

CSEA presents this as informational for Unit 9200 members working for Westchester County.  
This is from our friend John Nonna who represented residents in District 3, the Mount Pleasant area.



December 23, 2011

**Winter 2011 e-Newsletter**

Dear Friends and Neighbors:

**TOPICS IN THIS NEWSLETTER**

- **County Issues**

This is my last newsletter as your County Legislator. As most of you likely know, I was not re-elected in the November election. I have taken the responsibility of representing you in the County Legislature for the past four years very seriously. I recognize that you placed your trust in me and I have worked diligently to fulfill that trust. Although you may have disagreed with me on certain issues, please rest assured that my decisions and votes were taken after careful consideration of all points of view and all facts. They were made in what I believed to be in the best interests of my constituents.

During my four years in the County Legislature I have endeavored to promote transparency and open government, accountability and fairness. I have kept you informed of the work of the legislature and my own activities through this newsletter and frequent town meetings. I conducted eight community meetings each year throughout District 3. It has been said that “democracy dies behind closed doors “. That is why I believe in communication and the importance of a dialogue between elected officials and their constituents. I believe I was able to fulfill that goal during my tenure in the legislature.

Elected officials must also remember that they are accountable to their constituents-accountable to the taxpayers they represent, that taxpayers’ funds will be used wisely and efficiently. There will always be disagreements as to how funds should be spent and what should be the priorities. Westchester is a county with cities and farms, suburban areas and rural areas, inner cities and large areas of open space. Its population is diverse as well. We have extremes of great wealth and abject poverty. Yet we must remember that we are one people who are part of a broader community, we are connected. We must treat all these different parts of the county fairly. Fairness can mean different things to different people. The challenge is to come together and to work together to find common ground and find the proper balance among the various interests of our citizens. I have been an independent voice in the legislators seeking to bring these interests together to reach a common ground on the issues we face. Thank you for the opportunity to serve you over the last four years.

- 2012 Budget
- **Legislation Committee**
- **Local Issues**
  - Traffic Mitigation Plan
  - Miller House/George Washington Headquarters
  - Community Outreach
- **2011 Election**



## COUNTY ISSUES

### The 2012 Budget

The 2012 budget process is nearly complete. The Board of Legislators maintained a budget with a 0% tax increase and no use of the county's reserve fund. At the same time the Board restored jobs that were important for the maintenance of essential services and protection of public health, and safety that had been cut by the County Executive.

Fortunately, the County Executive recognized the short sightedness of cutting these positions and did not veto these job restorations.

The Board initially was going to cut \$2 million in jobs that were proposed by the County Executive. These were patronage positions that were County Executive appointments. The Board decided not to cut these positions in return for the County Executive's agreement not to veto important safety net programs such as eviction prevention, foreclosure prevention, funding for legal services for abused senior citizens and domestic violence victims which the County Executive had eliminated in his budget.

The County Executive did not veto the restoration of funds for nature centers in county parks which many constituents supported. The Board determined that this trade off was necessary in order to preserve these essential programs

The County Executive did veto a number of other items such as funding for (1) Cornell Cooperative Extension (2) the arts; (2) neighborhood health centers ; and(4) youth programs. The Board of Legislators will be deciding whether these vetoes should be overridden on Thursday December 22<sup>nd</sup> (which is after the preparation of this news letter).

The bottom line is good news for Westchester taxpayers - no tax increase and no use of the reserve fund which will help preserve Westchester's triple A bond rating. Public health and safety, quality of life and safety net programs were preserved.

## LEGISLATION COMMITTEE

I have been privileged to serve as legislation committee chair. The Legislation Committee is one of the two committees that are required by our County Charter, the "Constitution" of the County. All proposed local laws must be reviewed and approved by the Legislation Committee before the proposed local law is put to the entire Board for a vote. My approach to the committee was to allow discussion on any proposal submitted by

a legislator no matter what party, the County Executive or a citizen. In the past I saw proposals not brought to the table for discussion for political reasons. Secondly, I believed in legislative restraint. The County government cannot solve all social problems and we have to consider whether the County is capable of effectively enforcing laws that we passed and the cost of enforcement.

With that said, the Legislation Committee passed some important legislation over the past two years'. Here are a number of the most important pieces of legislation:

1. Term limits for County Legislators' and the County Executive. This legislation had been stalled and shoved under the rug for many years. I put it on the table and it passed. The limits are twelve years for legislators and the County Executive.
2. Reform of the financial disclosure statements required to be filed by elected officials and policy making employees. This law makes sure that these important statements are not buried in a file somewhere but reviewed to make sure they are complete and do not reveal any potential conflict of interests.
3. Creation of a charter revision committee to look at County government from top to bottom. This could result in streamlining county government to make it more efficient while producing a cost savings. In addition, I proposed that the Charter Revision Commission look at the entire budget process and see if it can be done in a more orderly and transparent fashion.
4. Flood mitigation law to enable the County to work together with our municipalities to address regional flooding issues. Towns and villages have been trying to solve these problems individually. This won't work. We need to work together to solve these problems on a regional basis. Legislators representing the Saw Mill River communities, (Legislators, Mary Jane Shimsky, Alfreda Williams and I), have already created a Saw Mill River Basin advisory committee of these municipalities to work on Saw Mill River flooding together on a regional basis.
5. The County Charter is unclear on the process for the Board of Legislators to issue subpoenas \The Board Chair was issuing subpoenas on his own without board approval or transparency. We passed law requiring that there be a full board vote or a committee vote before any subpoena is issued. This means the proposed subpoena will have to be discussed at a board or committee meeting as a matter of public record and a vote taken before the subpoena can be issued.
6. Finally we enacted reforms of the process governing the Board of Acquisition and Contracts. Most of these reforms were proposed by both Republicans and Democrats over the years and never brought to the floor for a vote. We finally accomplished that and passed these reforms.

## LOCAL ISSUES

**Traffic Mitigation Plan** – When I was first took office in January 2008, I learned that the City of New York had promised to implement traffic measures to mitigate the effect of closing the road over the Kensico Dam which was an important route for commuters. While we tried to get the City to reopen the road, it would not do so due to the fact that the Kensico Dam is a potential terrorist target and the results of a successful strike against the dam would be catastrophic to New York City and Westchester. I began working with the City of New York, the State Department of Transportation, Towns of North Castle and Mount Pleasant and our own County Public Works Department to bring these measures to fruition. It has been a long process but the issues are almost all resolved and the traffic mitigation plan is 90% complete. Construction should begin in 2012. I will not be in office when the work is completed. I want to thank Matt Warne of the New York City Department of Environmental Conservation and his colleagues for their hard work and cooperation over the years. I also want to thank the Supervisors and Police Chiefs of North Castle and Mount Pleasant, the Valhalla Fire Department, the New York State Department of Transportation and the County Public Works Department for coming together to move this job closer to reality.

**Miller House/George Washington Headquarters** – Sadly no progress has been made to restore the Miller House despite efforts of the Board of Legislators and a dedicated group of citizens in North Castle —the Miller House/George Washington’s Headquarters Committee- to renovate and restore the Miller House and move it to a location where it can once again be enjoyed by visitors and serve as an educational site for school children as it had been in the past. In a bi-partisan effort, the Board of Legislators voted to fund the restoration and renovation. The Board also voted unanimously to move the Miller House to a site close by, in the vicinity of Kensico Dam Plaza. The County Executive, however, has refused to follow the acts of the Legislature as the County Charter mandates. The Miller House Committee created a not for profit organization to raise funds to pay for the maintenance and programs at the restored Miller House. Their efforts have not been properly recognized. The County Executive’s actions are ironic because when he was a County Legislator representing District 3 he called for the immediate restoration and move of the Miller House—just 5 short years ago.

**Community Outreach** - I have worked with community groups who meet regularly with the Cottage School, Hawthorne Cedar Knolls School and the Volunteers of America who operate the Valhalla Homeless Shelter to foster a dialogue between the community and these institutions that operate in the community. These meetings have promoted a better understanding of the issues faced by these institutions and the concerns of the communities. In the case of Cottage School and Hawthorne Cedar Knolls the community groups have been able to address their concerns with the New York State Commissioner of the Office of Children and Family Services and her staff. These meetings demonstrate the value of open government, dialogue and the

importance of finding common ground on issues we face. I hope these meetings continue and stand prepared to continue to assist in making them happen.

### **2011 Election**

It has been an honor and a distinct privilege to serve the people of the 3rd Legislative District for the past four years. I leave office keeping in mind the words of Winston Churchill: "Success is not final, failure is not fatal. It is the courage to continue that counts."