

ALLEGANY AFFORDABLE GOVERNMENT GROUP

March 23, 2016
NOT APPROVED

Committee Members Present: K. LaForge, J. Adams, C. Jessup, J. Margeson, Chairman Crandall (Absent: K. Dirlam, Darwin Fanton, R. Oakerson, Brenda Rigby Riehle, Terri Ross)

Others Present: L. Ballengee, H. Budinger, B. Gamache, T. Miner, D. Root, R. Scott, T. Shaw

Media Present: No media present.

Call to Order: The meeting was called to order at 3:00 p.m. by Allegany Affordable Government Committee Chairman Kevin LaForge

Approval of Minutes

A motion was made by Legislator Jessup, seconded by Jodi Adams, and carried to approve the Allegany Affordable Government Committee minutes of November 23, 2015.

Water and Sewer Systems Efficiency Update

Water and Sewer Staffing in Allegany County

Director of Environmental Health Tyler Shaw gave an update on former Deputy Tom Hull's study of water and sewer staffing in Allegany County towns and villages. Mr. Shaw noted he received the information about the Sewer Operators from the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC). There was discussion on certifications for the water and sewer operators. Legislator LaForge noted it is easier to get water operators. Mr. Shaw explained it is harder to get sewer operators because they have to have three years of training.

There was a concern there may not be enough certified people to adequately staff the water treatment plants in the future because of potential retirements. Legislator LaForge stated staffing issues have not improved in the last six months. Legislator Root noted the lack of certified water operators is a concern everywhere. Legislator Root asked what the towns are doing to solve the problem. Mr. Shaw stated they are trying, but they have limited budgets. Legislator LaForge suggested one option may be to share operators. He added it should not be perceived as a job threat to anyone.

Recent Visit to Wayne County Water and Sewer Authority and the Wyoming County Water Agency

Legislator LaForge and Legislator Jessup visited the Wayne County Water and Sewer Authority last fall. Legislator LaForge said it is a well-run operation, and has been in existence since the late 1980s. Legislator LaForge stated it started with inter-municipal agreements for operators, and over time they have taken over all but two systems. He said they buy the bulk of their water from Monroe County. Legislator LaForge stated it is a fairly well developed organization with a rate structure. He said they are not subject to the tax cap because they are an authority. Legislator LaForge noted it is very difficult to become an authority.

Legislator LaForge explained they tried to visit the Chadwick Bay Water District in Chautauqua County, but they are not that far along. He noted they had a nice conversation with the Chairman of the Board because the director had a death in the family (They received approval from the Chautauqua Legislature this past week, and are up and running).

In February, they visited the Wyoming County Water Agency, and met with the Director of Environmental Health Stephen Perkins. He talked about the water agency they have in Wyoming County. Since it is an agency, they are subject to the tax cap. Legislator LaForge said the water agency initially started as an economic development initiative. Several years ago there were two yogurt plants in Genesee County. Wyoming County was hoping to get a plant, but they did not have the infrastructure to support one. Legislator LaForge stated the Wyoming County Water Agency provides beneficial pricing in water sampling, chemical purchasing, technical assistance, and leak detection assistance. Mr. Shaw stated he spoke with Mr. Perkins about their successes and challenges. Mr. Shaw said some of their successes were they had an initial plan and buy in. The towns and villages were going to save money, and they did not have to pay full price for some of their supplies. Mr. Shaw reported they tried to start a lab, but it didn't work out. Mr. Shaw stated the vision Mr. Perkins sees moving forward is chemical purchasing. They would buy the supplies in bulk, and store them. Legislator LaForge said the functions of a water agency have expanded because they can also perform the maintenance function for water systems. There is a potential for buying repair parts, and having a common pool of parts. Legislator LaForge also talked about capital improvement projects including water and sewer that eventually the State will have to take the tax cap off for municipalities. He noted they have already done this for the school districts.

Legislator LaForge stated the Wyoming County Water Agency is currently staffed between the Environmental Health Director and the Sanitarian. Legislator LaForge said that Wyoming County has an agreement with an engineering firm to assist when needed. Interim County Administrator John Margeson talked about regulatory control over the water systems, and where do they draw the line. Mr. Shaw stated it certainly a concern, and it is a fine line. Mr. Margeson asked if the systems are interconnected or are they autonomous independent water districts. Mr. Shaw stated they have both, and are similar to our County. Therefore, he believes it would be good to use their system as a model. Legislator LaForge agreed it may be a good model for Allegany County to examine. Mr. Shaw noted if they wanted to start one in Allegany County, he would need additional staff. He believes a key component to creating a water agency is receiving a grant. Legislator LaForge asked Public Health Director Lori Ballengee if they had time to complete the study and put together a plan. Ms. Ballengee stated it depends on the amount of time it would take, but they are willing to try.

How to Proceed

Legislator LaForge stated he would like to look at the Wyoming County Model, and have Mr. Perkins come to the next meeting to talk about their system. He would also like to have municipalities attend a meeting in the late spring or early summer to have more discussion on this topic. It was noted that mayors and supervisors are important representatives that should be included. Chairman Crandall believes the last time they talked about this issue, eleven out of eighteen municipalities with water expressed interest in being included on a grant to conduct a study. Ms. Ballengee suggested sending a questionnaire to the Mayors and Town Supervisors asking what they would find valuable in a water and sewer agency. She will put together a questionnaire, have it reviewed by designated Committee members, and once it is approved have it distributed. Ms. Ballengee will also contact Mr. Perkins about coming to the next committee meeting. Legislator LaForge suggested Ms. Ballengee speak to Clerk of the Board Brenda Rigby Riehle since she has had recent contact with Mr. Perkins.

Potential Grant Funding for Study and Implementation

Planning and Development Specialist Bryan Gamache has developed a relationship with the Department of State. He reported he talked with them about a month and a half ago. There may be \$120 million available for consolidation and efficiencies. Mr. Gamache said the downside to some of the grants is only ten to twelve percent can go towards administration. He noted he needs to get more information about it. Legislator LaForge said there may not be funds for a study. Mr. Gamache said a Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds studies. He believes there is \$750,000 available for a town and \$1.5 million for a County. Mr. Gamache will get more information.

Land Bank Project Update

Mr. Gamache reported their land bank application with Empire State Development will be reviewed tomorrow morning. He said as soon as he knows, he will notify everyone involved. Chairman Crandall asked how many other applications were submitted to establish a land bank. Legislator LaForge believes there were about five. Mr. Gamache doesn't foresee any problems with the application.

Mr. Gamache also said one of the sources of funding switched their contractor, and now he is working with the Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC). In the next couple of weeks, they will be sending an invitation to apply for start-up funds. He believes there is about \$150,000 available in start-up funds. The application will be a three page letter. County Attorney Tom Miner stated they will not be incorporated until Empire State Development approves the application. Then there will be about a four or five week process after that until they are official. Legislator LaForge suggested having an informal meeting with the tentative directors to talk about start-up funding.

Good of the Order

The next meeting will be on Wednesday, April 27, 2016, at 3:00 p.m. The time may be adjusted to accommodate Mr. Perkins.

Adjournment

There being no further business to come before the Committee, the meeting was adjourned at 3:49 p.m. following a motion by Legislator Jessup, seconded by Jodi Adams, and carried.

Respectfully submitted,
Rebecca Scott, Secretary to the Clerk of the Board
Allegany County Board of Legislators

ALLEGANY AFFORDABLE GOVERNMENT GROUP

April 27, 2016
NOT APPROVED

Committee Members Present: K. LaForge, J. Adams, C. Jessup, J. Margeson, K. Dirlam, D. Fanton, B. Riehle, T. Ross (Absent: C. Crandall, R. Oakerson)

Others Present: S. Perkins, L. Ballengee, B. Gamache, J. Hopkins, D. Edwards, J. Hermann

Media Present: No media present.

Call to Order: The meeting was called to order at 3:00 p.m. by Allegany Affordable Government Committee Chairman Kevin LaForge

Approval of Minutes

A motion was made by Legislator Jessup, seconded by Darwin Fanton, and carried to approve the Allegany Affordable Government Committee minutes of March 23, 2016.

Water and Sewer Systems Efficiency Update

Legislator LaForge introduced Steve Perkins, Director of Environmental Health and Administrator for the Wyoming County Water Resource Agency. Mr. Perkins stated the process to begin the Water Agency began in 2009 due to aging operators and a lack of replacement operators. Additionally, sampling was becoming troublesome with a lack of affordable price options.

In 2010, they received an efficiency grant from NYDOS to complete a study and develop a plan to improve municipal water systems. This greatly assisted with the formation of the Water Agency. In 2011, a team of four including a grant writer, engineer, and two members from the County's Department of Health completed the study. They canvassed every municipal water system in the County. There were sixteen municipal systems at that time. All sixteen systems agreed to be part of the study and signed intermunicipal agreements. The implementation grant funding award was \$235K. It was awarded in 2011 and lasted through 2015.

The agency formed in 2013 and is currently administered by a seven member Board of Directors. The duties and responsibilities for the Water Agency were identified. Please see attached Wyoming County Resolution No. 13-95 and By Laws of the Wyoming County Water Resource Agency. This information was distributed by Mr. Perkins at the meeting. Tasks that the agency was charged with included developing a water sampling program as a first priority. The agency implemented a program for chloroform sampling at a cost of \$10 per sample. The agency decided to open this service up to non-transient community systems including the Village of Alexander in Genesee County. Currently, there are 26 participants and roughly 1,200 samples taken yearly.

The agency offers equipment for leak detection and surveying. This service has been offered to neighboring Counties. On average, the agency handles 13 emergency detections of leaks annually. The agency's GIS Mapping Systems and asset planning services have successfully worked with the IDA and other agencies. Each agency equally benefits from the data system. Mr. Perkins reported that Wyoming County has a lot of smaller operating systems or aging systems having little or no back up mechanisms in place. The Water Agency assists

them by developing plans to meet the unique needs of each system. This can include both short and long-term needs.

The agency's joint purchasing for mass quantities is a service they continue to expand on while working toward uniform equipment replacement for supply convenience and cost savings.

There is a focus on improving the infrastructure for economic development in partnership with other agencies and the IDA. This began by identifying key areas for capacity. For example, in Perry, Silver Lake could be used as a source to draw more water from. There are two or three similar projects including increasing waste water capacities.

Currently, the Water Agency is under a \$19K tax levy and was given 5 years to get to a \$0 tax levy operational structure. It was mentioned that water rates for this area are much lower comparatively and increasing rates marginally could assist with building reserves. There are other ways to generate income using a fee for service structure including sampling and leak detection services. It is recommended that surveys be completed every three years for water systems. Due diligence must be demonstrated for unaccounted water loss. Ideally, no more than 10 percent of water should be unaccounted for. Jamie Herman stated the rates that Mr. Perkins spoke of are about half the cost of any rates he is aware of in Allegany County. Darwin Fanton mentioned that municipalities would likely participate with a demonstrated cost saving plan. He noted it would be an easier sell if they municipalities can itemize costs and services and see savings. Jamie Herman stated that surveys generally cost \$1,200 per day and generally take 3 - 5 days to complete. Mr. Perkins reported that surveying and leak detection service fees are based on an hourly rate plus mileage.

Neighboring towns and communities participate in Wyoming County Water Agency services including Genesee County. It was mentioned perhaps services should be marketed to municipalities in Allegany County. This could potentially be an option for future consideration. Sampling services includes bid rates and central distribution sites. Overall, Mr. Perkins reports the feedback he has received from participating municipalities has been positive and municipalities are happy with the services they receive.

Legislator LaForge noted the focus hasn't been on economic development but thought we could be missing out on opportunities if we didn't consider the potential benefit to the County.

Mr. Perkins noted the Water Agency has certified operators to fill in to meet the needs of partnering water systems. They are part-time positions and are paid for by the County and have included retired staff using intermunicipal agreements.

Darwin Fanton expressed concern regarding the lack of young people entering this occupation and stated there is a definite need for schools to educate youth of the job demands and to promote job opportunities at job fairs. Jamie Herman and Mr. Perkins noted the level of individual responsibility involved and referenced the Flint Michigan case. This occupation involves on-call work for emergency situations. Kier Dirlam asked what skills are required for the work. It was discussed that chemistry, math, science, and plumbing knowledge and skill sets are required. The ability to perform calculations, read blueprints, and complete construction

work is required. Jamie Herman noted plumbing skills are more necessary for the distributor side.

The Water Agency's boundaries are defined by permit with NYSDEC. It was noted the agency structure permits eligibility for USDA grant funds. The agency structure is defined by the County's Local Law.

Mr. Perkins shared some insight from lessons they learned throughout the process including the importance of dispelling myths that the agency is a "takeover" attempt by the County. Also, since Health Department staff serve in a regulatory role when working with municipalities, it was important to define the purpose of the agency in order to overcome fears and allow for open and honest communication.

Darwin Fanton and Legislator LaForge mentioned next steps will include completing the current study, determining potential shared services capacity with the Wyoming County Water Agency, meeting with municipal water systems in Allegany County, and seeking grant applications for project implementation.

Public Health Director Lori Ballengee asked Mr. Perkins to clarify how he records his time while working for the DOH and for the Water Agency. He stated he keeps a time log and generally spends 35 hours per week working for DOH and 10-15 hours per week working for the Water Agency. He noted this system of accountability has not been problematic.

Legislator LaForge and those in attendance thanked Mr. Perkins for sharing information about the Wyoming County Water Resource Agency.

Land Bank Project Update

Brian Gamache reported that the Land Bank Project has received \$10K from the Comprehensive Plan Implementation Group (CPIG). He noted that Legislator Jessup was instrumental in securing the funding.

Good of the Order

The next meeting will be on Wednesday, May 25, 2016, at 3:00 p.m.

Adjournment

There being no further business to come before the Committee, the meeting was adjourned at 4:42 p.m. following a motion by Kier Dirlam, seconded by Darwin Fanton, and carried.

Respectfully submitted,
Jodi Adams
Assistant to the County Administrator