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March 8, 2023

Dear Friends,

This newsletter highlights my recent annual NYS Clean Water Grant Workshop, which brings state agency representatives to Westchester to help local applicants secure grants to fund local projects. It was our most successful workshop since I started organizing these meetings in 2015. Below please read a summary of the event.

We are in the middle of the 2024-25 budget process. Most of my meetings in Albany are now on budget issues. We are preparing the Assembly and Senate budget proposals that will be the basis for negotiations with Governor Hochul, who issued her executive budget plan in January.

Education funding is a central issue during every budget year. I have discussed the budget with every school district, and I spoke at a rally on school aid in Mount Vernon last week.

This newsletter also includes information on a Science and Technology and Banks Hearing I co-chaired yesterday on emerging issues in Fintech.

As always, do not hesitate to contact me or my staff on issues in this e-mail or any matter in which we can be helpful. My office number is 914-939-7028.

Warm regards,

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**Annual NYS Water Grant Workshop Brings Record Attendance for Update on State Funding Opportunities**



*State agency speakers and sponsors at the 2024 NYS Clean Water Grant Westchester Workshop held at the Jay Heritage Center in Rye.*

**Rye, NY** – Westchester local government staff and officials, school representatives and environmental advocates received important updates on

2024 state grant opportunities at the **2024 Clean Water Grant**

**Workshop** hosted by State Assemblyman Steve Otis and officials of the NYS Environmental Facilities Corporation (EFC) and the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) at the Jay Heritage Center in Rye last Thursday.

The goal of this annual Westchester clean water workshop is to provide municipal and school district officials and staff with the latest information on the 2024 round of grants and the details regarding this year's application process. Over 60 attendees heard presentations from six agencies that focused on currently open or upcoming grant application rounds for 2024.

One highlight of this year's workshop was a presentation on NYS DEC's Resilient NY Streams Study Program, which the agency has undertaken in six watersheds in Westchester County. The workshop also included details on local government's ability to apply for several key water grant programs, including the Water Infrastructure Improvement Act (WIIA) and the Intermunicipal Grant (IMG) programs, administered by EFC and the Water Quality Improvement Program (WQIP), administered by DEC.

**Assemblyman Steve Otis said**, "We have held these Westchester workshops every year since 2015 when the WIIA program was created. The goal is to bring state water grant funding to Westchester communities to fund local projects. Special thanks go to Governor Kathy Hochul, NYS EFC President Maureen Coleman, and NYS DEC Commissioner Basil Seggos for the tremendous staff support for this valuable annual meeting. We were again joined this year by State Senator Shelley Mayer with whom I work closely on flood mitigation and water grant funding issues."

**New York State Environmental Facilities Corporation President and CEO Maureen A. Coleman said**, "Under the leadership of Governor Hochul, EFC's Community Assistance Teams are eager to work with state and local partners to

help all New York communities access the record amounts of funding to improve critical drinking water and sewer systems. We are committed to helping communities navigate the funding process and jumpstart crucial projects that will deliver clean water and build healthy, thriving neighborhoods."

**Commissioner of the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation Basil Seggos said,** "Hurricane Ida devastated many Westchester communities – underscoring the critical need for action on flood resilience and to upgrade clean water infrastructure and better prepare communities for the impacts of climate change. I thank Assemblymember Otis for bringing together municipal leaders, Westchester County officials, and State agency experts to strengthen the partnerships advancing beneficial projects and significant State investments with the support of Governor Hochul and the State Legislature."

The Resilient NY Streams Study Program update was provided by Tom Snow who oversees DEC's Watershed and Flood Resiliency Programs. This DEC initiative is of special importance in assisting Westchester local governments that need to address flood damage issues. The DEC program reviews past and current flood mitigation studies through state funded consultants and produces a priority list of projects to help local governments put shovels in the ground. The program also helps local governments identify funding options. The six stream studies covered Blind Brook, Beaver Swamp Brook, Mamaroneck Sheldrake Rivers, Hutchinson River, Bronx River, and Saw Mill River watersheds.

Environmental Facility Corporation Program Manager Máire Cunningham led the presentation on EFC's WIIA and IMG grant programs as well as the agency's Clean Water State Revolving Fund (CWSRF) program, and the federal Bipartisan Infrastructure Law grant programs also administered by the state. Cunningham also detailed EFC's expanded technical assistance program

through the agency's Community Assistance Teams, Planning Grant programs, and other technical assistance for applicants available from EFC staff during the application process.

Additional details were provided by three presenters from NYS EFC, a speaker from DEC on the WQIP grant program, and a presentation by the NYS Department of Health.

In addition, the attendees received a talk on the NYS Department of State's local government efficiency programs and a presentation by the NYS Office of Resilient Homes & Communities on new programs for flood damaged communities.

The full program was capped off by descriptions of grant writing assistance and other funding opportunities from the federal Sea Grant/Long Island Sound Study program.

Assemblyman Otis commented, "With ten speakers, representing six different agencies, and a full house representing local governments throughout the county, this was our most successful water grant workshop since we began hosting them almost a decade ago."

Applications for this year's \$325 million round of WIIA and IMG grant programs are due on June 14th, 2024. More information about the application process can be found on EFC's website. (<https://efc.ny.gov/>) Other programs will be announced later in the year.

Assemblyman Otis helped initiate the WIIA and IMG programs that have provided more than \$2 billion in grants to local governments statewide, including nearly \$130 million to Westchester municipalities for important clean water projects. Statewide grants from these water infrastructure programs alone have been awarded to over 800 projects in over 500 communities. EFC administers these programs and in coordination with the Departments of Health (DOH) and Environmental Conservation (DEC).

The workshop was co-sponsored by the Construction Industry Council of Westchester and the Hudson Valley, Federated Conservationists of Westchester County, Save the Sound, Long Island Sound Study, SeaGrant, Westchester Municipal Officials Association and the Jay Heritage Center, which hosted the workshop.

Follow-up assistance on state grant applications is available through the offices of Assemblyman Otis, Senator Mayer, or any State Assembly or State Senate member representing municipalities from Westchester.

**[Presentation slides and materials are available on my website HERE.](#)**



*Westchester local government representatives heard presentations from ten speakers, representing six different agencies, on the latest information regarding grant opportunities to help fund Westchester water projects.*

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### **Public School Funding Rally in Mt. Vernon**



Last Friday I was one of the speakers at a rally to support state aid to public schools in this year's state budget. I was joined by local teachers, school officials, the President of NYSUT, and fellow elected officials. I serve on the Assembly Education Committee and work very closely with school leadership in every school district I represent on the Sound Shore.

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**Fintech Hearing Discusses Benefits and Consumer Challenges of New Financial Technologies**



*Yesterday I co-chaired a hearing of the Assembly Science and Technology and Assembly Banks Committees on issues related to Fintech. Below is a summary of the hearing.*

**Assemblymember Hunter and Assemblymember Otis hold joint committee hearing on benefits, pitfalls of financial technology industry**

Assemblymember Pamela Hunter (D-Syracuse) held a joint Banks Committee and Science and Technology Committee hearing with Assemblyman Steven Otis on the transparency and security of financial technology, also known as FinTech. The hearing explored potential improvements to enhance protections for industry and consumers.



“Technology is rapidly evolving, and we must evolve with it,” said Hunter. “As chair of the Assembly’s Banks Committee, I know how essential online banking and FinTech services are to underbanked or unbanked communities. Strong consumer protections are equally important to help prevent predatory or deceptive practices and instances of fraud by third parties. We must continue working to improve consumer protections while allowing for innovation that improves opportunities and inclusivity within financial product offerings.”

Science and Technology Committee Chair Steve Otis (D-Westchester) said, “Our hearing was a great opportunity to discuss trends in the financial technology field as well as the need for strong consumer protections, cybersecurity practices, and data privacy safeguards for individuals using evolving financial products. We will continue to investigate ways to improve protections for consumers and the security protocols for traditional and new financial products.”

The hearing largely covered Buy Now, Pay Later (BN,PL) services as well as Earned Wage Access (EWA) and other services. Industry participants included Penny Lee, President and Chief Executive Officer of the Financial Technology Council; Phil Goldfeder, Chief Executive Officer of the American Fintech Council; Scott Astrada, Director of Public Policy & Social Impact at Affirm; Rachel Anderika, Head of Global Operations and Bank COO at Anchorage Digital; Ryan Naples, Director of Public Policy at DailyPay; and Ben LaRocco, Senior Director of Government Relations at EarnIn. Industry panelists were followed by consumer protection advocates including Yu Shan, Assistant Professor of Finance at Syracuse University; Andy Morrison, Associate Director at the New Economy Project; and Chuck Bell, Program Director at Consumer Reports.

**Additional quotes:**

“It was a great honor to serve the families of New York as a member of the Assembly, and I am equally excited to continue my public service advocating for responsible innovation that creates economic justice and equity for all New Yorkers, including those families I served as a member of the Assembly,” said Phil Goldfeder, CEO of the American Fintech Council. “AFC represents a cross-section of responsible fintech companies that embrace transparency and are rooted in regulatory compliance and consumer protection. Our members are committed to continuing our work with committee Chairs Pam Hunter and Steve Otis to advocate for pragmatic regulation that balances consumer access to financial services with strong and appropriate consumer protections.”

“New York State is a major hub for the fintech industry, and consumers here are increasingly turning to fintech products to manage their finances responsibly. We appreciate the opportunity to testify about the benefits of these digital financial tools and look forward to collaborating with Assembly leaders like Chairs Hunter and Otis to shape the future of finance.” — Penny Lee, President and CEO of the Financial Technology Association.

Ryan Naples, DailyPay Inc.’s Public Policy Director said: “Thank you Assemblymembers Hunter and Otis and to their committees for holding this important fintech hearing. DailyPay appreciated the opportunity to share the positive impacts of earned wage access (EWA) on our 600+ employer clients and 120,000+ users in New York state. DailyPay’s payroll-integrated EWA product saves hardworking people money by offering much-needed flexibility and control over their net earned wages so they can meet short-term

liquidity needs at a low-to-no cost. We support regulating EWA in New York, and are grateful for the state's continued leadership protecting consumers in an ever-changing financial world.”

“EarnIn strongly supports finding common regulatory ground where fintechs can help workers and offer more consumer-friendly products. New products deserve relevant and appropriate regulatory frameworks, and New York has been a leader in helping to create those. I'd like to thank Chair Hunter for the opportunity to speak today and help the Banks Committee explore these important issues.” - Ben LaRocco, Senior Director of Government Relations at EarnIn.

“The failure of state and federal policymakers to adequately address structural inequities in our financial system has fueled banking inequality and emboldened fintech companies and other financial predators, many of whom pose as agents of progress while peddling costly, inferior and exploitative products,” said Andy Morrison, associate director of New Economy Project. “Instead of endorsing patently predatory products like so-called Earned Wage Advance -- which is essentially payday lending by another name -- the state should enact living wage and other policies that address root causes of inequality and poverty. Passing the New York Public Banking Act (S1754/A3352) to pave the way for local public banks that will responsibly meet the financial services and economic development needs of low-income communities and communities of color should be at the top of the list this legislative session.”

“Today's important statewide hearing on financial technology highlighted the many benefits and risks of consumer-facing apps for banking, lending and electronic payments,” said Chuck Bell Programs Director, Advocacy from Consumer Reports. “We thank Committee Chairs Hunter and Otis for inviting a

wide variety of industry and community stakeholders to discuss and debate these critically important issues. This open exchange can help build a larger base of knowledge for making smart public policy decisions."

