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## Westchester chiefs meet with county legislators on public safety merger

WHITE PLAINS — Combining Westchester County's police and emergency services would save taxpayers money and wouldn't negatively impact their safety, several top commissioners testified Tuesday.

And it wouldn't be a "hostile takeover" of departments where any emergency responders are subservient to police, they said.

In appearing before a Board of Legislators committee, the commissioners did so "voluntarily," without the inducement of a subpoena, said Chief of Staff George Oros, who was among members of County Executive Rob Astorino's administration to talk about the proposed merger. "You can't just pull the switch on something like this," Oros said. "We want to make sure we don't jeopardize public safety."

Oros was joined by Public Safety Commissioner George Longworth, Emergency Services Commissioner Anthony Sutton and several other deputies who outlined the proposed consolidation of the two departments before county legislators.

Their appearance follows a battle between the two branches whereby the chairman of the Board of Legislators, Ken Jenkins, D-Yonkers, last week subpoenaed the administrators to appear before the board.

But at Tuesday's meeting, the matter appeared to be behind them as the discussion focused on the potential for **savings**.

"This is not a take-it-or-leave-it proposal," Oros said. "We are open to questions or comments and ways to make it better."

Legislators asked those questions and others. At one point, Legislator Michael Kaplowitz, D-Somers and chair of the committee, asked whether the plan was ambitious enough. "Let's dream big," he said. In July, Astorino proposed the merger of Public Safety and Emergency Services as a way to **save money** and streamline services. If approved, it would save \$746,000 next year, \$1.3 million in its second year and \$1.7 million in its third year, the commissioners said.

A chunk of savings would come through attrition, consolidating capital projects and eliminating repetitive duties such as payroll and **human resources** functions.

Efficiencies also would be gained in training and unified communications. Longworth, the public safety commissioner, would oversee three new divisions that each would be headed by a deputy commissioner, including Sutton.

Under this plan, no county police officers would lose their jobs. Though the county does not have a fire department, Emergency Services helps communities by coordinating responses , providing specialized support and offering training for firefighters, emergency medical technicians and other first responders. Some responders, however, have concerns over the concept and want to be included in discussions, said Michael DeVittorio, chairman of the Westchester County Fire Advisory Board, which is made up of paid firefighters, volunteers, chiefs and officers throughout the county.

"It's not a decision taken lightly," he said. "They haven't gone to the day-to-day, real-world operations."

Sleepy Hollow Police Chief John Kapica said the concept is long overdue because there is so much duplication, though he had concerns that fire and EMS would become secondary to [police departments](#) "There's too much duplication in government," he said. "I just don't want to see EMS go backwards." No vote was taken Tuesday, but the matter will be discussed again in September as legislators want to implement some sort of consolidation in time for 2011.

"This is the beginning , not the end, of this process," Kaplowitz said. "It's a matter of tremendous opportunity (and) tremendous importance."



Westchester Public Safety Commissioner George Longworth, speaking Tuesday to members of the county Board of Legislators about a merger proposal involving his department. (Ricky Flores/The Journal News)