

**Welfare to Work Commission  
Of the Suffolk County Legislature  
Minutes of the July 8, 2016 Meeting**

**Present:** Richard Koubek, Chair; Lisa Pinkard for Leg. Monica Martinez; Michael Haynes; Richard Krebs; Barbara Egloff; Luis Valenzuela; Ellen Krakow; Don Friedman; Ayesha Alleyne; Kimberly Gierasch; Charles Fox; Vincent Lopretto for Steve Chassman; Peggy Boyd

**Excused:** Kathy Liguori; DSS Commissioner John O'Neill; Michele O'Connell; Valerie Smith; Nina Leonhardt; Mike Stoltz; Sr. Lisa Bergeron

1. **Adoption of May Minutes:** Chair Richard Koubek reminded the Commission that the June meeting was cancelled due to the heavy meeting schedule of the Commission's Child Care and Supportive Housing Committees. The minutes of the May meeting were unanimously adopted, following minor edits, on a motion by Ayesha Alleyne, seconded by Ellen Krakow.
2. **Suffolk Bus Reductions:** Mr. Koubek reported that he, on behalf of the Commission, as well as the Presiding Officer's staff, were taken aback at the end of June by the County Executive's announcement that 10-20 bus routes would have to be eliminated. These cuts are due to the failure of the State to increase transportation funding for Suffolk as well as the County's budget deficit caused by declining sales tax revenues, which caused the County to reduce its funding for Suffolk buses by \$10 million in the 2016 County budget. Previous conversations with the Suffolk Department of Public Works staff did not suggest that significant elimination of bus routes would be implemented. He reported that efforts to secure some additional transportation funding for Suffolk County through MTA tax revenues were defeated in the State Assembly, although there was support in the Senate. He also reported that a conversation with the Presiding Officer's Chief-of-Staff led him to conclude that writing to the Legislature might not be productive since the Commission registered its opposition in the fall to the reduction of \$10 million in County funding for the bus system and that this reduction had been supported by the Legislature. He presented a draft letter (attached) to the County Executive which, following brief discussion, was adopted on a motion by Ayesha Alleyne, seconded by Ellen Krakow: Yes -11; No - 0; Abstentions - 2. Mr. Koubek reported that after he sent a draft of the bus letter to all Commission members, Legislator Martinez called him that day to say that she is very concerned about the cuts and was setting up a meeting with the Administration to discuss them. That meeting is scheduled for July 14<sup>th</sup>. Invitations were sent to over 20 community advocates as well as Department of Public Works administrators and the bus providers. Mr. Koubek will report on the meeting by email to the Commission members.
3. **IDA Scoring Tool:** Mr. Koubek reported that Jennifer Casey, the new Chair of the Suffolk County Planning Commission, met with him and Vice Chair Kathy Liguori on June 28 regarding the Commission's proposed IDA Scoring Tool. Ms. Casey was impressed with the tool and will bring it to Sarah Lansdale who is the Director of the Suffolk County Division of Planning & Environment. The goal remains to eventually discuss the tool with the Suffolk IDA staff.
4. **Supportive Housing Work Group:** Mr. Koubek distributed draft minutes of the May and June meetings of the Commission's Supportive Housing Work Group. He pointed out that representatives from Community Housing Innovations as well as the Family Service

League's TLC program described their services at the May meeting. Both programs serve chronically homeless people who have multiple psychological and physical barriers to self-sufficiency. Some have multiple medical diagnoses and suffer from substance abuse disorders. This chronically homeless population will be the focus of the Work Group. The June Work Group meeting was held at the LI Coalition for the Homeless (LICH) office where Executive Director Greta Guarton provided a statistical snapshot of the LI homeless population. At both the May and June meetings, the benefits of the federally-endorsed Housing First model were discussed in which homeless people are provided shelter without qualifications, followed by supportive programs and treatments. There was consensus that Housing First is an excellent approach to helping chronically-homeless people but it is very difficult to initiate in the suburbs, largely due to NIMBY and political opposition to such housing arrangements. The next Work Group meeting in July will explore new housing models under consideration by the LICH. Following that presentation, the Work Group will look at Suffolk's Single Point of Access program.

5. **Home Stability Support:** Don Friedman reported on a new initiative to help people on Public Assistance (PA) meet the cost of rent and heat. Assemblyman Andrew Hevesi – Chair of Assembly Social Services Committee– has been working with advocates on a number of anti-poverty initiatives, including the State anti-poverty budget package described at a previous Welfare to Work Commission meeting. Several items in that package were adopted by the Legislature. Assemblyman Hevasi is now working on the Home Stability Support (HSS) program. There are currently over 130,000 homeless children in NYS; about 80,000 families at major risk due to the inadequacy of the shelter grant, over the past four decades the shelter allowance has not remotely kept pace with increasing housing costs. Sheltering homeless people is a major cost burden for counties. About two thirds of PA households who are living in private housing have rents in excess of PA shelter allowances. This problem is acute in Suffolk where, due to the lack of rental housing and resulting high rents, many PA clients are living in units with rents that are more than 200% of the shelter allowance. This housing burden and the resulting stress of homelessness or the risk of homelessness, has a huge effect on the ability to pursue employment, education, etc. A recent book, “Evicted,” documents how the inability to retain affordable, stable housing negatively impacts the lives of poor people. The HSS concept – details are still being worked out – includes:
  - a. A statewide supplement to the DSS shelter allowance for families and individuals who are eligible for PA, facing eviction/homelessness, or loss of housing due to domestic violence or hazardous housing
  - b. The supplement amount is pegged at the difference between the current shelter allowance (\$447/month for a family of three) and 85% of HUD Fair Market Rental (\$1,324 for a one bedroom; \$1,608 for a two bedroom in Suffolk). Decisions have not yet been made on how to include heating.
  - c. HHS would be 100% federally and State funded, and would replace existing local supplements, such as those currently used in Nassau and Suffolk Counties
  - d. This is not an increase in the shelter grant – but rather a supplement to it.
  - e. Why HHS is a good idea:
    - 1) HHS will result in net savings owing to the decrease in homelessness that will result.

- 2) HHS will create more stability in families and neighborhoods
6. **Child Care Commission:** Mr. Koubek and Lisa Pinkard reported that the Commission had its second meeting in June. Its focus will be on data gathering regarding the availability and affordability of Suffolk child-care slots as well as overcoming the barriers families face in securing these slots. The Child Care Commission will not emphasize State child-care CCBG funding which will remain a priority of the Welfare to Work Commission...
  7. **New Commission Members:** Mr. Koubek reminded the Commission that there is a need for the Suffolk Legislature to update the membership seats on the Welfare to Work Commission: FECS has closed and that seat should be eliminated; the Suffolk Works Employment Program and the Suffolk County Department of Labor, Licensing and Consumer Affairs should be merged as one seat; the Health and Welfare Council of LI has asked to be removed because they do not have sufficient staff to attend meetings. He noted that United Way declined a seat because of internal staffing considerations. He submitted three organizational recommendations, each of which had agreed to accept a seat: the Community Development Corporation of LI; Family and Children's Association; LI Coalition for the Homeless.
    - a. Kim Gierasch moved and Richard Krebs seconded a motion to seat the Community Development Corporation of LI (CDCLI), which passed unanimously. This followed a brief discussion of the important role CDCLI plays in housing low-income people which is an essential focus of the Commission.
    - b. Don Friedman moved and Ayesha Alleyne seconded a motion to seat the LI Coalition for the Homeless, which passed unanimously. This followed a brief discussion of the important role that LICH plays in identifying and serving homeless people.
    - c. Ayesha Alleyne moved and Barbara Egloff seconded a motion to combine the Family and Children's Association (FCA) seat with the existing seat of the LI Coalition for Alcoholism and Drug Dependency (LICADD), which passed: Yes - 8; No - 3; Abstentions - 2. This followed a detailed discussion around the fact that LICADD is now a subsidiary of FCA. The two agencies maintain separate 501 (c)(3)s as well as separate missions and boards. Mr. Koubek reported that George Nolan, Legislative Council, opined that they could be seated as separate agencies. However, there was some concern that, while not fully merged, these two agencies should be combined as one seat.
  8. **WLIW "LI Business News":** Mr. Koubek reported that he was contacted by WLIW to appear again on their "LI Business News" program. The invitation was extended after LI Community Foundation President David Okron provided the producers with a copy of the Commission's 2012 Suffolk poverty study. Asked to name a Nassau representative who might appear with him on the program, he recommended Jeffrey Reynolds of the Family and Children's Association who had worked on the report when he served on the Commission. The program was taped May 31<sup>st</sup> and will air in August.
  9. **Next Meeting:** The next meeting will be August 12<sup>th</sup>.

### **Suffolk Bus Letter to County Executive Bellone**

July 8, 2016

Hon. Steve Bellone  
Suffolk County Executive

H. Lee Dennison Building  
100 Veterans Memorial Highway  
Hauppauge, New York

Dear County Executive Bellone:

The Welfare to Work Commission of the Suffolk County Legislature is deeply concerned about reports that the County will eliminate 10-20 bus routes that serve an average of 1,500 people a day. While we supported your efforts to secure additional State transportation funding over the past several years, the Commission expressed concern that your decision to reduce County bus funding by \$10 million in the 2016 budget might jeopardize bus service if the State did not increase County transportation funding.

The Commission has a long record of supporting Suffolk bus service, including the establishment of some Sunday service and some expanded evening service. Our interest in this issue stems from our charge to recommend policies and procedures that affect people leaving welfare for work. This legislative charge has focused us on supportive services for working-poor people in Suffolk. Safe, accessible, reliable and affordable bus service is an essential supportive service for low-wage workers.

The announced cuts in regular bus service came as a surprise to us since your *Connect Long Island* initiative emphasized the need for new and expanded bus service. Why create new routes when cutting existing routes?

While the routes to be cut have not yet been announced, the Commission looked at the lowest ridership routes most likely to be eliminated: S35; S31; S69; S76; 1A/B; 5A; 10A/B; 10D. Some of these routes serve communities with significant concentrations of working-poor people who require bus service, including: Amityville; Copiague; Hampton Bays; Lindenhurst; Middle Island; Port Jefferson. In addition, these lines connect with other lines to which riders will transfer, thus compounding the effects of the cuts.

The Commission shares your frustration with the lack of adequate State transportation funding. So too, we understand the gravity of the \$129.4 million budget deficit faced by the County. Unfortunately, resolution of these fiscal problems is falling on Suffolk's working-poor people who rely on buses, in some cases as their only means of transportation to and from work. The impact of the cuts will not only hurt these workers but also the businesses where they are employed, not to mention businesses where they shop.

In 2013, when the County faced serious reductions in the child-care subsidy for working-poor families, we applauded your actions that found \$3 million in the existing County budget, which was used to close the gap in State child-care funding, thereby restoring the subsidy to many Suffolk families. Coincidentally, \$3 million is the amount needed to save the bus lines slated to be cut this year. The Commission therefore urges you to repeat your fiscal creativity of 2013 so that \$3 million is found in the existing \$2.9 billion Suffolk County 2016 budget to preserve the 10-20 bus lines slated for elimination.

Bus service is critical for Suffolk's economic development as well as for the economic stability of our County's essential but fragile low-wage workers.

We thank you for your attention to this critical and urgent matter.

Yours truly for the Commission,

**Richard Koubek, PhD, Chair**

**Kathy Liguori, Vice Chair**





CC: Members of the Suffolk County Legislature