

**Welfare to Work Commission
Of the Suffolk County Legislature
Minutes of the March 8, 2013 Meeting**

Present: Richard Koubek, Chair; Kathy Liguori, Vice Chair; Marcia Spector; Richard Krebs for James Andrews; Don Friedman; Bridget DePasquale; Ellen Krakow; Roland Hampson; Kathy Malloy; Roger Podd for Ray O'Rourke; Chavron Pierce; Kimberly Gierasch

Excused: Marjorie Acevedo; Gwen O'Shea; Rob Greenberger; Barbara Egloff; Debbie Joseph; Nina Leonhardt; Ray O'Rourke Peggy Boyd; Michael Haynes; Jeff Reynolds; Gwen Branch; Michael Stoltz

Guest: Acting BRO Director Robert Lipp

1. **Minutes:** Commission Chair Richard Koubek opened the meeting by thanking the members who were in attendance despite another snow event taking place and reminded them that the February meeting had been cancelled due to the March 8th blizzard. Mr. Koubek also pointed out that the presentation by Acting DSS Commissioner John O'Neill scheduled for today had to be postponed to the April meeting because Mr. O'Neill was called into a telephone conference with OCFS administrators on Suffolk's child-care allocation. Minutes of the January 18th meeting were adopted unanimously on a motion by Kathy Liguori, seconded by Marcia Spector.
2. **Remarks by BRO Acting Director Robert Lipp:** Mr. Lipp began his presentation by commending the Commission for its Suffolk poverty report which he found quite good. He was struck by the report's assessment of rising caseloads at DSS compared with increases elsewhere in the State. He stated that, regardless of whether funding is available to implement the report's recommendations, the Commission's report and its voice is much needed in County government. Mr. Lipp then provided background on some of the fiscal challenges facing the County.
 - a. He pointed out that the County is facing a serious revenue shortfall and deficit which has required creative solutions such as some additional bonding, sale and re-leasing of county buildings, the red-light camera program and the sale and privatization of some County operations and properties such as the John J. Foley Skilled Nursing Facility.
 - b. Among the pressures on the County budget are increasing pension costs, sales tax revenue increases that are not keeping pace with rising program costs, the police arbitration settlement and the limited number of "one-shot" funding arrangements that are now available to address the deficit. He noted that many of the County's responses have been short-term to what is now estimated to be another \$60 million deficit in 2013 on top of the three-year deficit that has been projected through 2014. He pointed out that BRO did ask for a ¼ cent sales tax increase (as did the Commission in its report) but that the State was not likely to approve this increase. He noted that the \$70 million raised by the sales tax increase, were it to be enacted, would likely go to deficit reduction rather than toward implementing the program recommendations in the Commission's report.

- c. There was some discussion of the “third-rail of local politics” issue – increasing County taxes. Mr. Koubek and Marcia Spector reminded the Commission of a survey conducted by the Health and Welfare Council in the 1990s when Nassau County was facing a serious deficit. The survey asked Nassau residents if they would accept a tax increase to fund specific County programs that were named in the survey. The results were overwhelmingly positive: residents see the need for increased taxes if the taxes are linked to specific programs such as parks, recreation and other services. Ms. Spector stated that she believed this survey was funded by the Hagedorn Foundation. Several Commission members pointed out that the results could be very negative, especially if the program choices are related to social services for poor people. The Commission reached consensus that Mr. Koubek should reach out to Daren Sandow at Hagedorn to determine if there would be any interest in conducting a similar survey in Suffolk.
 - d. Mr. Lipp noted that County fiscal policy should have a three-pronged “Sustainable Development” approach: (1) economic growth; (2) environmental protection; (3) social services. He stated that the Commission’s report calls attention to the lack of balance and the need for the County to pay more attention to social issues such as supportive programs for working-poor people.
3. **Suffolk Poverty Report:** Mr. Koubek reported that he, Kathy Liguori, Mike Stoltz, Jeff Reynolds and Don Freidman met with the Cablevision Editorial Advisory Board to discuss the poverty report on January 18th following the Commission meeting. Peter Kohler stated that Cablevision would likely do a series of editorial profiles after April on some of the people featured in the report. A meeting with the Newsday editorial board is being arranged. In addition, Mr. Koubek, Kathy Liguori, Don Freidman, Nina Leonhard and Barbara Egloff spent over an hour presenting the report to the Legislature’s Human Services Committee on February 25th and he, Ms. Liguori and Collen Merlo of the Suffolk Mental Health Association presented the report to the Legislature’s Health Committee on February 28th. Those who testified reported that the interactions with the legislators were very positive. A presentation to the Legislature’s Public Works and Transportation Committee will be made on April 16th.
 4. **Commission Priorities and Annual report for 2013:** Having discussed the 2013 priorities at the January 18th meeting, and a copy of the annual report having been vetted by committee chairs and distributed to the Commission in advance of this meeting, a motion was made by Kathy Liguori, seconded by Marcia Spector, to adopt the priorities and report with one additional goal taken from the poverty report: creation of a child care task force to coordinate child care services with the County’s economic development plans. The motion passed unanimously.
 5. **Policy Updates:** Mr. Koubek reported that Legislator Browning is working with Senator Zeldin on a bill that would require OASAS to take responsibility for Suffolk sober homes. He also reported that Suffolk is receiving \$2 million in additional funds for transportation in the Governor’s proposed 2013-2014 State budget and that these funds might be used for extended bus service such as Sunday or evening service.
 6. **Next Meeting: Friday, April 12th , 9:30 AM** at the SCDOL One Stop Center.