



**MINUTES
COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE
MAY 20, 2014**

MEMBERS PRESENT

Alden H. Wolfe, Chairwoman
Jay Hood, Jr., Vice Chair
Harriet D. Cornell
Michael M. Grant
Douglas J. Jobson
Barry S. Kantrowitz
Nancy Low-Hogan
Joseph L. Meyers
Patrick J. Moroney
John A. Murphy
Aney Paul
Philip Soskin
Frank P. Sparaco
Aron B. Wieder

OTHERS PRESENT

Laurence O. Toole
Mary Widmer
Elana L. Yeger, Esq.
Stephen J. Powers, Esq.

MEMBER ABSENT

Christopher J. Carey
Toney L. Earl
Ilan S. Schoenberger

Chairman Alden H. Wolfe called for the Legislature to move into the Committee of the Whole at 7:08 p.m.

Legislator Michael M. Grant moved to convene as a Committee of the Whole, which was seconded by Legislator Frank P. Sparaco and passed unanimously.

The Legislature now resolved itself into a Committee of the Whole, Chaired by Alden H. Wolfe to discuss the following resolution:

A. COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

- 1. Referral No. 4065 - Setting A Date For A Public Hearing: A Local Law Amending The Rockland County Charter. (Sponsor: Hon. Alden H. Wolfe)**

Chairman Wolfe

Discussion on amending the Charter started about two years ago and this was through the cooperation between the Rules Committee and the Government Operations Committee. This was, and continues to be, a bipartisan effort to look at the Charter and find ways that we can make Rockland County government work better, be more responsive to the public and generally better serve the citizens of Rockland County. I do want to point out that this effort has purposefully not explored items that can be considered political in nature. For example, we decided that we were not going to consider term limits, because of the fear that the good government work that we hope to accomplish through amending the Charter could be undone by getting embroiled in political debate over such a divisive issue. Through the work of these two committees we have developed what we consider to be a proposal that will accomplish the goal of improving Rockland County government for all of our citizens. Again, it is focused on some broad-brush areas, but largely the main item is improving the annual budget process, which has been a source of frustration to all of us for many years. The proposal, we believe, will also increase fiscal oversight and enhance the system of checks and balances that is a critical part of a government such as ours, which has two separate co-equal branches.

This was a bipartisan effort. Legislator Carey, who couldn't be here tonight, was an important part representing the Minority. Legislator Sparaco was also part of that on the Rules Committee. We believe that the proposal, which we will not be voting on tonight, represents what we consider to be the best work product of this body.

Several weeks ago we had a meeting with the County Executive since the process is the passing and adoption of a Local Law clearly there needs to be cooperation between the two branches. We presented our proposal to him. He was to review it and give us his input, which we have not received yet. Hopefully we will get that soon so that we can see where, if any, differences lie and then have a discussion about boiling it down to what we feel is really most important. At that point we are going to have another Committee of the Whole where we as Legislators can actually talk about the specific language and hopefully adopt something that has been worked out mutually between the Legislature and the Executive branch. The public hearing date, since the timing is critical here, will be July 1, 2014. Since the final language on any proposed Local Law needs to be placed on the desk ten days prior I expect to have a Committee of the Whole some time in the middle of June. I hope that we can have some feedback from the Executive branch. The sooner we get it the sooner we can have the discussion and see what differences need to be ironed out.

Tonight, we are going to be voting simply to set a date for a public hearing. The Legislative proposal is attached to the agenda. As soon as our agenda went out on Thursday it became part of the public record.

Mr. Meyers

I know this is just setting a date for a public hearing. I am disappointed that we didn't include term limits. I think it would be good for this body to have term limits. I am also uncomfortable at the moment with the idea that a contingency budget would replace the Rockland County Executive's budget if a budget couldn't be agreed to, because a contingency budget based on a previous year wouldn't take into account certain mandatory costs that have to go up from year to year, like pension costs and health care costs. I don't know how the County could live with a contingency budget that does not reflect the reality of the expenditures for that year in any way, shape or form. I don't know how that is better than a County Executive budget that tries to take those things into account even if we disagreed with some of the numbers. I was not part of the discussions and this was the best thought. I don't see at first glance how that is a successful recipe. I am also concerned that if you have a stalemate with the County Executive, you then have a contingency budget and then what happens if you have another stalemate the next year? It doesn't seem workable to me. I realize that we are not voting on substance, but I don't see the basis for a public hearing just yet.

Mrs. Cornell

I am certainly voting for the public hearing. I wonder about questions that one might have between now and the time we have the public hearing. I am going to need someone to explain to me - Section C2.06: Confirmation of Appointments. We don't have to get into a discussion about it tonight, but I just wanted to know about the timing involved for getting answers.

Chairman Wolfe

Counsel is very well versed in all of the issues here. If anyone has any specific questions Mrs. Yeger is very capable of answering those questions. If anyone has ideas please share them. I expect that we will have a final version voted on by this body in roughly a month. The input from the County Executive is what we are waiting on. Those might be larger policy issues that we need to consider. A lot of hands have been involved in putting this together.

MOTION TO APPROVE

HOOD, JR./WOLFE: M.V.

Ayes: 13

Nay: 01 (Legislator Meyers)

Absent: 03 (Legislators Carey, Earl, Schoenberger)

Legislator Alden H. Wolfe called to report back to the full Legislature at 7:19 p.m., which was moved by Legislator Wolfe, seconded by Legislator Kantrowitz and passed.

MOTION TO ADJOURN (7:20 p.m.)

HOOD, JR./JOBSON: UNAN.

Respectfully Submitted,

Darcy Shapin-Greenberg, Proceedings Clerk