

Westchester County Explores Shared Services

Kathy Welsh



WHITE PLAINS – Keeping with the theme that we are one united Westchester County, County Executive George Latimer is making a push for municipalities to work together and find ways to save money and improve services by banding together and sharing equipment, contracted services and facilities where possible.

Latimer is asking that all creative ideas, suggestions and thoughts be shared at the public hearings or via email.

Shared Services Public Hearings June 14

3-5 p.m. Yonkers Riverfront Library

7-9 p.m. Mt. Kisco Library

Shared Services Email

Sharedservices@westchestergov.com

Westchester's Shared Services Program is based in Legislation signed by Gov. Andrew Cuomo that requires county and local officials statewide to work together to eliminate duplicative services to save money and reduce property taxes.

New York State has also set aside \$225 million in matching state funds for money the counties save by sharing services.

County Executive George Latimer said it is important for municipalities, county government, legislators and the local public school districts to work together to come up with innovative solutions to cut costs, “It is important to understand that in this administration, in this County government, we are all in this together. We are tasked by state and federal governments to do certain kinds of things, and people who live in Westchester County expect to see certain services. And the question is, how can we best deliver those services?”

Other Counties, like Nassau and Suffolk Counties, have already submitted successful plans. In Nassau, the County submitted a plan that involves 70 municipalities, one aspect of it is conversion of a 70-year-old sewage treatment plant into a pump station for Nassau County and Long Beach. The Plan is estimated to save taxpayers \$130 million.

Latimer said, “We are not approaching this as ‘us’ and ‘you,’ we are approaching this as ‘we.’ And we are trying many things with that mind set, sitting down with our fellow local governments to find out what is the best way to do this.”

The 2017-18 NYS budget required every county executive to convene a Shared Services panel made up of the chief elected of every municipality in the county. The goal of the panel is to develop a county-wide property tax savings plan via sharing of goods and services and/or consolidations of departments or functions resulting in reduced costs. Proposed actions can include actions among municipalities (and school districts or BOCES), between municipalities and the County or any combination.

The Shared Services Plan is being guided by consultants from the SUNY Rockefeller Institute and the Benjamin Center at SUNY New Paltz. They are working with both County and municipal officials to explore options to work together. Latimer convened the Panel at a meeting on May 9, attendees from 41 municipalities, as well as all County Departments, attended. The public hearings are the next step in developing the plan.

Director of Operations Joan McDonald said: “The shared services plan is an opportunity to increase funding from the state, try new ideas, and learn from other plans and other counties’ successful experiences.”

The push has been made before, but never successfully seen through. While many changes have already been made, Latimer said there are still many potential savings.

Calendar

- June 14- Public Hearings
- 3-5 pm Yonkers Riverfront Library
- 7-9 pm Mt. Kisco Library
- Aug 1- Deadline for the Presentation to Westchester County Board of Legislators
- Public Hearing- Date and Location Pending
- Sept. 15- Deadline for the Panel Vote on Plan and Submission to New York State
- Oct. 15- Deadline for the Presentation of Plan to Public

The plan must include recurring property tax savings. Savings that have been realized would be eligible for a one-time state match. Westchester County convened a panel in 2017 and submitted a plan for \$1.2million in savings annually (\$2.3 million for the first year). The 2018-19 budget allowed counties to revise and resubmit their plans; and, Latimer decided to reconvene the panel to generate larger savings via a more comprehensive plan.