

**Welfare to Work Commission
Of the Suffolk County Legislature**

Minutes of the July 9, 2010 Meeting

Present: Richard Koubek, Chair; Kathy Liguori, Vice Chair; Bridget DePasquale; Ellen Krakow; Rob Greenberger; Eric Lopez; Gwen Branch; Roland Hampson; Roger Padd for Pam Killoran; Michael Haynes; Mike Stoltz; Jack Caffey; Peter Barnett;

Excused: Don Friedman; Judy Cahn; Jane Devine; Idania Aponte; Frank Casiglia; Peggy Boyd; Nina Leonhardt; Joan Grant

Guests: Jill Rosen-Nikoloff, Suffolk County Director of Affordable Housing, Department of Economic Development and Affordable Housing

1. **Minutes:** The minutes of the May 21st meeting were accepted unanimously, following minor editing, on a motion by Jack Caffey, seconded by Kathy Liguori.
2. **Presentation on Affordable Housing in Suffolk County:** Chair Richard Koubek introduced Jill Rosen-Nikoloff, Director of Affordable Housing for a presentation on Suffolk County affordable housing initiatives. He reminded the Commission that Ms. Rosen-Nikoloff's presentation was the second – preceded by Michael White, Executive Director of the Long Island Regional Planning Council in April – both of which were updates on the Commission's 2007 affordable housing report to the Legislature, *Affordable For Whom?* Ms. Rosen-Nikoloff then presented an overview of these Suffolk County initiatives funded initially with \$31 million in County monies obtained through a bond referendum and other sources:
 - a. **72H Land Transfer Program:** The 72H program allows Suffolk County to transfer tax delinquent properties that have defaulted to towns and villages for the creation of affordable housing for people earning under 80% of the Area Median Income (AMI.) These properties are typically vacant or uninhabitable and require renovation or rebuilding. She noted that approximately 524 homes have been transferred for this purpose with non-profits such as the Community Development Corporation or Habitat for Humanity receiving the properties at no cost.
 - b. **Fast-Track Program:** In this program, the County expedites through the County's approval processes the applications of builders who are creating affordable housing. Thus far, approximately 900 such applications have been fast-tracked.
 - c. **Transfer of Development Rights (TDRs):** In this program, the County assesses the number of development rights that could have been obtained on land that the County purchases for open-space preservation. These development rights are then banked for transfer for free elsewhere in the County for use in the creation of affordable housing. Additionally, these TDRs permit developers to double the density allowed on the properties provided. These applications tend to be applied to scatter-site

developments rather than large, “big ticket” developments. Thus far, 69 TDR credits have been banked under the County’s Save Open Space program, one has been utilized by a developer and three applications are awaiting a decision.

- d. **Land Acquisition:** In this program, the County subsidizes land-purchase and infrastructure costs (sewage treatment, fencing, lighting, landscaping, etc.) for affordable housing development. To receive the subsidy, at least half of the units must be affordable to people earning under 80% of AMI. Thus far, nine developments have been approved for the subsidies with a total of 376 affordable units, 212 of which are rental units. An additional 263 units are in the pipeline to receive funding. The blended cost of the subsidy to Suffolk County is approximately \$39,000 per unit, down from a previous County cost of as much as \$100,000 per unit. These programs have been especially useful in downtown revitalization and economic development projects such as Sunnybrook in Bay Shore, Millennium Hills in Melville, and three projects in the Patchogue Village revitalization/Smart Growth development program.
- e. There next ensued a discussion of Ms. Rosen-Nikoloff’s report.
 - i. Richard Koubek asked if TDRs are the same as the transfer of sewage flow rights, to which Ms. Rosen-Nikoloff responded yes.
 - ii. Responding to a question from Mike Stoltz, she also stated that most of these projects are tax positive to local school districts. She responded to another of Mr. Stoltz’s questions that Section 8 housing vouchers can be used in the rental units if the renter qualifies and the rent is applicable to the Section 8 program.
 - iii. Richard Koubek pointed out current opposition to an AvalonBay development in Huntington Station that has arisen in part because Section 8 vouchers might be accepted. Ms. Rosen-Nikoloff stated that there was little public opposition to the nine developments she cited because local government officials worked closely with her office to build public support, such as the Mayor and Village Council in Patchogue.
 - iv. Rob Greenberger asked if the County promotes local job creation related to each of the larger housing developments. Ms. Rosen-Nikoloff stated that the County has policies and procedures to insure that the residents can afford to live in these homes and the County gives a preference to people who work nearby the developments, in accordance with Smart Growth principles.
 - v. Asked how the County defines affordability, Ms. Rosen-Nikoloff stated that generally the cost of a rental unit or equity (purchased) unit is computed at 30% of the monthly income of each individual or family. Rents are capped to preserve affordability and there are re-sale policies to insure that equity units remain affordable when they are sold.
 - vi. Asked by Richard Koubek about union hiring, Ms. Rosen-Nikoloff stated that builders are not required to hire union and pay

prevailing wages, but are encouraged to, noting that many unions are flexible with the prevailing wage in developments where affordable housing is being constructed.

- f. Mr. Koubek expressed thanks for the comprehensive and very enlightening report provided by Ms. Rosen-Nikoloff, noting that quite a number of the recommendations in the Commission's 2007 report have been implemented by the County. Other Commission members spoke with admiration at the progress that is being made by the County to expand the stock of affordable housing.
3. **Sober Homes Report:** Richard Koubek stated that the Commission's sober homes report was presented to the Health and Human Services Committee of the Legislature by him, Kathy Liguori and Committee Co-chairs Mike Stoltz and Peggy Boyd on June 3rd. He noted that the report was very well received by the Committee and was also reported in *Newsday*. Committee Co-chair Mike Stoltz stated that the Committee met on June 29th to consider next steps, which include:
- a. Not pursuing a revision of the 2003 County sober homes law struck down by the federal judge in 2010 because council believes there is little chance that this revised law would withstand a federal court challenge.
 - b. Following a conference call that Legislator Kate Browning participated in with State Assemblywoman Amy Paulin, Chair of the Assembly's Committee on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse, there was support for a Suffolk County pilot project to create local regulation of sober homes. Legislator Browning has been in discussions with SCDSS Commissioner Greg Blass and his staff on the possibility of drafting County legislation to allow SCDSS to have regulatory authority over sober homes that receive SCDSS rent payments. One possibility being discussed would be to make these sober homes County contract agencies. Roland Hampson, however, stated that this may create certain legal problems. County options for regulating sober homes will be pursued by the Committee at its August meeting.
 - c. The Committee recommended that Presiding Officer Bill Lindsay send a letter to County Executive Steve Levy inviting him to convene a conference of Suffolk County town supervisors and their code enforcement officers to identify common problems and solutions to the regulation of substandard homes.
 - d. The Committee also recommended that a delegation of state legislators be convened in the late summer or early fall to consider drafting a State bill that would grant the New York State Department of Alcohol and Substance Abuse Services (OASAS) the statutory authority to regulate sober homes.
4. **Employment Assessment and SCDSS Liaison Committees:** Committee Chair Rob Greenberger stated that the Committee would meet in July to continue its work on policies and procedures for screening persons with disabilities as well as Peter Barnett's proposal for policies for improving communication and cooperation between SCDSS and nonprofit agencies on individual cases. Tom Grecco and Jean

Carlson of SCDSS will be attending the next Committee meeting to address these issues.

5. **Monthly Staffing Report:** Richard Koubek distributed the SCDSS Major Trends report from Gail Vizzini, Director of the Legislature's Budget Review Office, for February-April 2109, compared with February-April, 2010. The report again showed dramatic, in some cases, "double digit" increases in caseloads for Temporary Assistance, Food Stamps and emergency housing due to the recession. Roland Hampson then distributed staffing data, June 2009 compared with June 2010, which reflected the increase in caseloads and applications, yet showed a 50% reduction in "days to disposition" for Family Assistance and Safety Net applications due to increased use of SCDSS staff overtime. While Mr. Hampson did not have exact SCDSS vacancy numbers at the meeting, he later confirmed that the current SCDSS vacancy rate is 6.9% down from the 2009 vacancy rate of 8% -11%.
6. **Child Care Committee:** Chair Kathy Liguori reported that she and Richard Koubek met with Dennis Nowak of the SCDSS Child Protective Services (CPS) Division to discuss a training program that would improve communication between CPS and child-care providers, while enhancing the providers' skills in recognizing and dealing with potential and actual child-abuse situations in their centers. The Committee will meet again in July to continue this discussion, which will likely involve a training provided by the Child Care Council of Suffolk and attended by CPS staff who can use the training to dialogue with providers about their CPS concerns.
7. **Self Sufficiency Report:** Richard Koubek and Kathy Liguori reported that they attended press conference on July 6th, co-sponsored by the Empire Justice Center, and attended by Congressman Steve Israel, to unveil the *2010 Self-Sufficiency Standard for New York State*. Using actual costs, such as child care, food and housing for each New York State county, the report demonstrates that Suffolk County families - due to the high-cost-of living - require over 400% above the Federal Poverty Level to meet basic expenses. For example, a family with one adult, an infant and one pre-school aged child needs an annual income \$90,310 to meet basic expenses. It was agreed that Commission member Don Friedman, who participated in shaping this study, would make a presentation to the Commission at a future meeting and that the Self Sufficiency Standard would be folded into the Commission's deliberations on issues such as child care.
8. **Public Transportation:** Mike Stoltz raised the issue of public transportation in Suffolk county in light of recent hearings in consideration of a proposal put forward by legislator Jay Schneiderman to increase fares and to establish the addition of Sunday service. He stated that several hearings were held but, other than advocates and a few riders, the hearings were poorly attended. It was agreed that transportation is a very complex issue but one that the Commission may take up at future meetings. Richard Koubek said that he would reach out to Legislator Jay Schneiderman who sponsored the pubic hearings on the Suffolk bus system.
9. **Next Meeting: Friday, July 3rd, 9:30 AM** in Conference Room A of the SCDOL One Stop Center. [Note: the August meeting was cancelled due to committee meetings and vacation schedules.]