



News from Assemblywoman

Sandy Galef

AUGUST 2014

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Dear Constituent,

This year's New York state budget has money in it to help property taxpayers by paying you back for any increases in local property taxes when your local governments and schools stay within the state tax cap. For next year, there will also be a tax freeze if governments and schools show savings of 1% over the next three years. Some good work has been done locally over the last few years to reduce overlaps and increase government efficiency. Now that the economy has picked up, we need to remain vigilant if we are to continue making inroads into holding the line and preferably even lowering property taxes in the area.

In May 2014, I held a forum with the Department of State to review their program for Local Government Efficiency and hear about success stories around the state. Liz Armstrong, News Editor for Philipstown.info, covered the event and did a terrific write up which is reprinted here, or can be found in its entirety on Philipstown.info's website. You can also see the forum on YouTube or request a DVD copy from my office.

In June, leadership organizations from around the state held one of a series of forums which focused on fostering collaboration between and among different governments, identifying success factors, and also discussing barriers that need to be overcome. I am including some of the success stories here that were discussed at their June 17th event as well as others I am familiar with or have learned about from a listing Dutchess County recently published.

Additionally, I have included a comment section to gain your input about areas you think have the most potential to produce savings and ensure you receive the state benefit of a property tax freeze.

I hope we can continue to work together on this critical issue to lower our property tax burden.

Sincerely,

Consolidation and Sharing Key to Town and Village Efficiency

June 4, 2014

State officials give tips and offer aid

By Liz Schevtchuk Armstrong

(Reprinted with permission from Philipstown.info)

Led by Assemblywoman Sandy Galef, officials from New York State's Department of State last Thursday (May 29) briefed citizens and civil servants on the A-B-C-Ds of increasing local government efficiency, saving taxpayer money, and boosting state aid levels.

Their alphabet focused on A — alternative ways of thinking; B — better governance through efficiency; and C consolidation, sometimes achieved by D — dissolution of small independent jurisdictions.

Held at Cortlandt town hall, the event drew about 20 attendees, including administrators from the Garrison and Carmel public school districts. No one from the Cold Spring Village Board, Nelsonville Village Board, or Philipstown Town Board came, despite their ongoing consideration of consolidating their building departments.

Galef, who represents Philipstown and other Hudson Valley towns, highlighted both the pressures for, and advantages of, merging government functions. The impetus largely comes from the governor and state efforts to get local governments to freeze property taxes, meet a cap on tax increases, and save taxpayer money, with refunds for residents of those jurisdictions, including school districts, that do so, Galef said. Along with the rewards come obligations for governments to cut spending, she explained.

"So there's a big effort," she said, "for us to learn to share services, coordinate our programs, consolidate services or consolidate governments or whatever. If we want, ourselves, as taxpayers, to get some money back from the state with the freeze in the future, we have to convince ourselves and the public and our local officials that we need to do things differently."

Answering difficult questions

Mark Pattison, director of local government services in New York's Department of State (DOS), said local jurisdictions need to ask "is there a better way to provide services?" He pointed out that many of New York's numerous government entities originated in the 18th or early 19th centuries, born of solitary hamlets and the distance easily covered on horseback. Over time, distances and borders between jurisdictions disappeared and individual governments remained and overlapped, he said. With that came extra costs — rapidly escalating costs in recent years, he said.

Pattison delineated ways local jurisdictions can share services or consolidate. For the latter, one option is dissolution of one municipality (or other jurisdiction) and its merger with another, a process that can either begin with a municipality's governing board, or at the initiative of residents who get a dissolution referendum on the ballot. As communities consider consolidation, "there are many questions to be answered," Pattison advised. "Larger is not always better." At the same time, he observed, small jurisdictions face difficulties even keeping a government in place. "Some of our communities can hardly get people to run for office anymore," Pattison said.

He advised communities everywhere to answer certain questions. Among them is not only whether "too many layers" of government exist but

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Sharing and Consolidation Success Stories from around New York State

I know you have been hearing a lot about the new state program we implemented to incentivize school districts and municipalities to look at even greater efficiencies in order to achieve long term property tax savings and give taxpayers a rebate to hold the line on property taxes. In mid-June, the New York State Association of Counties (NYSAC), New York Conference of Mayors (NYCOM), Association of Towns of the State of New York (AOT), and New York State School Boards Association (NYSSBA) hosted a conference entitled “Grace Under Pressure: Innovation in a Time of Forced Efficiencies,” where leaders of these state associations participated in a “Municipal Innovation Exchange” and roundtable discussion of shared services projects in the region. I thought it might be helpful to list some of these projects in an effort to share new ideas and engage in the process of expanding what we think is possible in our own localities and schools. I am also including projects I know of either locally or have read about in other sources.

I encourage you to ask questions of your municipalities and schools to see if they have looked into some of these types of sharing opportunities and to encourage them to expand what services and with whom they share. I have also included a tear off on the back of the newsletter for you to share local success stories or areas you are hopeful can be looked at in the future for efficiencies and sharing.

Ways to Share Services

- Town assumes the role of village **courts**
- Town pays County for **police services**
- City **collects garbage** for village
- County provides **engineering services to towns** for bridge and sidewalk work
- City shares **solid waste disposal** with county so they are able to dissolve an authority in the city
- County provides **E911 dispatch** to cities and local municipalities
- Town and School District look into sharing **field maintenance and snow removal** through Department of State Local Government Efficiencies grant
- Local community college provides countywide **printing services, water filtration, defensive driving courses**
- Two towns share **assessor services**
- County provides **annual auction services** for municipalities

Ways to Share Property & Assets

- School uses town’s **salt sheds** (school purchases salt from town through cooperative agreements)
- School builds **transportation facility** and shares it with town for storing trucks and equipment. Town pays school district for use.
- Shared **fuel building and pumping stations** services local towns and local fire departments
- Shared **water line**: Village-built line for school, school pays village for it
- **Police range** used by multiple municipalities
- **Municipal training facilities offered for use** by county and state agencies **for EMS and Fire training**
- **Unified communications center**—city, 5 towns, county
- **Snow removal** agreements with many municipalities—shared equipment and staff
- Shared purchase of **ladder truck**
- **Backup water systems** for multiple municipalities
- Multi-county shared **computer aided dispatch system**, training and preparedness drills, fire and some police agencies radio system upgraded to transition all law enforcement
- **Shared fuel farm** to deliver fuel via technologically advanced delivery system to county’s and participating municipality’s vehicles



From the Department of State Local Government’s Division, Carl Ublacker, Deputy Secretary of State Dede Scozzafava, and Mark Pattison joined Sandy in May for a forum to discuss ways schools and localities develop efficiencies to save money.

Ways to Share Personnel

- Shared **school bus administrator & school food service** director
- Small school districts upstate share **curriculum and instruction leaders**
- 3 villages combine structure-fire response (**police & firefighters**)
- County loans village **code enforcement officer**
- **Unified economic development team**—city, municipalities, county
- **Snow removal** agreements with many municipalities—shared equipment and staff
- **County water and sewer authority** helps reduce number of sewer and water districts needed
- **Decontamination team/hazardous material team** provided as mutual aid to other counties and municipalities

Success Stories - Continued from page 2

Ways to Share Contracts & Purchasing

- Cooperative bids for **paving, blacktop, EMS supplies, water chemicals, auto parts, record storage**, lease space from volunteer fire departments for EMS services
- County offers help with **procurement process** for political subdivisions and school districts to utilize the **county's RFPs**. Some examples: fuel purchase, highway materials, paper, propane, cleaning supplies
- **Energy purchasing consortium** county/city
- Go **paperless**
- Shared **purchasing of equipment and supplies**
- School **buys sand** from town's contractor. Town benefits by buying larger quantity for lower price.
- Cloud based **building, permitting, code enforcement**, planning and zoning collaboration software among 12 municipalities-allows for public to **submit online permit applications**, and for code enforcement officers, building inspectors and plan reviewers to **share information in real time**.

Shared Employee Benefits

- **County health insurance policy** can be utilized by local municipalities
- **Workers compensation insurance pool** includes soil and water conservation district, 10 municipalities, 15 volunteer ambulance and fire squads
- **Labor negotiation services-uniform public employee benefit package**
- City formed **health insurance trust** with county to get better deals and cut out broker fees



I worked collaboratively with three communities in my district, Town of Cortlandt, Village of Buchanan and Village of Croton and a dedicated group of volunteers led by Janet Mainiero to get this wonderful memorial to our September 11th victims complete. It is a beautiful and moving installation on the banks of the Hudson River in Croton and I encourage everyone to pay it a visit. There will be a ceremony on September 11, 2014 to commemorate the event and the new statue.



As Chair of the Assembly Real Property Tax Committee, I meet with my colleagues in Albany to focus on key issues impacting New Yorkers.

Consolidation and Sharing - Continued from page 1

"what the right layer is," he said. He offered the state's assistance, including grants and financial aid, as local deliberations on consolidation, combining functions, and achieving other efficiencies ensue. "This is not a top-down thing," Pattison emphasized. "It's an invitation and incentive for people to get together and think about their governments in a different way," asking, "Is there a better way for us to do it? People ultimately have to choose where they want their communities to go," he said. "Do they want to maintain some unique identity" as a separate village or school district, "perhaps at a cost?"

Moreover, according to Pattison, in consolidations, "it's not always just the cost savings" that provide benefits, since consolidations "almost always result in opportunities for improved services." For example, he said, combining disparate justice courts into a single larger court "can provide the idea of more proper facilities and supports" for ensuring justice in the community.

"We have lots of local courts in the district I represent," Galef noted.

Locally, consolidation of the Town of Philipstown, Village of Cold Spring, and Village of Nelsonville justice courts into one has been suggested for several years.

Easy and tough cases

To begin merging and saving money, communities typically "take the small steps that build the common ground," combining some functions; moreover some small jurisdictions have shared services quietly for years, Pattison pointed out. "The harder ones," in his view, "are dissolution of villages or elimination of police departments."

Carl Ublacker, land-use training specialist in the DOS Local Gov-

ernment Division, outlined consolidations and shared-service projects recently undertaken across the state, among them:

- Merger of two school districts into one.
- Establishment of a shared public works facility to serve a school district, town, and village.
- Use of a common zoning code for a town and two villages.
- A BOCES (Board of Cooperative Educational Services) and school districts' merger of information technology, purchasing, and more.
- Creation by a school district, county, town and villages of a mutual records management center.

Ublacker also mentioned the consolidation of the Town of Saugerties and Village of Saugerties police. "It was pretty contentious," he recalled. Up front, a savings of \$678,586 annually was estimated but the move saved "slightly over \$1 million" yearly, he added.

"Fire-services consolidation," uniting individual departments, "is also oftentimes contentious," Ublacker commented. He said the state has funded a couple of fire-fighting consolidations and elsewhere paid for equipment for a merged department serving two villages and a town.

In controversial consolidations, both Pattison and Dede Scozzafava, New York's deputy secretary of state, highlighted the importance of dissemination of facts and sound information, so residents can vote with knowledge and objectivity. "We all know that in a lot of these situations it's emotional and emotion is powerful," Scozzafava said. "It takes a lot to work through some of these issues."

Fall Internship Openings

I am pleased to announce I will once again offer unpaid internships in my district office in Ossining for high school and college students who have an interest in government and politics. The internship allows students to gain a first-hand look at various aspects of state government. It is a wonderful office experience in which students get involved in writing letters, drafting press releases, crafting citations, researching legislation, sitting in on meetings with various interest groups, and attending and helping organize press conferences, town hall meetings and public forums. They also help write entries for these newsletters. Additionally, they have a window into how local communities and state government work together and how we help support constituents. Many have had an opportunity to join me in Albany during legislative session to see first-hand how the legislative process works. Not only will interns learn important new skills and concepts, but they will enhance their already existing skills and can use the experience to expand their resumé's.

Anyone with an interest in applying for this internship should visit my website at <http://assembly.state.ny.us/mem/Sandy-Galef> click on the Important Links tab and fill out the online application, or call Dana Levenberg in my office at 914-941-1111.



Interns joined me this summer for a small celebration at my home: From top left, Malahni Banta, Patricia Carbary, Hamza Raja, Emily Johl, me, Cat Purdy, Liam Cushen, and Andrew Coleman.



News from
Assemblywoman
**Sandy
Galef**

Property Tax Freeze Ideas to Help Cut Costs

AUGUST 2014



PLEASE CLIP OUT AND RETURN

Constituent Feedback

In order to participate in the tax freeze, our communities and school districts need to identify one percent savings over the next three years. Below, please let me know your ideas and suggestions for areas where you think we can find savings and efficiencies towards accomplishing that goal. Feel free to share any areas you have read about in this newsletter which you like, or other ideas you would want to propose for your community or school so that we can work on moving them forward. Send to my district office at 2 Church Street, Ossining, NY 10562. Attach more pages as needed. Click here to fill out on-line.
