

**ALLEGANY COUNTY BOARD OF LEGISLATORS
COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE**

February 21, 2018

CALL TO ORDER: The meeting was called to order at 9:00 a.m. by Chairman Curtis W. Crandall

LEGISLATORS PRESENT: Chairman C. Crandall, G. Barnes, J. Burdick, D. Decker, W. Dibble (9:10 a.m.), B. Harris (9:10 a.m.), S. Havey, D. Healy (9:17 a.m.), J. Hopkins (9:54 a.m.), J. Ricci, D. Root (9:54 a.m.), P. Stockin, (Absent: P. Curran, D. Fanton, K. Graves)

OTHERS PRESENT: S. Decker; R. Christman, A. Hunt (Co. Clerk Tour); C. Coombes, C. Higby, K. Hooker, D. Lavery (Information Technology Tour); D. Horan, V. Grant, K. Scutt, J. Tomasi (Social Services Tour)

DEPARTMENTAL PRESENTATION AND TOURS:

Office of the County Clerk

County Clerk Robert Christman gave a brief overview of what types of things are recorded/filed in his department. He indicated that he is an elected official with a term of four years. He has been the County Clerk since 2004. The budget for his department is \$700,000. Much of the computers/equipment used in his office are owned by an outside vendor. The contract for their equipment and software costs around \$50,000 annually. They are in the process of digitizing all of their records including maps. It is necessary to have one hundred percent accuracy in recording and digitizing the documents their office maintains.

Mr. Christman touched on the importance of having a staff with adequate knowledge and experience to properly record and track important documents. He was fortunate the Board of Legislators understood this and allowed him to hire his new deputy, Ryan Keib, before his two previous deputies retired. It is difficult to replace people with years of knowledge. His office currently has thirteen full-time employees and a couple of part-time employees. They have hired a retired surveyor and retired deputy clerk to work on a short-term, part-time basis to go through and correct old files, mainly maps. Mr. Christman noted that the digitized maps are accessible via the internet. It's a convenient tool for surveyors and attorneys to use. They must pay a fee for its use which helps to pay for the overall cost of the system. He boasted that once the digitization of the maps is complete, his office will have the best, most usable system in the state of New York.

The County Clerk's office is also able to process passport applications and does so at less cost to the customer than other places.

The group then moved over to the area occupied by the Department of Motor Vehicles. The DMV has been in its current location since 2012. He introduced the legislators to Alice Hunt who is Deputy County Clerk III and oversees the DMV. Prior to the new location, the DMV was set up in a manner in which customers had to go through a two-step process for DMV transactions. First, an examiner would look over the paperwork and

then they would have to go to another window to pay for the transaction. Now, customers are able to visit just one window to have their transaction processed. Mr. Christman cut down on the number of full-time staff for the DMV. They now utilize part-time employees who work approximately four hours per day through the busiest hours, usually around 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Mr. Christman encourages everyone to have their DMV transactions processed locally at our County office. The State makes it possible for people to take care of some transactions online which also allows them to take the profits for those transactions. Allegany County is able to keep 12.7 percent of the proceeds from each transaction processed in our office. That helps to keep our tax dollars here in the County. Chairman Crandall remarked on the new DMV location and how the remodeling was done in-house. The desks/service windows are modular to accommodate for any future reconfigurations that may be necessary.

Information Technology

Keith Hooker, Information Technology Director, introduced his staff. Chad Coombes and Cory Higby who are Network Technicians, and Darby Lavery, Network Administrator. Mr. Hooker remarked that IT has been in its current location for 7 or 8 years. Numerous questions were asked about how equipment is set up throughout the County buildings and whether what is being used is adequate. Mr. Hooker stated that the main server for the County is located in their office, but there are many switches in various other locations. Mr. Hooker stated that when it comes to running wiring to different areas the more basic wires are done by Public Works; fiber is more complicated and is run by an outside vendor. Mr. Hooker stated that each floor has its own set of switches. The switch allows for communication between the different areas. He went on to explain that the wall jacks used in each office are connected to the switch for that area. Mr. Hooker listed over a dozen locations including the Jail, the Crossroads Complex, and a couple of locations in Cuba and Wellsville at which they maintain equipment. Mr. Hooker indicated that they are responsible for most County equipment with the exception of a couple of telephones at the Landfill and the Friendship DPW office which has its own internet service and phones. They do help with occasional issues there as well. Legislator Barnes asked who the County used for internet service. Mr. Hooker stated that they had a contract with ION which is now First Light. Legislator Dibble asked if the new third floor renovations were on schedule as far as information technology is concerned. Mr. Hooker indicated that they are waiting on quotes, but should be ready. Legislator Havey asked how and where information is backed up. Mr. Hooker stated that it's backed up in two locations every couple of hours. Any changes that are made are stored and copies are sent to both locations. Mr. Hooker explained to the group that wireless technology isn't quite up to the same level as wired technology but it's possible to move in that direction in the near future. It's not quite as quick or reliable. Legislator Healy asked if their department had enough space to operate. Mr. Hooker said that compared to the very limited space they had before they are doing well. At one-time IT was spread into small spaces throughout the buildings. He doesn't see them outgrowing their space anytime soon. Legislator Dibble asked about maintaining air quality for the equipment. Mr. Hooker said that while it's not always perfect, the server room is well maintained. There are sensors for temperature, humidity, and water on the floor. He and his staff receive notifications if any of these are out of the normal range. Even after hours, Mr. Hooker receives notification via text message and email so that he can contact DPW to remedy the situation. Chairman Crandall inquired whose decision it is to replace computers. Mr. Hooker said it's usually the department head who makes the request to have equipment replaced. It often depends on what programs they need to be able to run. Sometimes it's

the age of the equipment or the availability of new equipment that helps to make those decisions. Chairman Crandall brought up the topic of outside funding for replacement of equipment. Mr. Hooker stated that much of the equipment at the Jail is replaced using outside funding. He mentioned that IT was able to replace a firewall with outside funding as well. Legislator Barnes asked for explanation of what a firewall is. Mr. Hooker stated that it's basically a barrier from outside hackers. It inspects any information coming into the County and decides whether it should be allowed. Legislator Dibble asked what they do in the case of a power outage. Mr. Hooker said that they have battery backup that covers their equipment until the generator kicks in. Mr. Hooker asked the Legislators how the iPads were working for them. A couple of the Legislators mentioned problems they were having but stated that they were probably just "operator error" rather than real problems. Chairman Crandall voiced his frustration with the County email system and asked what other counties are using. Mr. Hooker stated that the County email system is 8 years old. He mentioned that the State uses Office 365 and that may be something to use in the future. The group discussed some of the benefits of using Office 365.

Department of Social Services

Vicki Grant, Commissioner of Social Services, welcomed the legislators. She introduced Julie Tomasi, Kim Scutt, and Don Horan, who make up the administrative team for Social Services. Ms. Grant said that she had hoped to have a greater amount of time to go into more detail about the services they offer. She would give an overview today and will get into greater detail during future Human Services committee meetings. Ms. Grant said her office deals with a lot of gray areas. She remarked that when people think of social services they tend to have negative thoughts. People often think about welfare benefits that are "given away" and that their department "snatches babies." Her office works hard to have appropriate relationships with people and give a positive message about the work they do. Most people don't want to come to their office for services. The idea that poverty is always generational is a misconception. Sometimes people lose a job or become sick. Confidentiality is extremely important. It's important that people trust them. Maintaining the emotional and physical safety of their staff and themselves is necessary. Good press is important to change people's perceptions about social services. Ms. Grant stated that they must have relationships with outside agencies. Some of this is helpful for the work they do, but some of the relationships are required by the State. She reminded the legislators that she is not able to speak about specific cases or clients. She can give general information about services that are provided but she's unable to even acknowledge if someone is a client. Ms. Grant reminded the legislators that a lot of the work they do is reimbursed through the State and Federal government and some of it is partially funded through other County offices.

Kim Scutt, Director of Temporary Assistance, stated that the main goal in her area is for the client to achieve independence. Temporary Assistance includes: financial assistance, child care assistance, drug & alcohol screening, nutritional assistance, medical assistance, Medicaid managed care, home energy assistance, fraud investigations, homelessness prevention, job search assistance, job readiness skills, employment counseling, employment subsidies, post-employment services, and transportation assistance. Legislator Healy asked if there was a residency requirement for people to get assistance. Ms. Grant stated that there is no residency requirement. Ms. Scutt pointed out income standards charts that were included in packets of information each of the legislators received. Legislator Harris remarked that the charts used to determine benefits are

complicated. Ms. Scutt stated that there is a great deal of training involved in figuring out the benefits someone may be entitled to. Legislator Healy asked if most of the services provided by their office are required by the State. Ms. Grant said that some are Federal programs, some are State programs. Legislator Barnes wondered if there are any services provided that are mandated by the County. Ms. Grant said that child preventative services are not required but are provided in hopes that it will prevent some of these people from needing further services in the future. They feel that prevention works. The group talked about the comments they hear about people coming to Allegany County because it's easier to receive services. Ms. Grant stated that the same requirements/rules apply in each county in the State. Being located so closely to another state may have a small impact. They talked about the fact that an address is not required to apply for assistance. Social Services is required to help anyone who comes in the door who is eligible. The group also discussed the use of "food stamps" and how they hear people complain about what goods are being purchased. Sometimes people make comments that those receiving assistance are able to buy food items that might be considered a luxury for others. Ms. Grant stated that SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) is not to be used for non-food items such as shampoo or other personal items. There are some SNAP outreach programs that educate clients in healthy eating and ways to stretch their money. Legislator Burdick asked if clients lose their benefits if they find a job. Ms. Scutt stated that their benefits will be reduced but there's still an incentive to work. Legislator Harris asked what statistics were kept on usage of services. He also wondered what service aside from Medicaid is most utilized. Ms. Grant noted that some of the data is difficult to pull out of the system and there is some overlap that makes it difficult to get accurate figures. Ms. Scutt stated that HEAP (Home Energy Assistance Program), Temporary Assistance, and SNAP were the most used. Based on Allegany County's population, 31.3 percent of our residents use at least one of the services provided by the Social Services department. If you count other services, such as child support, child care, and the New York State of Health Medicaid enrollments, the percentage could be as high as 59.7 percent (as of the end of December 2017). The group then discussed the issue of fraud and whether it's possible for someone to sign up for assistance in more than one county. Once someone is signed up in one county they wouldn't be able to sign up in another. The system would recognize the duplication. They have staff members whose job it is to investigate fraud, and the money recovered more than pays for the cost of the staff in that group.

Julie Tomasi, Deputy Commissioner spoke about some of the services her area covers. They include, child protective services, foster care, adoption assistance, abuse prevention services, personal care services, trauma systems therapy, PINS reform, foster parent certification, child abuse prevention services, family assessment response, adult protective services, financial management, and alternative to nursing home care. Ms. Tomasi remarked, "Families don't ask us to be part of their lives." The jobs her staff perform are not for everyone. They see a very dark side of life and it affects them personally. Often services begin with a call being made to report a suspected case of abuse, neglect, etc. Those reports come in at any hour of the day or night. Their staff has an on-call rotation. They have 24 hours to do a safety assessment. She remarked that they had received three reports after hours the night before. All reports must be investigated. In some cases, they are able to work with families to provide support and work with the families to best meet the family's needs. In other cases, children must be removed from their home. Foster care is a last resort. They try to find family members who are able to take care of the children. They don't want kids to be in foster care one day more than is absolutely necessary. A permanent home for the children is important. She noted that there are not enough foster

families in our county or in New York State. Ms. Tomasi also mentioned that services are available for vulnerable adults as well.

Don Horan, Director of Administration Services, deals with accounting, claims, third party health, parent locator service, records retention, support collection, support establishment, support enforcement, and paternity establishment. His office handles 3,800 child support cases. Differences between states in emancipation age make it difficult to enforce child support orders. The age of emancipation in New York State is 21; in many other states the age is 18. He also spoke about the accounting portion of his position. There is a lot of moving money around. He has to recoup money from the State and Federal governments to operate many of their programs. Social Services has the largest budget in our County government.

ADJOURNMENT:

There being no further business to come before the committee, the meeting was adjourned on a motion by Legislator Root, seconded by Legislator Ricci, and carried at 10:57 a.m. so that the regular standing committee meetings could be held.

Respectfully submitted,

Sarah M. Decker, Journal Clerk/Deputy Clerk of the Board
Allegany County Board of Legislators