

## **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