



Unit 9200 – Employees of Westchester County
Civil Service Employees Association
112 East Post Road
White Plains, New York 10601

Minutes of Open Monthly Member Meeting
DECEMBER 7, 2010

Karen Pecora – President

Kwabena Manu – 1st Vice President / Union Representative
Junio I. Alvarado – 2nd Vice President / Union Representative
Teresa Rella – 3rd Vice President
[Vacant] – 4th Vice President

Michael Wolf – Treasurer
Kimberly Gotzen – Secretary

- **Officers in Attendance:** All officers were in attendance, as well as Local 860 President John Staino
- Meeting was held at the White Plains High School, 550 North Street, White Plains
- Meeting was called to order at 6:00 PM by President Pecora
- Pledge of Allegiance
- Moment of silence for departed Members and family members and troops serving throughout the world

Agenda Items

We invited the Board of Legislators to join us for dinner and our meeting to show our appreciation for all of their efforts in frantically working to save our jobs in the last few weeks, and today we have good news that **so far more than half of the 226 jobs slated to be cut have been restored to the budget.**

- **Guest Speaker: Majority Leader Peter Harkham, Board of Legislators**

I would like to thank the Members for all of their service this year under really difficult circumstances. You've had a cloud hanging over you for a year, since the administration changed, and we know how difficult it has been, especially after the early retirements and separations where some of you are now doing two jobs. You're exemplary, above and beyond the call, and we want you to know from our perspective, we really appreciate what you're doing, and we certainly understand the conditions you're doing it under, and we just want to say thank you for that. When we were here last, we committed to restoring jobs as a priority, and we have put a significant number of jobs back in the budget. At least half of the 226 jobs will be restored to the budget, and we're not finished with the process yet. We have a vote on Friday, and then there will more than likely be a veto process. We know that even one job is too much to lose, and we're sorry that at this time we can't say that we can restore all the jobs, but we're working really hard. I'd like to commend your leadership for working very closely with us, not just during this budget process, but throughout the year. We wish you the best for a Healthy and Happy Holiday Season.

- **Guest Speaker: Legislator Alfreda Williams**

I thank all of you, because I know it hasn't been easy, especially at this time of year. I know it's hard for you to plan for your families, but I thank you for your hard work and cooperation with us in trying to maintain as many jobs as possible.

- **Guest Speaker: Legislator Bill Burton**

Chairman Ken Jenkins is a fighter, always stands up for what needs to be done, and works to get what we need to run this County Government with the people and the programs that matter most. Wishing you the best of the holiday season, and God Bless you all.

➤ **Guest Speaker: Chairman Ken Jenkins, Board of Legislators**

I know it's a very difficult time as we are going through these changes. We are continuing to work hard through this process, and fighting and doing the very best that we can to restore as many jobs as we can, so that you, our colleagues, can continue to provide high quality services to the people of Westchester. We know that it's not your issue where we are in this economic climate and with this budget deficit. We're looking for every penny under every rock. We need a balance between the people that pay for the services, the people that receive the services, and the people that deliver the services. I'm looking forward to hearing from you about how your work conditions have changed after the retirements this year. We're going into a budget battle. This is a very difficult time, and there is no joy in going through budgets and looking at numbers, but we're doing our best to find ways to put back as many jobs as we can. For the ones that it looks like we may not be able to restore, there are still discussions to be had. We all need your support, and we appreciate your inviting us here to hear from the employees.

➤ **Guest Speaker: Majority Whip Judy Meyers, Board of Legislators**

I see a lot of familiar faces out there. My colleagues have already conveyed our sentiments to you about our fight with this budget. We're working on it! Thank you for being here, and Happy Holidays everyone.

President Pecora thanked the legislators for everything they have done. We have tried our hardest to be part of the solution, but there is nothing that we can do as far as our contract.

Local 860 President Staino thanked the Legislators for their efforts. We will do everything we can at CSEA to help the Legislators to find a way to restore all positions possible.

Unit 9200 Members addressed the Legislators:

➤ **Israel Rosa, Social Services**

I would like to thank you, because we know that you've been elected to do a job, and we thank you for that. Can you give us a breakdown of jobs that are still in jeopardy?

Chairman Jenkins responded that the County Executive's budget targeted 226 positions. Social Services is not affected by layoffs at this time. Section 8/Planning and Community Mental Health have received letters that their jobs are in jeopardy. I spoke with the office that manages Section 8 for New York State who received an unauthorized letter from County Executive Astorino informing them that we are terminating our contract. We feel strongly about maintaining the Section 8 program, because it is one of the programs that bring revenue into Westchester County.

➤ **(President) Karen Pecora, Parks**

Please check the Department budgets for vacant positions that have not been eliminated from the budget. It is extremely unfair to talk about laying off even one employee when Departments are protecting unmanned positions in their budgets.

➤ **Paul Thompson, Information Technology**

I went over your proposal on the website, and appreciate the 1% tax decrease. What do you think the County Executive is going to do when you present your budget with positions restored?

Chairman Jenkins responded that even if we restore 150 positions, there would still be some employees laid off. We understand the charter, and after the last public hearing, we can vote, and we can do additional add-on's. We're starting early on Friday at 12:30 PM (instead of Monday as scheduled), and the County Executive has 5 days to veto the line item add-on's. Once we pass our budget, the County Executive has 10 days to approve or veto the entire budget. We can then override that veto - the budget needs 9 votes to pass, but it takes two thirds or 12 votes to override the County Executive's veto - but there must be a budget in place by December 27th. I suspect the County Executive is going to line item veto some items. It is important for you to be in contact with your own Legislators, and let them know that you support these add-on's for previously cut positions.

Majority Leader Harkham stated that we have a Democratic majority of 12 votes, we have been unified in this process, and we expect that we will continue to be unified.

➤ **John Brucale, Parks**

I've been an employee at Playland for 43 years, and I didn't take the buyouts for personal reasons, and because I love my job. I am one of the 226, and I would like to be able to walk away when I feel that it's time, and not have anyone tell me I have to leave my job.

Chairman Jenkins responded that we will not play with people's minds or jobs. We add in the services that we want to see - if we added anything in to the budget, then we intend to keep it in. It helps all of us when we're all working together with this process. There are groups out there that believe that we should be slashing and burning, and we don't agree with that. The County Executive called for a 12% reduction in the workforce, and right now we're at an 11% reduction, and we have reduced spending in the 2011 budget.

➤ **Lynnette Draper , Planning/Section 8**

The County Executive cut the Section 8 contract with the state, the Legislators put it back in, and we don't know where New York State stands. Who is the determining authority?

Chairman Jenkins responded that there is one governing body of Westchester County, and according to the charter, that is the Board of Legislators, and we have the controlling authority. The County Executive is the CEO for day-to-day operations. New York State said that they do not want to be in the middle of the fight between the County Executive and the Board of Legislators. On Section 8, we have made it clear that when the budget is adopted, the Commissioner of Planning will send a letter rescinding the letter sent to New York State in October by the County Executive and restoring the Section 8 program contract. The Board of Legislators can override the County Executive's veto, and that means that we have the final authority.

➤ **Kim Nugent, Planning/Section 8**

I have ultimate faith that Section 8 will go forward with the help of the Board of Legislators, but my concern is after that, the public perception is that this program costs the taxpayers money, which is untrue. Our caseloads are well over 150, which is the benchmark, even though the County Executive is saying that they are at 100.

Majority Leader Harkham responded that's just 'Astorino math'. He asserted most of this year that we are at a 166 million dollar deficit – and it turns out that we have a 52 million surplus. The deficit in Section 8 was a chargeback to IT, which is a made up number, and we know that. If they're not including salaries and fringe benefits in their contract, that's their poor management, not a reflection on the program or the employees who administer it. The onus is on them to manage the program better – it's a management issue, not a productivity or a cost issue.

Chairman Jenkins responded we have oversight authority. We are in constant contact with our fellow Legislators and with our constituents. Our goal is to run at a zero increase tax levy, but also for smart transitions – there must be analysis to make sure that the numbers that the County Executive is publicizing are real, or to refute them and show the actual numbers – this is our job, to show the facts. Union Members need to take it upon themselves to talk to their friends and neighbors, and tell them the facts about County workers.

➤ **Leslie Messina, Community Mental Health**

Thank you for being here tonight, and for working collaboratively with President Pecora and our Union. We appreciate it from the bottom of our hearts. I am one of 5 employees at the satellite shelter location of the Mount Kisco Community Mental Health Clinic, and although we had been told that the Community Mental Health clinics and positions had been restored to the budget, we received an E-mail from Commissioner Mitchell on Friday telling us that our services were no longer required.

Chairman Jenkins responded that all positions in Community Mental Health have been restored. There is a state mandate that requires Westchester County to provide community mental health services, The Commissioner wants to get the County out of the mental health business. In order to do this, and comply with state requirements, there will need to be a transition plan – the clinics cannot simply be closed with the assumption that not-for-profit agencies will somehow absorb these clients. We understand that the federal government is changing the way Medicare and Medicaid reimbursements work, but this does not mean that the resources are no longer available, but that there will be different ways in which to bill for services.

Majority Whip Meyers responded that each Commissioner was told this year to come back to the County Executive with a 20% reduction in their departments; they're just trying to keep their jobs, and under this pressure, they're coming up with solutions and cuts that are actually against the law. There must be a transition, and we have a mandate to make sure these services are available to the citizens of Westchester.

➤ **Andrew Swain, Social Services**

Thank you for attending our meeting. Closing shelters and mental health clinics where employees that have 20+ years of service and experience doesn't make sense. Closing these centers will also be more costly in the long run. Please look at the residual effects of these cuts.

Legislator Alfreda Williams responded that we know that there is a residual effect, both on employees and the clients. One of the reasons we've tried so hard to restore these positions and clinics is that we know the dire consequences this would have to our citizens in need, and we are trying to find the best way to continue to provide these services into the future. The County Executive is concerned about changes in the Medicaid funding in the next 4 years. Changes do not necessarily mean lost revenues to the County, but only different ways of billing, and in the mean time, our priority is to keep in mind the difficulty in transitioning the patients of these centers, and to be sure of the continuity of these services.

Chairman Jenkins responded that the County Executive does not have a clear understanding of the interconnectivity of the services you provide within the different Departments, and how they can impact each other when there is a discontinuity of services. There is a ripple effect in many other areas when one area is slashed and the citizens are no longer being served in important areas.

➤ **Jose Alonso, Social Services**

There is an initiative by New York State to privatize medical transportation.

Chairman Jenkins responded that we are not aware of that at this time. We will look into that issue.

President Pecora thanked the Members for speaking, and the Legislators for taking the time to attend our meeting. We have invited the Legislators to attend our Unit 9200 Holiday Party on December 18th, and we hope they can come and celebrate the holidays with us, and take a short break from the difficult issues we are facing together.

➤ **Irene Carr Leadership Award:**

The Irene Carr Leadership Award is given out by the CSEA Statewide Women's Committee, and they are looking for CSEA Members who exhibit leadership throughout the year, helping Members and their community. The award will be presented at the CSEA Statewide Women's Conference in April 2011. Any CSEA Member is eligible, not only Officers, Stewards and Activists. We would love to have Members nominated from Unit 9200. The nomination form can be downloaded at www.csealocal1000.org, and the deadline is **February 1, 2011**.

➤ **Handout: News Release – County Executive Astorino to Host Tele-Town Hall on Budget Wednesday**

County Executive Astorino will be holding a Tele-Town Hall Meeting on **Wednesday, December 8, 2010**, and instructions on how to participate are on the handout. We encourage Members to call in as taxpayers in Westchester, and express their concerns with this Budget.

➤ **Local Government Grievance Representation Workshop:**

A two-part, six-hour free workshop on Local Government Grievance Representation, to educate members on how to work with their contract's grievance procedure and to understand their role and responsibility as a grievance representative in protecting the rights of bargaining unit members in the workplace (please bring your contract), will be held on **Wednesday, December 8, 2010** and **Thursday, December 9, 2010** from **6:00 PM to 9:00 PM** (includes light dinner at 5:30 PM). Call the Region 3 Office at **(845) 831-1000** to register.

Members must attend both workshops, as well as the Representing Members in Interrogations Workshop next year, to be considered for certification to represent Members in Notices of Questioning, however, there is a conflict with the **December 9, 2010** final Public Budget Hearing. Members could attend the first night of the Workshop and attend the second part the next time the Workshop is held.

➤ **Unit 9200 Holiday Party:**

Although this is a tough time for all of us, our Holiday Party is a way to give something back to Unit 9200 Members and celebrate the holidays. The Unit 9200 Holiday Party will be held on **Saturday, December 18, 2010** from **6:00 PM to 11:00 PM** at the Westchester Marriott in Tarrytown. The cost is **\$35.00** for Members and **\$65.00** for non-Members, and the deadline to purchase tickets is **Friday, December 10, 2010**. We are also asking for volunteers to assist with registration and raffles for half an hour during the cocktail hour.

➤ **2011 Budget:**

We had some good news today, and as a result of the hard work on our behalf by the Board of Legislators, positions in Section 8/Planning, Community Mental Health and Labs & Research have been restored to the Budget. This is one battle we have won so far, and we thank the Legislators that have worked on our behalf immensely, and hope that their continued efforts will result in more positions being restored.

➤ **Public Hearings RE: 2011 Westchester County Budget:**

The final Public Budget Hearing will be held on **Thursday, December 9, 2010** at **7:00 PM** at the Little Theater at the County Center. We appreciate all of the Members who have attended the previous two hearings in November and passionately spoken about their work on behalf of the taxpayers of Westchester County, and we encourage Members to attend this last hearing and show solidarity with all Unit 9200 Members who are in danger of being laid off. **Please arrive by 6:00 PM to sign up to speak**, and contact President Pecora if you need a Unit 9200 T-shirt.

➤ **Advertising:**

Our Bee-Line Bus ads are going out now for the next 4 weeks. Our print ads will also appear in the Harrison Report, the Yorktown Cortlandt Express, and the Guardian. Make sure your friends and neighbors see these ads – your neighbor knows that you work for Westchester County, and they think that you make over \$100,000.00 a year.

➤ **Polar Plunge:**

Two Unit 9200 Members, **Betty Lewis** from Community Mental Health, and **Christina Garabedian** from Public Works, participated in the Polar Plunge at Playland on **Saturday, December 4, 2010**, and raised \$1,900.00 in donations for the Special Olympics. Congratulations to them, and we hope to have more Members participate in future events.

➤ **Upcoming Elections**

CSEA has an interest in preserving the Democratic Majority in the Board of Legislators, and we will help in any way we can to achieve this. As you know Legislator Tom Abinanti won his bid for a State Assembly seat, and there will be a special election held in February or March of 2011. It is our goal to make sure another Democratic Legislator will take that seat, and our Political Action Committee will be involved in interviewing candidates and making recommendations for CSEA endorsements, not only for this special election, but also for the general election in November 2011 when all of the Legislators are up for re-election. This is of the utmost importance to our Members, and we will be calling on you for your support and assistance in this very important movement in the coming months.

➤ **EEOC**

County Employees go to the EEOC (Equal Employment Opportunity Commission) / Human Rights Commission when they feel they are being discriminated against in the workplace and County Executive Astorino has decided that the Human Rights Commission is no longer necessary in Westchester County. CSEA does not have the authority to handle discrimination cases, so with the elimination of this Commission, County Employees will have no avenue to file complaints regarding discrimination within the County. Employees who file complaints with the New York State EEOC will most likely need to hire their own attorney to pursue complaints, and management who have complaints against them will no longer have the Human Rights Commission to defend them, and would also have to hire attorneys. This commission has saved Westchester County a lot of money in avoiding lawsuits in these cases.

Open Forum

Questions from Members answered by President Pecora:

➤ **Retired DSS Member Linda Bryant stated she is very proud that CSEA and local agencies did such a great job at the Public Budget Hearings. Have we had any feedback from the Board of Legislators?**

We were recognized in the media as showing up in force at all three meetings in support of our Members, and we got our message across. The Legislators are in a tough spot, because everyone speaking is asking for cuts to be restored. There were very few people speaking in support of Astorino's budget, but those who did were small business owners in Westchester, who may not be aware of the impact to their businesses if Westchester County workers are no longer supporting them.

