

# Working Together:

## Local Governments Sharing Services



**NYSAC**  
NEW YORK STATE  
ASSOCIATION OF COUNTIES

**A Working Draft of Innovative Ideas**  
Compiled by  
New York State Association of Counties



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# Better Together: County Governments Sharing Services and Working Smarter for New York

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## FORWARD

*By NYSAC Executive Director Stephen Acquario*

The recession, the state-imposed property tax cap, and the Governor's most recent proposal to provide property tax rebates has put a renewed public focus on shared services at the local level. Despite the fact that local governments across the state have been effectively sharing services and consolidating functions or departments for decades, these projects are often not widely publicized or replicated. With this report, we hope to begin changing that.

Within this report, you'll find a collection of innovative ideas for local government efficiency, effectiveness and cost savings. By sharing these ideas with leaders in local government across the state, NYSAC hopes to encourage further municipal shared service projects.

This is a living document, and will evolve and grow as we receive additional input from our members. Descriptions of the projects included in the report vary in detail and length based on the responses received from counties.

NYSAC is dedicated to facilitating the exchange of information and best practices among counties throughout the state. When we share our ideas, discuss the challenges we've faced, and celebrate our successes, all of our counties become stronger.

This report is the first step in providing a platform for sharing innovative ideas among local governments, and will assist our local leaders in using the current economic challenges to think outside the box.

By using inventive local strategies to address the financial pressure every county government faces, we can protect taxpayers and the essential services they rely on.



## COMMUNITY COLLEGES

**Jefferson Community College** needed to expand and build a new residence hall to meet its goals of drawing more students to the campus from greater distances, stabilizing college revenues and better managing students' utilization of the campus. In order to move forward on this expansion project, Jefferson Community College President Carole McCoy explained, a collaborative effort of the college, the faculty student association, Jefferson County government, local businesses, the City of Watertown, the local job development corporation, New York State, and others was required. Issues such as financing, overlapping and conflicting zoning requirements and the inability to transfer land between certain entities needed to be addressed. Today, the project is underway and is expected to provide a stable foundation for the college's academic future while strengthening the partnership with local businesses and supporting economic development.

## LAND BANKS

Vacant, abandoned, and tax-delinquent properties can scar a community. With no authority to take control and redevelop these properties, local governments suffer loss of revenue, unattractive landscapes, and the cost of potential public health and safety mitigation. To address these difficulties, municipalities are establishing land banks to acquire tax delinquent, tax foreclosed, vacant, or abandoned real property. Once a land bank is established, municipalities can design, develop, construct, demolish, reconstruct, rehabilitate, renovate and otherwise improve upon the property.

Many of the approved land banks are county-run or are collaborations between counties and cities. As of December 2013, eight land banks had been approved, and they include the three following collaborations:

**Erie County is working with Buffalo, Lackawanna, and Tonawanda** to target and transform blighted properties in their communities. The success of the Erie County Land Bank depends on these local governments working together. Startup funding was provided by Erie County and it is likely to be augmented with millions of dollars from the New York State Attorney General's office, as part of a federal banking settlement. With the help of these funds, dozens of properties are expected to be addressed.

**Onondaga County is working together with the City of Syracuse** to turn neighborhood eyesores into attractive, habitable dwellings.

**The Cities of Schenectady, Amsterdam, and Schenectady County**, in addition, are collaborating on a Land Bank in the Capital Region.

## EDUCATION

**Ulster County is working with their Community College and the Kingston School District** to develop the S.T.R.I.V.E. (Shared Taxpayer Relief through Innovative Visions in Education) Project. The S.T.R.I.V.E. Project improves access to higher education, places surplus county buildings back on the tax rolls, repurposes an elementary school that would otherwise be vacant, and provides a single point of access to Ulster County's health and human services.

## EMERGENCY SERVICES

**Monroe County partnered with Orleans, Genesee, and Ontario counties** to provide seamless interoperable emergency communications capabilities to State and local first responders traveling within and through the four counties. They leveraged State and Federal funding streams and made collaborative communications system investments. In the end, the counties minimized costs while maximizing the benefit to the public.

In Monroe County, all 911 calls are answered at a single emergency telephone center with state-of-the-art technology, regardless of the location of the caller or the type of emergency. The 911 Center began operations in February, 1986 as a way to consolidate services in Monroe County. The Center has continued to grow and now serves 84 different public safety agencies. As police, fire and ambulance services have joined the County 911 system, redundant call answering and dispatching centers have been eliminated. The public benefits from a seamless emergency system and from significant cost savings.

**Albany County combined forces with the cities of Cohoes and Watervliet to**

**provide emergency communications** dispatch through the County Communications Center. Beyond personnel, additional cost savings is realized through the reduction in required software and hardware licensing, along with the costs associated with service and maintenance. This consolidation of dispatch functions eliminates the transfer of 911 calls between municipalities and has improved response times. Additionally, there has been increased coordination between dispatchers and use of interoperable channels, which helps incident coordination.

**Otsego County's Emergency Services Office works in conjunction with the Leatherstocking Alzheimer's Association**

to provide Project Lifesaver, an internationally recognized program to help locate Alzheimer's patients and others with medical conditions that make them prone to wandering. Through this shared service, the Office of Emergency Services handles all field related work (searches, equipment replacement, etc) while in the course of normal duties across the county when possible. Without this shared service, the Alzheimer's Association would require a vehicle and/or fuel and mileage budget monthly. Additionally, the Office of Emergency Services is involved in any missing person search within the county. By participating in this program, the county has first-hand knowledge of the client's home, property, physical description and habits. This information along with the Project Lifesaver equipment enhances our abilities during a search. Grant funding for program startup and equipment purchases was provided through a state grant in 2006.


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**Chemung County provides emergency 9-1-1 dispatch services to the municipalities** within its borders and also provides sheriff road patrol services to the Town of Southport, which recently abolished its police department.

**The Westchester County Emergency Communication Center (ECC)**, also known as “60 Control,” provides primary dispatch services to 48 (83%) of the 58 fire departments and 26 (58%) of the 45 EMS agencies in the county. The ECC coordinates all fire and EMS mutual aid responses throughout Westchester. The county supports an Internet-based “Hotline” phone system that operates independent from the Public Switched Telephone Network (PSTN). This system provides redundant communications during an emergency. The system is offered to municipal emergency operation centers, hospitals and other emergency management partners.

**The Chemung County Fire Advisory Board** is working in cooperation with the City of Elmira Fire Department and fire districts throughout the county on responding to 63 recommendations provided in a recent fire services study conducted in the county.

**In Monroe County**, the Regional Traffic Operations Center (RTOC) is a joint venture of the Monroe County Department of Transportation, Monroe County Airport Authority, New York State Department of Transportation and the New York State Police. The facility brings together under one roof a wide variety of traffic and emergency responders. These agencies each contribute a different viewpoint of traffic which, when put together, form complete detection and response capabilities for both the daily routine of traffic as well as traffic incident management.

**The Central New York Interoperable Communications Consortium (CNYICC) is comprised of nine counties** that are committed to constructing a regional communications system, share costs and infrastructure where applicable and prove the concept defined within the State Interop Plan (SIP) of “a system of systems”. The consortium currently has 5 of the nine counties on a unified technology platform with the balance in the procurement process. The 5 share common infrastructure and maintenance costs and have collectively negotiated continued maintenance beyond warranty to include “break-fix”, software and equipment replacement and technology refresh within the Contract period.

Each participating county within the current network realizes about \$250K in annual maintenance costs for shared equipment and each is estimated to save \$200K over the contract period for Fixed Network equipment maintenance through the collectively negotiated contract. SEIC and UASI grants have partially funded equipment purchases. However the majority of the funding for the Consortium build-out has been locally sourced.

**Schoharie County purchased Town Bonds after Hurricane Irene**, which left heavy damage across the region. The county was able to use its fiscal strength to assist small towns with the cost of rebuilding after the storm.

**In Warren County**, Police and Emergency Services 911 Dispatch for the City of Glens Falls was consolidated into the Warren County Sheriff’s Office. Consolidating 911 services is popular because it not only saves money, it increases the quality of emergency response within the community.

**Essex County uses some of Clinton County's** emergency communication towers to ensure reliable emergency 9-1-1 coverage throughout the county.

## EMPLOYMENT SERVICES

### **The Orange County Employment & Training Administration (OCETA)**

has been proactive and innovative in the acquisition of special grant funding to provide transportation support and assistance for this population. The OCETA is an Orange County government department that coordinates and oversees all of the county's employment and training programs. These programs utilize local, state and federal funding, including Workforce Investment Act initiatives and Welfare to Work (WTW) Employment Programs. The local Orange County Department of Social Services subcontracts to the OCETA all employment activities for public assistance recipients deemed employable.

## ENERGY—GAS AND ELECTRICITY—PROCUREMENT

**Tompkins and Tioga counties came together in 1998 to form the Municipal Electric and Gas Alliance (MEGA)** to take advantage of the deregulation of electricity. This county-based organization was designed to help local governments control their energy costs and meet public bidding requirements. What started as a collaboration between two counties has grown to an alliance of more than 30 counties, along with hundreds of cities, towns,

villages and non-profit organizations. MEGA is governed by a Board of Directors elected by its membership. MEGA acts as an aggregator that brings together a collective of customers to increase the buying power of each individual member. The result is more competition and lower costs.

**Chautauqua County** co-located a fuel depot in a way that allows villages, towns, school districts, fire companies and the county to share it. The depot is key-coded, making it is easy to track use. A secondary benefit of this shared fuel depot has proven to be the reduction of environmental hazards.

**Lewis County** also operates a fuel depot for more than 40 departments and governments, including the Lowville Central School District, the department of transportation, fire departments and town and village highway departments.

## ENVIRONMENTAL

**Chautauqua and Cattaraugus counties** have a joint agreement to maintain flood control dam structures in both counties, the Conewango Watershed Commission. All maintenance activities are shared between both municipalities. Individual counties handle major capital projects. They try to break even, in terms of cost, by helping each other out. They share equipment, people and resources back and forth. There is no money exchanged.

**Westchester County** provides municipalities with sewer wastewater detection services to protect the Long Island Sound and rivers in the county to protect the environment and help local governments comply with federal storm water management requirements.

**In Monroe County, the Division of Pure Waters was established** to reduce the levels of pollution in Irondequoit Bay, the Genesee River, areas of Lake Ontario and other waters of Monroe County to safe and healthy levels. Pure Waters' staff manages four geographic districts containing several miles of major interceptor tunnel, two wastewater treatment facilities, pump stations and the sewer collection systems for the Rochester and Gates-Chili-Ogden districts. Prior to the implementation of Pure Waters, the City of Rochester operated a combined sewer system that conveyed both storm water and sanitary sewage in a single pipe. During periods of rain the system would overload. Overflow points were established to prevent sewage from back flowing into homes. Those overflow points were along the Genesee River and Irondequoit Bay. The Pure Waters

program, working in conjunction with the City of Rochester, formed the Rochester Pure Waters District in 1971 to supervise and finance the construction of the treatment plant upgrade and implement a solution to the combined sewer overflow problem. Through partnerships and collaboration, Pure Waters was able to successfully implement a comprehensive regional sewer system at a cost that was affordable for the community

## GIS

**Rensselaer County provides maps** on paper and electronically to the municipal police departments and all fire departments. As well, many of our municipalities use our GIS for other services including assessment and planning.

## HEALTH CARE

**Tompkins County and all of its municipalities created a health insurance consortium** to pool its covered lives and realize a shared savings in excess of \$1 million per year. The smallest jurisdictions save the most under this model. Last year, municipalities from neighboring counties began to join the consortium.

**Erie County partnered with the University of Buffalo Dental School, Catholic Healthcare and Lakeshore Hospital to create a community health clinic.** Erie County, as landlord, collects rent from health care providers that provide free or reduced cost health care services. Use of the clinic instead of an emergency room saves money for local, State and Federal governments.

**Chemung County created a public-private partnership with the Arnot Ogden, Priority Healthcare** to create a Medicaid Medical Home to improve primary care services and lower health care costs in their community. The program, recognized as a Patient Centered Medical Home by the National Committee on Quality Assurance, served 1,900 in its first year and is estimated to be saving 15 percent on public health care dollars.

**Rensselaer County** established a program wherein its municipalities can purchase health insurance through the County's policies, being of most benefit to those entities that have less than 50 employees.



## HIGHWAY MAINTENANCE, PLOWING AND RESURFACING

**Oneida County has a shared service agreement with all three cities, 17 villages and 26 towns in the county** that has been in place for at least seven years. It was a five-year agreement that has been extended for another five-year term. The cities, villages, and towns contract with the county for snow removal, mowing and ditching with specific terms and payments. Some of these terms include a trade of services. The county stripes town roads and the towns mow or ditch county roads. Sometimes the smaller municipalities pay for the materials and trade labor and equipment services. Other services fall under the shared service agreement.

The main component of the shared service agreement is that it allows all members to share specialized equipment or services as a pool. The county has two stump grinders, the City of Rome has a bucket truck. The county has two lowboy trailers, a road widener and a 10 ton roller that we share with the towns. Most equipment that is loaned is operated by the lender. Equipment loaned without an operator has to be added to the borrower's insured equipment policy. Towns join together with trucks to assist each other with paving projects. This speeds up paving projects for municipalities and contractors, allowing for lower prices and efficient uses of equipment in a short construction season.


The shared service agreement also allows for the trade of materials. There is a form that is filed with a description of the service for record keeping and reporting. Material trades are usually completed timely. Equipment sharing is not intended for equal trades but as an investment or dividend from the pool. Some years a municipality will contribute more than they receive and the next year they may receive more that they contribute. A member does not have to send equipment every time it is requested, just contribute when they can. These agreements are especially great when there are emergency needs and the agreement is already in place.

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**Erie County and the Town of Tonawanda** embarked on a collaborative project to pave one of the area's parkways. The town provided a milling machine and employee labor while the county provided trucks, rollers, asphalt and additional labor to expedite the process. The work on the parkway, which the county owns, likely would have been delayed until the following year due to budget constraints. But due to this collaboration, the work saved money and was completed earlier than expected. Erie County also collaborated with the City of Buffalo to repave a portion of road in the city.

**Chemung County** is working with local governments to combine their public works departments. As public works commissioners retire or leave for other jobs, as one did recently in the Town of Big Flats, those services then fall under the county public works department. The Consolidated Urban Highway Services Area, or "CUHSA" encompasses the Town of Horseheads, the City of Elmira, the Town of Elmira and the Villages of Elmira Heights and Horseheads and also includes portions of the County.

**In Lewis County**, all 15 towns plow the county roads. They also trade roads with two towns, mile for mile. Lewis County plows 75 miles and the towns plow the other 249 miles.



**The Cattaraugus County Public Works Department** has Shared Services Contracts in place with several municipalities within the county: the cities of Olean and Salamanca; towns of Allegany, Ashford, Carrollton, Coldspring, Conewango, Dayton, East Otto, Ellicottville, Farmersville, Franklinville, Freedom, Great Valley, Hinsdale, Humphrey, Ischua, Leon, Little Valley, Lyndon, Machias, Mansfield, Napoli, New Albion, Olean, tto, Perrysburg, Persia, Portville, Randolph, Redhouse, Salamanca, South Valley, Yorkshire, and Villages of Allegany, Cattaraugus, Delevan, Ellicottville, Franklinville, Gowanda, Little Valley, Portville and South Dayton. The contracts help each municipality share equipment, labor and materials in an effort to reduce costs, save time and labor, and improve efficiency.

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**Genesee County** takes responsibility for procuring all street signs and performing sign maintenance and replacement for all local municipalities within the county except the City of Batavia. The county also maintains location and reflectivity data, which helps with lawsuits and accident investigations. An added benefit is that signs are uniform across the county and catalogued in a GIS system.

**Lewis County** has historically done almost all bridge repair for the towns. They are in the process of putting the bridge crew back together for the next round of bridge maintenance work.

**Greene County** shares heavy equipment with towns and villages in the county. It's currently a gentlemen's agreement.

**Chautauqua County** shares road maintenance equipment with its towns and villages.

**Essex County** has an agreement with their towns and villages to share road maintenance equipment.

**In Franklin County**, the county contracted with 18 towns to sand and plow their roads. The county also contracted with several towns, to arrange for the towns to mow county roads.

**Wyoming County** has been assisting towns and villages by bidding on sand, gravel and black top – an arrangement that's been in place for 25 years.

## INSURANCE

**More than 750 local governments jointly own and operate a property and casualty insurance reciprocal** that was started in 1993. The New York Municipal Insurance Reciprocal (NYMIR) was created at a time when local governments in New York State had a difficult time finding quality and affordable property and casualty insurance to protect the public buildings under their care and public officials working for their residents. In response, New York's three municipal associations - the New York State Association of Counties, the Association of Towns of the State of New York and the New York State Conference of Mayors – banded together to form NYMIR.

NYMIR is premised on reciprocity. Since it began in 1993, NYMIR has grown from a small program with 26 members to the largest insurer of local governments in New York State, with more than 750 members in 2014. The three municipal associations and NYMIR's board of governors, made up of local officials, use their extensive knowledge of municipal issues and laws to ensure that NYMIR continues to develop insurance and risk management services that are tailored to meet the needs of local governments.

**Dutchess County** is among dozens of counties that provides a county-wide self insured workers' compensation pool for all municipalities. These collective agreements provide economies of scale that provide local governments a lower cost way to provide employees with risk management services and workers compensation insurance.

**Rensselaer County** administers the Workers' Compensation Pool for the county and community college, IDA, Soil and Water Conservation District, ten municipalities, and 15 volunteer fire districts.

## JAIL OPERATIONS

County Corrections Departments are experiencing the same budgetary constraints as other county departments – shrinking resources amidst growing expenses. There is a constant need to maintain a safe facility that protects both the public as well as provides for the safety of inmates and jail staff. Routinely, safety is compromised due to the presence of contraband materials. Also, isolation from family and friends can exacerbate inmate mental health problems and decrease morale. The challenge in jail management is to provide cost savings solutions to problems while promoting inmate well-being.

**Westchester County** implemented a video conferencing system, the TeleCorrections Inmate Kiosk and Video Visitation System, at the county jail to provide inmates with communication and connection with their families and loved ones, as well as with their legal representatives, bail assessors, etc. This systems helps to minimize security risks at the jail, it decreases the demands on security officers, and reduces opportunities for contraband to enter the jail. The County generated approximately \$400,000 in cost savings in 2011 by reducing the time it took for bail expeditors to meet with inmates to arrange bail.

**Putnam County** District Attorney Adam Cohen also spearheaded an initiative to replace some court appearances with video conferencing in the jail. Significant cost savings related to transportation and security costs were found. This initiative required State and local law changes.

## MEDICAL EXAMINER

Counties are responsible for investigating the circumstances and causes of any death in the county. They must investigate unattended, violent, suspicious and criminal deaths, as well as any death that takes place in the local jail. Investigative and autopsy reports are provided to the courts, district attorney, and police regarding cases in which there is a belief that a crime may have been committed. Some counties elect Coroners and others appoint Medical Examiners. In counties with a medical examiner, it can be a challenge to fill this position. This happened to Oneida County in 2012 when it sent out a Request for Proposals (RFP) for a Medical Examiner and received no responses. Oneida County officials got creative and the outcome was an intermunicipal agreement between Oneida and Onondaga counties to share Medical Examiner services.

## MENTAL HEALTH

**The Westchester County Department of Community Mental Health** provides Employee Assistance Program (EAP) services to the administrators and employees of Westchester County, Putnam County and 33 municipalities. EAP is low-cost and is designed to help employees with problems that may affect job performance such as legal, financial, family, emotional, psychiatric, marital, and alcohol and substance abuse. EAP also offers assistance to supervisory staff to help them find solutions to complex human resources problems through a multitude of trainings and/or individual assistance.

**Otsego, Delaware, Schoharie, and Chenango counties collaborate on mental health services.** Tri-County Forensic Mental Health Services provides mental health services in the county jails, for local courts and legal systems for the counties of Otsego, Delaware and Chenango. Four County Adolescent Community Residence serves adolescents with mental health residential treatment needs in Otsego, Chenango, Delaware and Schoharie counties, however adolescents from neighboring counties are accepted. Four County also provides mental health crisis and community stabilization/outreach services (Otsego, Chenango, Delaware, and Schoharie). The four county mental health services development service serves Otsego, Chenango, Delaware and Schoharie counties.

**Otsego County** has co-located, but not yet integrated, mental health and addiction recovery services only because of separate state agency oversight and regulations. All the above initiatives are fiscally supported with state funding through NYS Office of Mental Health and NYS Office of Addiction and Substance Abuse Services.

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## PARKS AND RECREATION

**Cattaraugus County** runs the New York State Parks and Recreation's Navigation and Snowmobile program with the Seneca Nation of Indians, Lime Lake Cottage Owners Association, Onoville Marina, snowmobile clubs in the county, and Allegany State Park Police. The collaborative project is funded, in part, through funds from the NYS Parks Department (about 25 percent of the cost of the program).

## PROSECUTION

**The Cattaraugus District Attorney's Office works with all local, federal, state and county police departments to collaboratively investigate and prosecute crimes.** This has always been this way. They share costs for extraditions, post-mortem examinations, laboratory examinations, etc. They also collaborate with the Children's Advocacy Center, which provides a multitude of support services for child victims, including medical, psychological, and financial assistance. The Children's Advocacy Center's functions are totally supported by grants and fund raising initiatives.

**The Westchester Intelligence Center** of the District Attorney's Office is a collaborative partner with Westchester's 42 local police departments, as well as state, federal and regional agencies, to facilitate information sharing, analyze electronic data, locate and connect information from disparate data sources, and apply these technology driven solutions to criminal investigations. In addition to supporting criminal investigations, WIC analysts regularly provide crime statistics and other data to localities and agencies.

**The Westchester County District Attorney's Office** regularly provides training for law enforcement and other agencies. The wide range of topics has recently included various legal updates, elder abuse, sex crimes, human trafficking, arson, drug and alcohol abuse, cyberbullying and internet safety, animal cruelty and the use of K-9 animals in investigations.

## PUBLIC DEFENSE SERVICES

**Ulster and Dutchess counties** have a shared services agreement to jointly provide legal defense counsel to indigent clients. The counties forged a cooperative agreement to garner a level of cost containment over a State mandated expense that has now reached a combined total of nearly \$3.9 million annually in Ulster and Dutchess counties.

When a Public Defender's Office is disqualified from representing an eligible indigent client due to a legal conflict, a private attorney is assigned. The attorney then bills the county according to rates established by New York State in a process referred to as "assigned counsel." This shared service arrangement permits each public defender's office to share resources and create cost efficiencies while at the same time increasing the quality of legal services they provide.

## PUBLIC HEALTH

**In January 2013, Genesee and Orleans counties' Health Departments began a two-year collaborative Cross Jurisdictional Services (CJS) pilot project** to study and assess the merits of sharing public health services. The counties decided to provide services through a shared senior administration model in order to create financial savings while enhancing service delivery. This initiative is the first of its kind in New York State.

Lobbying by county officials and NYSAC resulted in newly-adopted changes in Public Health Law (PHL 351) allowing, with the approval of the New York State Commissioner of Health, up to three counties with a population of less than 150,000 to hire the same Public Health Director (PHD). The retirement of the Genesee County PHD in late 2011 provided the opportunity to reach across the county line and appoint a single director.

In October 2012, the PHD in Orleans County was approved by both county legislatures, the Boards of Health and the NYSDOH to oversee both county health departments. In addition to the PHD, both counties are currently sharing a Deputy/Environmental Health Director and a Director of Patient Services. These three administrative positions have already realized fiscal savings while driving programmatic efficiencies through identifying best practices between the counties.

In addition to shared senior leadership, Genesee and Orleans have successfully achieved several fiscal and programmatic efficiencies that are driving the positive impacts of the project. Looking ahead, the counties are developing language for a cross-jurisdictional agreement to share non-administrative staff. This agreement would allow departmental leadership to leverage scarce resources and human capital by having another tool available for assisting in delivering essential services, cross training and emergency preparedness response activities in both counties. The counties will also begin to develop a blue print and strategic plan for future integration of services beyond the end of the 2014 pilot project.

This cross-jurisdictional project has deep regulatory and logistic complexities. It is the result of significant hard work, flexibility and forward thinking by the legislatures, Boards of Health, the NYSDOH, and the staff from both counties. This diverse group has proactively responded to the difficult fiscal environment by working through differences and understanding that by working together, even across county lines, governments can maximize savings while enhancing services to residents.

**Rensselaer, Albany, Schenectady and Saratoga** counties to put on a half-day forum called "Tools for Caregivers" which is primarily targeted at those who care for the elderly but can also apply to other caregivers. These counties also collaborated in the past to educate seniors on signing up for Medicare Part D.

**Franklin County** consolidated the County Nursing Home with Alice Hyde Medical Nursing Home. This unique public/private partnership was awarded \$9.3 million in grants under the Health Care Efficiency and Affordability Law for New Yorkers to improve long-term health care in Franklin County. A new facility was built to consolidate the aging nursing home buildings.

## PUBLIC SAFETY

**Monroe County** has constructed a regional public safety training facility for EMS, Fire, Law Enforcement, public officials, and industrial fire and EMS organizations. Monroe County contracts with Monroe Community College for all public safety training to be conducted at the facility. The public safety training facility houses the Monroe County Fire Bureau, Monroe County Office of Emergency Medical Service, Rochester Fire Department Training Division, Monroe County Office of Emergency Preparedness, and numerous classrooms and office space for Monroe Community College, including the Homeland Security Management Institute. Through collaborative partnerships among agencies and organizations that use the PSTF, taxpayers are able to realize savings and ensure that first responders and emergency personnel are receiving high quality training in a cooperative setting.

**The Monroe County Crime Laboratory was founded in 1961 and is a regional forensic laboratory that serves the City of Rochester, Monroe County** and seven surrounding counties with a combined population of over 1.1 million people. The Crime Lab provides superior scientific analysis of forensic evidence for law enforcement and public safety agencies. Due to the expenses of operating a forensic laboratory, a regional approach was favored and has allowed surrounding municipalities and agencies to utilize the service of a top-rate forensic laboratory.

**Westchester County's Forensic Science Laboratory** provides laboratory analytical services on a variety of evidence submitted by the 47 municipal law enforcement agencies in Westchester County. These include DNA, drugs, arson, gunshot residue, trace analysis

and audio/ video evidence. The DNA section is part of the FBI CODIS DNA network. The lab responds to crime scenes on a selective basis when laboratory level analysis is required at the scene. They are currently the only Forensic laboratory in the State accredited to conduct audio/video analysis on evidence such as surveillance recordings from crime scenes. The laboratory conducts training sessions for local law enforcement on how to properly detect, collect, and package evidence for submission to the laboratory. The laboratory also maintains an International accreditation, meeting the ISO/IEC 17025 Standards and supplemental requirements for the operation of a Crime laboratory.

**The Seneca Nation of Indians contracts with the Cattaraugus County Sheriff's Office** for security at the Seneca-Allegany Casino, plus funds School Resource Officers in two schools, and two officers assigned to the drug task force. The annual value of these projects is more than \$1.8 million in added security within Cattaraugus County.

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**The Nassau County Police Department** provides the primary patrol service for the residents of Nassau County not covered by 20 local police jurisdictions. Nassau County's Police Department Personnel Reduction and Precinct Consolidation Initiative enabled 94 members of the Nassau County Police Department to retire. This initiative also enabled the agency to reorganize the provision of services by consolidating the number of police precincts. By consolidating precincts and redistributing the administrative

workload more evenly, while at the same time keeping the number of patrol posts throughout the county constant, the NCPD maintained, and even enhanced, the level of public service within Nassau County.

**In Westchester County**, the Victim Justice Center at the District Attorney's Office provides crime victims with information concerning their legal rights, assistance with victim impact statements, access to counseling and help in filing for restitution. Services are free of charge and bi-lingual. The Victim Justice Center is located at the District Attorney's Office and is open Monday through Friday during normal business hours. In addition to the Victim Justice Center, domestic violence victims can receive specialized comprehensive services and legal services through the County's Family Justice Center located at the White Plains Courthouse complex. The Family Justice Center is supported by a federal grant and includes providers from across Westchester County. The District Attorney's Office coordinates a multi-disciplinary team of professionals that investigate child abuse cases at Westchester's Children's Advocacy Center (CAC). Child abuse victims receive forensic interviews and medical exams at the CAC with the overriding goal of reducing trauma to child victims. Child victims and family members also receive access to counseling and crime victim advocacy.

**Monroe County** provides central police services for local governments as a way to eliminate costly duplicative services and maximize essential resources of the county's law enforcement agencies. These services include program evaluation, development of centralized police reporting forms, firearms training and qualification, police officer training, along with enhancing voice and data mobile communications. Consolidation of these services saves taxpayers the cost of duplicative

services, and just as important, ensures that all agencies receive high quality training and use compatible communications.

**Schoharie County** owns a fire training facility, which is used by fire departments within the county for training and practice purposes.

**The Nassau County District Attorney and the Mayor of Hempstead** brought together county leaders, community groups and local businesses with a goal of reducing crime. Through research of databases it was discovered that nearly 70% of all crime in a community was centered in a four block radius that was making it unsafe for citizens and bad for business. By bringing together community leaders (law enforcement, government, business, and citizen groups) a step-by-step plan was developed and implemented to rid the area in question of crime. Clearing the streets of drug dealers was the first priority, followed by making sure appropriate county supported human services were provided once the streets were cleared of criminal elements and involving business and citizen groups every step of the way to provide long-term sustainability of the initiative. Under the initiative crime was reduced by nearly 80 percent and the community was able to reclaim the area.

## PURCHASING

**Nassau County** is looking to offer piggy backing opportunities to local governments who purchase common items such as paper goods, stationary, sodium hypochlorite, salt, sand, tires and increase our receivables for all recyclables including brass, sheet metal plastics and rubber.

**Westchester County's Bureau of Purchase & Supplies** hosts a website that posts more than 100 contracts that are available for political



subdivisions to utilize. Some contracts are created specifically on behalf of the municipalities since the county has the lawful ability to create one contract that serves all. Cooperative purchasing is also an option, when appropriate, to achieve greater overall savings.

**In Rensselaer County**, the Director of Central Services solicits participation/interest bids by political subdivisions and school districts before bids are let, so that quantities reflect anticipated purchasing by all entities. However, there is no obligation on anyone's part to actually purchase or purchase the quantity they predicted. The most common bids which municipalities and school districts use include fuel, highway materials, paper, and vehicles. The county has also done joint bids with Albany County for ice treatment and produce.

## REAL PROPERTY SERVICES

**Tompkins County** is one of two counties in New York State with a countywide assessment unit. The County provides the assessing functions for all municipalities within its borders. The Tompkins County Department of Assessment has a professional staff of 14, reduced from a high of 19 in 2000. The reduction was a result of efficiencies gained by developing an in-house database and by cultivating an exceptional staff. This office is an early and long-standing example of successful consolidation and a shared service that has worked to save money and improve service delivery.

**Nassau County** has the second countywide assessing unit, however Nassau still has some local assessing jurisdictions.

**Cattaraugus County's Real Property Services** assists all municipalities in the county with office operations. The department currently assists every municipality within the county (including 32 towns and two cities). They assist the Assessors in all of these municipalities by entering in the sale information for every property transfer that occurs within the county. The sale information gets entered into the Assessor's software program. They, in turn, get the RP5217 and make sure that what was entered is correct.

The County Real Property Services office also maintains all the administration processes that are needed for the Assessors' software program. This includes, but is not limited to: agricultural value updating, aged exemption limit updating, star exemption updating, updating neighborhood codes, adding and modifying escrow accounts, etc. If the county did not perform the above functions, then all of it would fall onto the shoulders of the 34 municipalities within the county.

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**Rensselaer County**, like most counties, hosts the real property services information system and provides access and support to the town assessors. The county processes and prints tax bills for all the towns and school districts and collects delinquent taxes or take title to parcels with unpaid taxes in all municipalities except the cities of Troy and Rensselaer.

## RECORDS MANAGEMENT AND ADMINISTRATIVE FUNCTIONS

**Westchester County** provides local officials access to monthly reports of mortgage taxes collected for a municipality. The clerk's office provides the data through Westchester Records Online. Data for a month is released on the eleventh day of the following month, enabling users to select time frames including the previous month. Westchester Records Online is a web-based application through which a customer can find data about and images of documents ranging from deeds to maps to summons filed in the Office of the Westchester County Clerk. Local governments in Westchester can enter into an Inter-Municipal Agreement (IMA) to view not only public records, but also imaged documents such as the Real Property Transfer Forms which are not available to the public.

**Schuyler County has received a NYS award for Records Management Consolidation** involving Schuyler County, Watkins Glen School District, Village of Watkins Glen, Town of Dix, Cornell Cooperative Extension and the International Racing Museum.

**Tompkins County** has a plan to digitize records in order to avoid a potential \$4 million expense necessary to build a records center. State archive grant funds were used to help with the municipal records maintenance.

**The Chemung County** Treasurer's Office has established a municipal services division to offer a full range of accounting and bookkeeping services to all municipalities within the county.

**Westchester County's** professional IT staff offers to provide domain naming support, email services and blackberry account support for any municipality within the county. These services are available through existing public expertise and government contracts.

**Nassau County's data center** will be offered to local governments as a co-location site for their data and hardware redundancy. In addition, they will offer their Microsoft and Oracle enterprise agreements as a way to help smaller governments achieve better vendor pricing.

**Otsego County** personnel offices handle civil service exams and record keeping for all municipalities and schools in the county.

**Westchester County** has developed various personnel training programs – such as a New Employee Orientation, Workplace Violence Prevention training, and FMLA – that a local municipality might adapt for their own training purposes. In addition, the County has developed Human Resources materials -- such as an Employee Handbook, Code of Ethics, FMLA documents, etc. – that might serve as a sample for a local municipality to work from when developing their own materials.

**The Monroe County Civil Service Commission** is composed of five members appointed by the County Executive for a six-year term. The Commission oversees the Civil Service function for all branches of local government in Monroe County, except for those covered under the Rochester Municipal Civil Service Commission, such as the City of Rochester and the Rochester Housing Authority. This consolidated service allows smaller municipalities and school districts to avoid millions of dollars in personnel expenses and provides consistent interpretations of the Civil Service Law.

**Westchester County's Department of Information Technology** (DoIT) offers reduced cost digital printing and professional graphic design services to municipalities, schools and special districts in Westchester County. DoIT's print shop facility is equipped to handle large scale print job processing in a variety of formats, including tri-fold brochures, large documents bound in book form, bi-fold pamphlets, etc.

The county also offers local governments to piggy back on their contract with Connecticut Business Systems, LLC (CBS) for multifunction digital copiers/printers. The new Xerox technology provides a broad range of solutions that offers state of the art features and a document management solution, including print, copy, scan and fax technology. Because of their purchasing size, the county is able to secure competitive prices and services that are not normally offered to smaller organizations.

**Rensselaer County** administers civil service requirements for all its municipalities, including the City of Rensselaer, whose Civil Service the county agreed to oversee last year. The only municipality within the county that continues to oversee their own Civil Service is the City of Troy.

**Schoharie County's** Information Technology Department provides municipal software to towns and villages within the county

## **SEWER AND WATER SYSTEM**

**Ontario County** provides meter reading and water and/or sewer billing services to other municipalities. They also provide sewer maintenance of distribution systems to include 29 pump stations for another municipality in addition to processing sewage.

**The Monroe County Water Authority** is the third largest water supplier in New York State, producing and delivering an average of 18 billion gallons of affordable drinking water each year. The MCWA services Monroe County and portions of each of the five surrounding counties. The Authority's service area includes over 50 towns, villages, cities and other Water Authorities. The MCWA presently serves approximately 194,000 retail, wholesale and other customer accounts. It also provides the City of Rochester with up to 26 million gallons per day for distribution within its retail service area. Towns and villages have benefited from agreements with the MCWA because they avoid have to make large capital expenditure for water treatment equipment, yielding recurring savings for taxpayers.

## SOLID WASTE

**The Oneida-Herkimer Solid Waste Authority**, now over twenty years old, continues to be a beacon of successful regionalization and consolidation. With its award winning recycling program and integrated facilities it is looked upon as a model not only across the State but nationally. With its original goal of developing an efficient, environmentally friendly, self-sufficient waste management system which provides incentive for waste reduction and recycling completed, the Solid Waste Authority continues to reinvent and improve its system. The two-county single-stream recycling program and Landfill Gas Electricity Generation facility continue to increase service while decreasing costs. Since its creation, the Solid Waste Authority has been financially self-sufficient while containing disposal rates for citizens, businesses and municipalities. Since its inception, the Solid Waste Authority has never asked either county for direct funding, in fact they have been able to reduce rates not only in 2006 but again in 2013. Disposal rates and fees are lower today than they were in 1992.

There's a lesson here that goes beyond one program. We should be focusing our resources on our needs in a collaborative coherent way. We have to become innovators who change what does not work. We have two choices: Re-structure the future or simply let the erosion of fiscal stability that we see all around us make the decisions for us. In Oneida County the choice is simple, re-structure the future. That's the kind of spirit that changes this region for the better.

## LONG TERM STRATEGIC PLANNING

**Genesee County** realized that as a small rural Western NY county sandwiched between Erie and Monroe (each with populations at least 12 times larger than Genesee) they needed to be more than just a rest stop on the way to something bigger. To become a destination of its own the County undertook the development of a long term strategic plan to focus on all aspects of their community. They identified their core assets, how to encourage economic development, improve services and generally maintain and improve the quality of life while encouraging growth. They divided into 10 focus groups to concentrate on various issues. The "smart growth" end result required a lot of cooperation across municipal lines and led to a county wide water system that improved services and targeted regions for development, a renegotiated sales tax sharing arrangement and expanded community college system that provided satellite locations to make higher education and workforce training more accessible to county residents and to build a workforce that can support local businesses and attract new ones. The community college satellite locations also provided additional community space for the public. The plan required partnering with business, academia and others to help inform the strategic plan and explain it to municipalities and individual so a shared vision and plan could be realized.

## SURPLUS AND UNDERUTILIZED PROPERTY

**Nassau County** sold a vacant parcel of land for \$1 million more than its assessed value, which provided an immediate cash infusion to the county and put the property back on the tax rolls.

**Saratoga County** sold its unused landfill facility to a private entity to provide for safe, economically stable disposal of not-recyclable waste. With this transaction, the county obtains a lump sum payment and revenue sharing between the county and the purchaser, creating recurring revenues over the next 20 years.

## TAX COLLECTION

**Fulton County** signed an inter-municipal agreement to collect taxes in the City of Gloversville. The agreement has been in place since 2005.

## TRANSPORTATION

**Tompkins County, the city of Ithaca and Cornell University came together several years ago to create the** Tompkins Consolidated Area Transit, Inc. (TCAT). The city, county and Cornell each provide equal funding. TCAT is also funded by the State Transit Operating Assistance Fund, based on ridership and miles traveled. TCAT has been recognized as the best transit system of its size in North America.

**Otsego County shares public transportation routes with the City of Oneonta and ARC Otsego.** The County and ARC formulated a contract to utilize an ARC route for public transportation with a connecting point to the inner city portion of the Oneonta Public transportation system. If the county had to run this route individually it would cost approximately \$50,000-\$60,000. As a shared route, the cost is approximately \$20,000 per year.

In the transportation world, the latest hindrance to public transportation is the initiation of the Medical Answering Service for Medicaid. This State initiative took Medicaid ridership from public transportation systems and brokers to taxi services. Prior to Otsego County being mandated to the State MAS program, there was a working relationship to share the cost for Medicaid trips with the Department of Social Services. Now that this no longer exist, the county lost 90% of its Medicaid ridership, and the State is paying more for Medicaid transportation as well as duplicating services by using taxis rather than public transportation for Medicaid rides. With the recent MAS plan for Medicaid transportation the state has reversed established coordinated plans into separated services that cost taxpayers much more.

**Schenectady County** undertook an extensive review of its bus routing and schedules for preschool special education students and determined that by shifting routes slightly and adjusting schedules by just 15 minutes could reduce their transportation costs by half. Negotiations ensued with preschool special education providers to make sure the new schedules could be accommodated and the county did realize savings approaching 50 percent on their transportation costs for this program.

## VETERANS AFFAIRS AND COMMUNITY SERVICES

**In Otsego County**, Veterans Affairs and Central Planning share a common vehicle and office functions. The Veterans Affairs Department receives direct assistance from Central Planning in preparation of the Quarterly Newsletter, website support, ordering of supplies, and assisting the VA Director if there is a need for handling an overflow of Veterans or their dependents.

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**Steuben County and Allegany County** share a Director of Community Services, who oversees the department in both counties.

**Chenango County** has consolidated Youth Bureaus within the county, including its cities and towns.

**Orleans and Genesee Counties**, which coordinate on several fronts, share a Youth Bureau between the counties as well as the City of Batavia.

## WEIGHTS AND MEASURES

**Schuyler and Chemung counties** share a Weights & Measures director and department. The State Legislature passed a measure to allow this shared service.

## INTERDEPARTMENTAL CONSOLIDATION AND SUPPORT

**The Cattaraugus Community Action** coordinates several departments, including the Cattaraugus County Department of Social Services, Mental Health, Child and Adult Protective Services, Domestic Violence, Courts, Prosecution, and all law enforcement agencies. This cooperative program has grown over the past decade and continues to adapt and improve to better serve the community. The numerous agencies working together prevent duplication of services, possible gaps in service, and helps provide a complete service for victim assistance, protection of involved parties, and bringing offenders to justice.

**Essex County consolidated its offices of Community Development and Planning, Youth Bureau, Stop DWI and Traffic Safety into the Office of Community Resources.** The services each office offered prior to the consolidation continue to be offered by significantly fewer employees.

**Yates County's Public Health Department** provides clerical support for the Community Services Office.

## PRIVATIZATION

**Madison County** privatization its Certified Home Healthcare Agency (CHHA) and Long-Term Home Health Care Program (LTHHCP). While the home care program in Madison County historically generated a surplus it has done so at a decreasing rate for the last decade. The County faced financial losses as a result of increasing operating costs and difficulty in recruiting and retaining health professionals, particularly home care nurses. The spiraling mandated fringe benefit costs and work rules associated with union contracts posed further problems related to decreasing operating costs to fit within evolving payment systems.

A two-track approach was recommended for gathering and evaluating information pertinent to 1) identify and implement needed improvements in the functioning of the County's Certified Home Healthcare Agency (CHHA) and Long Term Home Health Care Program (LTHHC) and, 2) investigate options and considerations for a Request for Proposal to solicit purchase offers for the possible sale of the CHHA/LTHHC to qualified purchasers. Based on review of the performance improvement activities and submitted proposals, the Madison County Board of Supervisors approved the sale of the Certified Home Healthcare Agency (CHHA) and Long Term Home Healthcare Program (LTHHC) licenses to a private provider. Within the public health services area of the county budget, the annual cost savings to the County is over \$914,000.

## ADDITIONAL STORIES OF LOCAL ACTION AND INNOVATION

### *ARGO: Action to Redesign Government Operations*

In Oneida County, a new plan (dubbed Project ARGO: Action to Realign Government Operations) was implemented to streamline government operations and save money. The time to study consolidation, collaboration and shared services is over. The time to act is now. ARGO is a project that will turn these efforts into reality. The guiding principles behind the program are simple. We have to be an active, engaged county at all levels of government and in every community. We do not have a pre-ordained view of how any government service ought to be structured. We will believe in what works. Show us what works, show us how to make a change, and we will invest in making that idea happen so we can start transforming the structures of government for the 21st century.

The way ARGO works is straight forward. It starts with the one thing that turns ideas into action: Money. The first step was to ask the County Board of Legislators for \$500,000 to fund consolidation and collaboration projects that have a long-term net savings to the county and the partner government that has the idea. The second step was to create a committee to oversee and vet each project. The third and final step was to solicit ideas from the local government within the county. As this program moves forward we will work with any municipality that has an idea to realign government operations that will have a long-term net savings. The money will go towards the missing piece that will make this reform a reality, whether that is something as complex as shared IT services or something more straightforward like a piece of equipment. When we look at this approach we are hoping to tear down the wall of provincialism that manifest themselves as redundant layers of government that cost the taxpayer money and prevents them from receiving a better service. We present ARGO as a model for all counties to streamline their operations and move their counties forward into the 21st century.



*The New York State Association of Counties is a bipartisan municipal association serving the counties of New York State including the City of New York. Organized in 1925, NYSAC mission is to represent, educate and advocate for member counties and the thousands of elected and appointed county officials who serve the public.*

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