Nacerino stated Commissioner Fusco's expertise is better put to use when it is focused on what she needs to be doing, rather than with the administrative work.

Legislator Montgomery questioned what the salary for the position is.

Chairwoman Nacerino stated \$50,000.

Legislator Montgomery stated the County Executive stated there would be no new positions created in 2019.

Director Eldridge stated the difference now is that this position is fully funded.

Finance Commissioner William Carlin stated that is the difference.

Legislator Montgomery stated the Legislature did not approve a position in the Sheriff's Department that had no fiscal impact, due to it being decided that there would be no more new positions.

Director Eldridge stated the difference between these positions is that the Sheriff's Department position was being funded by other money within the Department's budget, not outside funding.

Legislator Montgomery questioned if the \$50,000 funding is guaranteed annually.

Commissioner Fusco stated the County has been awarded the UPWP funding since 1970. She stated the funding increased in 2016 from \$100,000 to \$200,000. She stated Putnam County asks the least from NYMTC and they have assured her to not worry about the funding.

Legislator Montgomery questioned what this position's tasks will be.

Commissioner Fusco stated they will be given work that she cannot give to outside help. She stated many items are confidential and would need to be done by someone within the Department.

Chairwoman Nacerino made a motion to move Approval/ New Position Classification Confidential Secretary, Planning, Development and Public Transportation Department to the Full Legislative Meeting; Seconded by Legislator Jonke. All in favor.

Item #5 - Approval/ Budgetary Amendment (19A036)/ Commissioner of Planning, Development and Public Transportation Fusco

Chairwoman Nacerino stated this has been prorated for the rest of the year at \$41,454.

Chairwoman Nacerino made a motion to move Budgetary Amendment 19A036 to the Audit & Administration Meeting; Seconded by Legislator Jonke. All in favor.

Item #6 - Approval/ Fund Transfer (19T124)/ To Cover OT Expenses due to Three Vacancies and One Employee on 207C/ Sheriff Langley (Also addressed at 6/19/19 Protective Svcs.)

Chairwoman Nacerino made a motion to move Fund Transfer 19T124 to the Audit & Administration Meeting; Seconded by Legislator Jonke. All in favor.

**Item #7 - Discussion – Discontinuation of Women, Infants & Children (WIC) Program/
Personnel Director Eldridge, Health Commissioner Dr. Nesheiwat, Health Fiscal Manager
Orr**

**a. Discussion/ Discontinuation of WIC Program/ WIC Taxation & WIC
Personnel**

Director Eldridge gave the attached PowerPoint Presentation. He stated he has met with five (5) of the 10 WIC employees. He explained what a layoff unit is and in this case it is the WIC Department. He referenced slide #3 to explain how displacement works in civil service. He stated the soonest possible date that WIC would be discontinued is October 1, 2019. He stated a lot can happen between now and October. He stated he has spoken with the WIC employees about the potential for moving into another position. He stated if the employees are not able to move to another position, they are put on a preferred list. He stated that list must be used for four (4) years and it provides many options for the employees to find new positions. He stated he met with the employees and the union on May 6, 2019 to relay all of this information regarding the discontinuation of WIC to them. He stated there is no “good” way to relay this information other than to sit down with the people who are being affected. He stated the notice given is just shy of five (5) months. He stated in the past there have been layoffs with only 60 days notice. He stated he has had very good meetings with the employees and has asked each for an updated resume. He stated he still needs to meet with the part time employees. He stated he believes that over the next few months there will be opportunities to find new jobs for the employees in the WIC program. He stated another aspect to consider is that there have been significant changes to the Health Department recently, including many retirements. He stated he and Commissioner of Health Dr. Michael Nesheiwat will be bringing a plan for reorganization of the Health Department before the Legislature in the future. He stated he is available for any questions regarding this matter and will have constant communication with each of the employees that are involved. He stated he has been involved in a number of layoffs which have had less time to figure out than this instance, but there was significant success in placing the employees in other jobs. He went over the details of a big layoff in 1992 when the county cut 16% of its workforce. He stated the County offered an early retirement incentive which approximately 33 employees took, while of the remaining 37 employees, 35 found other jobs which were very comparable to the jobs they had. He stated the County is going to work very hard to accommodate the employees. He stated he knows that everyone appreciates the employees as they have done an excellent job for the County.

Chairwoman Nacerino stated thanked Director Eldridge for this information. She stated personnel matters are very fragile because it deals with people’s livelihoods and quality of life. She stated it is not easy to be faced with these decisions. She stated she knows that Commissioner Nesheiwat was very concerned that the employees would receive the utmost respect and courtesy and wanted to address the employees directly about this situation. She thanked everyone for their efforts. She stated the County is confident that certain employees in competitive positions will be moved to other departments and that some will move to Open Door to continue their specialties. She stated she would like to speak about the details of why WIC is

being discontinued. She questioned why this contract is being broken in its fourth year out of five (5).

Health Department Fiscal Manager Bill Orr stated there was a nutritionist who left approximately six (6) months ago. He stated this left a vacancy of approximately \$90,000. He stated discontinuing the WIC program has been a thought for a while, but this vacancy gave an opening to do so, instead of hiring someone new. He stated the State WIC Program has helped guide the County on the timing of this.

Commissioner Carlin stated WIC was taken on years ago because there was nobody else to handle it. He stated now that the County has grown, there are organizations like Open Door who can take it over.

Chairwoman Nacerino stated WIC is not a mandated program for the County, which is an important factor.

Commissioner Nesheiwat stated the WIC staff is great and the County is very lucky to have them, but sometimes governments have to make tough decisions. He stated the County cannot offer the services that Open Door can provide. He stated Open Door is a one-stop institution for full services, and the Health Department cannot compete with that. He stated this is best decision economically for the people of Putnam County, and the services will be more efficient. He stated that is the driving force behind the decision.

Chairwoman Nacerino stated the focus remains with serving the people of Putnam County. She stated this will enhance the services provided to constituents.

Commissioner Nesheiwat stated he is very confident in Director Eldridge to accommodate the WIC employees.

Chairwoman Nacerino noted that the grant funding is based off of an estimation of 1,200 clients, but the County does not have that many clients, so the grant funding is reduced while administrative costs increase.

Legislator Jonke thanked Commissioner Nesheiwat and Director Eldridge for addressing the concerns that he had, including layoffs and finding positions for the employees.

Legislator Addonizio stated there is an impression that many of the positions were preserved. She requested clarification.

Director Eldridge stated there is a provision in the CSEA contract in which certain circumstances require positions to be retained if the County contracts out for services. He stated for instance mental health services are mandated by the State, and they are contracted out to CoveCare. He stated the discontinuation of WIC is different because the County will not be contracting out the services, they will be getting out of the WIC business entirely.

Legislator Montgomery stated she would like to make sure that the public in the audience knows that they are able to speak on this topic. She stated this is a public health issue with many layers. She questioned when the decision was made to get out of the WIC business, when was it initiated, and who made the decision, because it was not the Legislature.

Legislator Albano stated no decision has been made.

Legislator Montgomery stated the way it is being talked about sounds as if it has already been decided.

Chairwoman Nacerino stated it is contingent on the Legislature's approval.

Legislator Montgomery stated there is a letter from the County Law Department requesting that the State release the County from the grant for WIC.

Chairwoman Nacerino stated the County cannot proceed without knowing if that flexibility is granted. She stated moving forward is contingent on the Legislature's consideration.

Legislator Montgomery questioned who asked the Law Department to request a release from the State.

Chairwoman Nacerino stated she believes any overture like this would have to be with the approval of the County Executive. She stated it is not an individual decision, it is made by many with knowledge of the situation.

Legislator Sullivan thanked Director Eldridge, Commissioner Nesheiwat, and Fiscal Manager Orr for all the information they have provided. He stated it is important that the County provide the best services possible to the taxpayers. He stated there is also a fiduciary responsibility to the taxpayers as well. He stated he is more comfortable with moving forward after hearing the information provided tonight regarding the employees finding new positions.

Legislator Montgomery stated she understands the fiscal responsibility but she does not see that WIC is operating at deficit.

Fiscal Manager Orr stated if WIC keeps operating at this level it might break even, but only because the nutritionist position is vacant at \$90,000. He stated it is also due to the WIC Coordinator being part time, not full time. He stated in order for WIC to be operating at full capacity, it would cost a lot more money.

Legislator Montgomery stated she is not in favor of handing a program over to be run by the Federal Government.

Legislator Jonke stated Open Door is an FQHC (Federally Qualified Health Center), it is not run by the Federal Government.

Legislator Montgomery stated the County is still losing control over the program.

Legislator Jonke stated it is the Commissioner Nesheiwat's opinion that the program will be handed over to a place that is more qualified.

Legislator Montgomery stated she has met with Open Door and is very impressed. She stated she has heard that wait times are very high. She stated she is unsure how easily constituents from the western side of the County will be able to utilize Open Door.

Chairwoman Nacerino stated there are five (5) people in Cold Spring and 23 in Putnam Valley that are being served by the WIC program out of the 915 clients who utilize WIC. She stated decisions have to be made for the greater good.

Legislator Montgomery stated she is looking at the big picture including money being spent on amenities instead of basic needs.

Chairwoman Nacerino the decisions of the County Government cannot always being comingled.

Legislator Montgomery stated the funding for the decisions comes from the County taxpayers. She stated sometimes money has to be spent to provide services to constituents.

Chairwoman Nacerino stated that is why this situation works, because the services will still be available and they will be more qualified.

Legislator Montgomery stated if she was confident that everything would go as planned with this process she would support it. She stated right now she is just seeing a discontinuation of a public health service. She questioned who will be the County health providers in the event of an emergency. She questioned if the County is confident that Open Door would step up in the event that there is a crisis.

Chairwoman Nacerino stated that is just speculation and this discussion is only about specialized service through the WIC program.

Legislator Sayegh stated it is belittling to the Health Department to say that they would be lacking in any way due to this decision.

Commissioner Nesheiwat stated the benefits outweigh the risks. He stated the County cannot offer the services that Open Door can. He stated the County does not have doctors on staff to provide the services.

Janet Canaday, CSEA 8150 Union President, thanked Legislator Montgomery for asking questions about this process. She stated her main concern is the WIC employees. She stated she hopes the County works with the Union to retain the employees. She stated they want to stay and work for the County. She questioned what the term "comparable title" means in the case of reassigning the employees.

Director Eldridge stated the intent of the law is to find a job for employees who are put on the preferred list. He stated it is very broad based so that he can make a connection between positions to move the employee.

Rebecca Wittenberg stated she has been with the WIC program since its inception. She stated she respects the Legislature a great deal. She stated out of the four (4) full time WIC employees, one (1) is a year away from retirement and two (2) are a year away from having 15 years with the County, which makes a huge difference as far as health benefits. She stated they have spoken with Open Door and they are a good organization but they do not give the benefits that the County does. She requested clarification on the vacant nutritionist position and its effect on the deficit.

Fiscal Manager Orr stated the \$90,000 nutritionist position has been funded at a lower lever for \$51,000. He stated if it was filled the deficit would be approximately \$111,000 but since it is not filled it is approximately \$60,000.

Ms. Wittenberg stated the County is getting more funding from the State this year because the caseload is down across the State and the Country. She stated the State has never cut the amount of funding due to a lower caseload. She stated she has noticed that the County has been filling many vacant full time positions with part time employees. She stated she is concerned that the full time WIC employees will not be able to find other positions. She stated there is one (1) year left on the Federal grant funding and she would like to at least stay functioning through that last year. She stated she would not expect Open Door to give WIC the same attention the County staff would. She stated at the last State review they called the County WIC Program a “model program”.

Chairwoman Nacerino thanked both Ms. Canaday and Ms. Wittenberg. She stated their points are well taken. She stated this is why we are having this discussion. She stated everyone realizes the utmost importance of this issue. She stated we cannot let the issue of being one (1) year away from the end of the contract and retirement for an employee be the driving force in the decision making. She stated we are confident and optimistic in the efforts of Commissioner Nesheiwat and Director Eldridge.

Item #8 - FYI/ NYS Contract For Grants- Putnam County Health Department Contract # DOH01-C30467GG-3450000 – WIC/ Senior Deputy County Attorney Diaz – Duly Noted

Item #9 - FYI/ 2019 Accident Report – Duly Noted

Item #10 - Other Business - None

Item #11 – Adjournment

There being no further business at 6:50 PM Chairman Nacerino made a motion to adjourn; Seconded by Legislator Montgomery. All in favor.

Respectfully submitted by Administrative Assistant Ed Gordon.