



Commentator

April 2009

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The League of Women Voters, a nonpartisan political organization, encourages the informed and active participation of citizens in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy. The League does not support or oppose candidates for public office but does encourage its members as individuals to participate actively in the political process. The League acts on those issues the membership chooses for study and action

The LWV of the Mid-Hudson Region covers the Mid-Ulster County area and the Dutchess County area. We belong to the LWV of New York State and the LWV of the US.

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CALENDAR		
2009	MAKE A NOTE: April 22 is Earth Day Celebrate and GET GREEN	
APRIL		
18	10:00-12:00	Consensus brunch meeting on Golden Hill at the Town of Esopus Library in Port Ewen
22		Earth Day
25	10:00-12:00	Consensus meeting on National Popular Vote at the Unitarian Universalist Church, Sawkill Rd, Kingston
MAY		
5	7:15-9:15	Board meeting at Jacki's
13	10:30-12:00	Book Repair at Elizabeth Askue's. Call to confirm
15-17		State Convention, Syracuse
19		Statewide School Budget Vote
20	6:00-8:30	Annual Meeting & Pot-Luck Supper at the Town of Esopus Library, 128 Canal St., Port Ewen
JUNE		
2	7:15-9:15	Board meeting. Place TBA
7	1:00-3:30	Charter honoree luncheon at Wiltwyck Golf Club honoring Cindy Bell, Lee Cane, Tom Kadgen & Reneé Sachs
AUGUST		
29-30	TBA	Annual Yard Sale at Emily Hauser's

Check our Calendar on-line for updates at
<http://midhudson.ny.lwvnet.org/calendar.html>.

Commentator archives, State and National League newsletters are at
<http://midhudson.ny.lwvnet.org/Newsletters.html>

MEMBERS: Need a ride to a meeting? Interested in car pooling?
 Please contact Jean McGarry, 336-6622 or jfmcg@hvc.rr.com

Prez Sez...

Greetings,

It is April and there is much to celebrate. The budget has passed in New York State and along with its passage New York State passed the Bigger Better Bottle Bill. This is the first major change to the state's bottle law since it was enacted in 1982. The League of Women Voters was one of many groups who campaigned over the last nine years to expand the law. "This will remove water bottles from the waste stream and return nickel deposits for much needed state revenue," commented Barbara Bartoletti, LWVNY Legislative Director. Let us hope that as we commemorate Earth Day on April 22nd next year, our beautiful Mid-Hudson region will realize a significant decrease in littered water bottles as we clean up after the winter thaw.

What else to celebrate in April besides the fact that you may have gotten a refund from the IRS? There are two opportunities for great discussion and consensus. The future of Golden Hill is the topic on April 18th and the National Popular Vote is the hot button on April 25th. Check the calendar for time and place and please plan to attend and bring a friend.

Happy April!

Jean

**OBSERVER
CORPS REPORTS**

Did you know that many government public meetings are on the internet with live streaming video coverage? The Ulster County Legislature has been "webcast" live for a few months. Go to www.totalwebcasting.com/live/ulster on meeting nights for live video and at any other time for archived footage.

And check out www.nysegov.com/webcast.cfm for webcasts of New York State meetings and www.statewidemediaproject.org for other local meetings.

Our website at midhudson.ny.lwvnet.org/elections.html#Local_Gov_Sites has links to all of the town, city and village websites in Ulster and Dutchess Counties. Check to see if your local government posts agendas, minutes and other government documents.

**Ulster County
Legislature Meeting**

The Legislature was called to order at 7:00 pm on April 7th. 26 legislators were present, 7 absent.

After noting the several pieces of correspondence, county officer and committee reports received by the legislature and on file with the clerk, Chairman Donaldson granted Privilege of the Floor to Bruce Denner, Geraldin Buck and Charles Lyonhart to speak in regard to Organ Donor Awareness Month.

On behalf of Chairman Donaldson, legislators Zimet and Gerentine presented a Pride of Ulster County award to Gioia Shebar, Bernetta Calderone and Tara O'Connor-Alisse, for their tireless efforts to promote and prepare state legislation for short term property tax relief and long term tax reform.

The Public Comment portion included 3 speakers in favor of the proposed plastic bag fee legislation and 2 speakers promoting the agreement with UCDC. Both legislative items were included in this legislative session.

Some 35 items were adopted by the legislature "on consent" involving various appointments to county boards, approvals of several intergovernmental and non-governmental agreements, budget amendments concerning a number of public works and transportation projects and programs, and supporting the Omnibus Property Tax Reform And Relief Bill pending in the state legislature.

Some 16 non-consent legislative items were brought to the floor. Five bond issues for highway equipment and local bridge and road construction totaling \$9,300,000.00 were approved.

Approval of agreements between the County and unionized labor in the Sheriff's Department was referred to the Criminal Justice Committee.

A resolution supporting the UC Town Clerks' Association position to keep town clerks, tax collectors and highway superintendents as elected officials was adopted.

A public hearing on a local law establishing a plastic bag fee was set for May 6, 2009 at 6:00 pm.

An Introductory Local Law under which chain food service operators would be required to post calorie information was adopted. Minority Leader Noonan suggested that members of the legislature (and any of their family members) owning/operating

such facilities immediately implement calorie posting as a sign of legislative leadership.

A resolution approving guidelines for a performance based economic development plan with the UC Development Corporation was passed including, on-consent, amendments offered by the minority to match UCDC fundraising at 50% rather than 30% and revising the performance criteria for new jobs to more clearly indicate actually filled or to be filled jobs. Amendments also included designation of the Deputy Chair of the Finance Committee [a member of the minority] as a member of the UCDC board.

A resolution requiring the County Executive to account for monies expended in connection with providing for office space was defeated. A number of minority legislators spoke on the issue of transparency and legislators' relationship with the County Executive. Chairman Donaldson advised the body that he had been assured the information would be available when finished. He further committed to join in the request if the material is not received as represented.

Legislator Zimet submitted a resolution, after obtaining approval to suspend the rules of the legislature, which would have Ulster County join a statewide statement of commitment to make our communities "Climate Smart". She pointed out that Ulster County has been a leader in these efforts but joining with communities throughout the state would emphasize the importance of saving energy and helping the climate. [For more information, see <http://www.dec.ny.gov/energy/50845.html>]

Jim McGarry

Republican Caucus

The Caucus was called to order at 6:00 pm on April 7th by Minority Leader Noonan.

Due to time constraints, discussion was limited to a few matters. Those discussed included the proposed "Lynette's Law" under which certain acts would be classified as a felony level aggravated harassment. It was expected the resolution would be withdrawn as proposed upon the advice of the County Attorney. Issues relating to local authority to enact the law as written requires reconsideration and revision.

The caucus generally discussed a proposed plastic bag fee law and members described a variety of expressions of disapproval from the public. Being in favor of public hearings in general, the caucus agreed to support scheduling the hearing.

The caucus discussed at length the resolution concerning guidelines for a performance based economic development plan between UCDC and Ulster County. [See Vic Melville's Observer Corp report below]. A number of suggested changes discussed and it was agreed to offer an amendment that would use jobs created and filled rather than simply creating the job title. The caucus further agreed that the 30% County match of funds raised by UCDC be raised to 50% with a \$50,000.00 cap.

In addition to the technical and substantive issues of the resolution, the caucus discussed the political implications of any steps the caucus might take to oppose the legislation. A number of the members spoke favorably of their experiences with UCDC and its staff. It was pointed out that, due to the number of majority legislators who were expected to be absent, the caucus found itself in a unique position of power. Some observed a measure of disregard for the minority caucus and its essential role in the legislature. Several legislators noted that opposition or any effort to delay enactment of the legislation could be perceived as anti-business. In considering the poor economic climate and need for economic stimulus in Ulster County, caution was urged lest the wrong message be transmitted.

The caucus discussed an amendment to be made by the majority under which the Deputy Chair of the Finance Committee [a minority party legislator] would be a member of the UCDC. The amendment was seen as an intrusion upon prerogatives of the minority caucus.

Jim McGarry

Ulster County Economic Development, Housing, Planning & Transit Committee

Date: 3/25/09 Start Time: 7:06 p.m. Finish Time: 9:03 p.m.

Chairman Hector Rodriquez addressed the subject of the Ulster County Development Corporation (UCDC) contract language of the proposed Ulster County Legislature resolution. Lance Matteson, president of UCDC discussed the subject of adjustable amounts based on metrics, e.g. jobs, matching funds, qualified jobs (criteria of a quality job) and required documentation. Legislator Gary Bischoff asked

about how much documentation is needed and what means of communication is acceptable (e.g. is e-mail OK?) to verify jobs. There was considerable discussion initiated by Legislator Peter Loughran about the criteria of a "quality job" being \$13 per hour and access to health benefits. Hector Rodriguez stated the goal is to get PRISM type jobs. Lance Matteson emphasized a desire for reasonable goals (and some discussion of a "claw back provision").

Holly Christana, a guest, advocated support of a food pantry and soup kitchen in Kerhonkson. She requested free bus service and C. R. said no free rides are allowed but DSS can issue bus passes. W. H. chairs the Community Action Committee and said the organization would need a 501 (c) (3) designation.

Steve Finkle, representing the City of Kingston, reviewed the status of the Empire Zone June 2009 funding gap. The state has not decided on the status of the EZ program and its funding. A UCL resolution pertains to requirement of two days per week of coverage by the EZ staff at the UCDC office. A discussion led to an amending the resolution to be two days per month as a target to be tracked and monitored by UCDC during the 2008-2009 fiscal year program (unless terminated).

Lance Matteson discussed the IDA re Rocking Horse Ranch and solar projects: leads, milestones, specific businesses related to jobs.

Art Smith, Deputy County Executive, discussed the Ulster County Legislature resolutions related to US stimulus package. Some local jobs are for 15 months with no cost to county. The county budget is being changed to accept stimulus money.

Dennis Doyle, director of the Planning Department, discussed the \$400,000 housing grant re the RUPCO block grant. Peter Loughran questioned, and he is concerned: is there a grant reduction (to the housing portion) for administrative costs?

The committee discussed the replacement of the IDA appointee. Several members expressed compliments about both people.

A future signing of a contract with Westchester by Hector Rodriguez for the committee was approved.

Dennis Doyle discussed a late resolution that the Kerhonkson bridge is funded by the US stimulus program. (Several planned projects have been moved forward as a result of the US stimulus funding. P. L. commented there is a lack of county engineers to move project forward and maintain an ongoing and increasing workload. Engineering consultants will be required.)

Vic Melville

Ulster County Environmental Committee

Ulster County Environmental Committee 3/18/09

Committee Chairman Brian Shapiro welcomed the LWV Observer and invited her comments at the end of the meeting.

The committee passed a resolution setting a public hearing for Wednesday, May 6th, on the Proposed Local Law Establishing a Plastic Bag Fee. Implementation of the law, which imposes a ten cent fee per plastic bag provided by retail merchants in the county, is anticipated before the end of the year. The proposed law sets a fine of \$250 for a merchant's first violation, and \$500 for each subsequent failure to collect the fee. The committee intends the law to be more educational than punitive, and expects that with widespread public support it will ultimately reduce the amount of plastic bag litter throughout the county.

An annual report from the head of the Soil and Water Conservation District outlined for the committee its activities in the county for 2008.

A report from Steve Noble, chair of the Environmental Management Council (an advisory committee) shows that 14 of the county's 24 municipalities now have Environmental Councils/Commissions. The most recent additions are the Town of Plattekill and the City of Kingston.

The Ulster County Resource Recovery Agency representative reported that a hazardous household waste disposal day is scheduled for Saturday, April 18th. By appointment only, hazardous materials including electronics will be accepted for recycling for a fee of \$7 per carload. Sign up at <http://www.ucrra.org/> Also noted was a new recycling program offered by retailer Best Buy, which will accept old electronics for safe disposal on a daily basis. Fees may apply. Full details can be found at <http://www.bestbuy.com>

Linda Roberts

Date: 3/25/09 Start Time: 6:13 p.m. Finish Time: 7:05 p.m.

Legislator Susan Zimet, chairwomen of the Arts, Education, Tourism and Community Relations, explained the context of this meeting: that it is a joint meeting of the committees to address policies concerning topics of mutual interests (e.g. agriculture, tourism, arts, solar initiative) to the committees. Legislator Hector Rodriquez, chairman of the Economic Development, Housing, Planning and Transit committee, added the scope of interest includes legislative initiatives and funding.

Susan Zimet emphasized the topic of branding various entities such as the Women's Studio Workshop, farmers markets, Shadowland (40th year), Mohonk Mountain House (140th year) such slogans as Ulster Loves Art.

Legislator Gary Bischoff: He introduced the subject of websites to identify and provide information for various areas related to branding: using agriculture as an example. There was considerable discussion about websites and navigation perspectives, particularly related to branding. There was a comment from Arthur Smith, Deputy County Executive that similar ideas were in discussion in the office of the county executive. A question from Hector Rodriquez: Is this operations (County Executive) or policy (County Chairman)?

Legislator Donald Gregorius asked: are they discussing initiatives, policy and money? Where does the money come from?

Cynthia Ruiz, director of Public Transit, said the ADL program overlays businesses.

Susan Zimet said there was some confusion about the roles and responsibilities with the County Executive on these areas.

Lydia Reidy, Cornell Cooperative Extension Executive Director stated that NY Ag & Markets – Ag Districts and Farmland Protection gather info on farms, CSAs, etc. and need a place (website) to put it.

Lance Matteson, president of the Ulster County Development Corporation said this (website) discussion is also being held in the Ulster Tomorrow effort: tourism, agriculture, green enterprise and the creative economy.

Susan Zimet stated the arts fund and film festival are important to include, and Donald Gregorius added the importance of linking arts to tourism.

Hector Rodriquez asked what resources can be shared and made know by a website, such as an arts inventory and a shared kiln?

Legislator Catherine Terrizzi asserted the website should start small, then grow, e.g. as a map.

Legislator Peter Loughran added the web links could work like an electronic phone book.

Legislator Thomas Briggs explained that he does not know computers, but was thinking of such ideas like a day-planner.

Hector Rodriquez asked how to move forward on policy.

Donald Gregorius asked how to go from What (we want) to How (we achieve) and he discussed some themes and identities such as Woodstock which are widely known.

Legislator Wayne Harris asserted that people identify with events vs. location, so a navigation device would take a person from an interest to a location (e. g. "Woodstock" interest to Ulster County).

Susan Zimet asked the committees to think on these topics and revisit a joint committee meeting.

Lance Matteson suggested visits to strategic companies and then expand to the arts, etc.

Vic Melville

Ulster County Health Services Committee

The Committee was convened at 6:35 PM on 3-19-09 by Chairman Rob Parete and adjourned at 7:04.

Members of the committee were present except for Legislators Terpening and Petit. DCE Beckman was present and Karen Binder.

There were 3 resolutions that the committee dealt with:

The first one was to confirm the appointment of David Klegg as a member of the UC

**Ulster County Human
Services and
Personnel
Development
Committee**

Board of Health. Passed.

The second one was to approve the reclassification of a vacant full time benefited position at Golden Hill Health Care Center. The DCE brought it forward and the Director, Sheree Cross provided explanation. Legislator Stoeckler expressed appreciation for Mrs. Cross' work and her timely responses and help whenever he has called upon her. Passed

The third resolution dealt with eliminating 3 positions at the UC Health Department: vacant Environmental Health Manager (management) and 2 unencumbered clerical support positions (Administrative Aide/Typist and Administrative Asst./Stenographer); and creating a full time Deputy Director of Environmental Services; and a full time Confidential Secretary to the Public Health Director.

DCE Beckman offered the above as explanation as to how the County Executive was looking to reorganize the department's structure. Additionally, he commented that by June 1 it is hoped that the new Director, who must be a doctor and will serve at the pleasure of the County Executive, will be on board. This person will also have the authority to select his/her own Confidential Secretary. Passed

The last unfinished business dealt with the Local Law requiring Chain Food Services operators to post calorie information on menus. A public hearing was held on March 4. Chairman Parete noted that most comments made were supportive. This will be referred to the full legislature for a vote.

Under new business Legislator Stoeckler raised a question regarding the recommendation of the Blue Ribbon Panel on Long Term Care to privatize the Golden Hill Center that was presented to the Health Services Committee in September, 2008 and again to the full County Legislature in November, 2008. Following discussion it appeared that the Health Services Committee would develop a sub-committee to review the report and make recommendations.

Lee Cane, Observer Corp

The Committee was called to order by Chairman Don Gregorius on 3-23-09 at 4:49 and adjourned at 6:40. In addition to all the committee members being present, DCE Marshall Beckman was in attendance.

There were several resolutions to be dealt with.

Initially, the committee heard from DCE Beckman as to why there was a need to reclassify a vacant full-time benefited position at Golden Hill Health Care Center. Apparently, while all recruitment procedures had been followed, it had not been possible to find an assistant to the Deputy Director. Therefore, that position was to be abolished and a new position, an administrative secretary created with a savings as well. During discussion members voiced concern about the savings indicated. Decision was made to amend the resolution eliminating the suggested savings, and then the resolution to reclassify the position was passed.

Other resolutions for DSS dealing with the 2009 County Budget regarding administrative funds for HEAP, and inter-municipal agreements involving CWEP and domestic violence matters were passed.

A resolution pertaining to the Sheriff's Department was not discussed.

The last resolution dealt with reclassifying and creating positions at the UC Department of Health. Considerable time was spent on this matter. DCE Beckman explained that the Director must be a doctor and emphasized that the County Executive's office would not know for a couple of weeks what the salary would be: "want the best qualified at the most reasonable salary."

Next he commented on the need to restructure the UCHD. There is a need for an actual person to fill the Position of Environmental Engineer, vacant since the previous incumbent left about a year ago, whose duties during the last year has been handled by the incumbent Public Health Director in addition to his own duties.

An additional aspect to restructuring is to create uniformity among the departments. In this situation the County Executive wishes to change the administrative aide position to one of a confidential secretary to the new director, who would appoint the person, who would serve at the pleasure of the new director.

The principal concern expressed by some of the committee members was the salary to be paid to the confidential secretary (in the \$50,000 range-Personnel had indicated this was appropriate) and the need for the committee to have a job

Legislative Ways and Means Committee

description for this position. Addition concern was expressed as to how this resolution looks given the economy: county spending a lot of dollars on salaries and benefits. There is a need to review what the county is doing: cut expense, raise taxes, what to fund, not fund, where the line to be drawn is.

A brief examination of the county personnel budget indicted there were varying salaries being paid to the confidential secretaries, all with varying years of service, who are presently employed by the county.

At the vote, the resolution was defeated 4-3.

The last item of business dealt with a report by Chairman Gregorius regarding attorney salary parity. He advised the committee that the Democratic caucus had asked him to review this subject from a variety of views. He reviewed the previous work done, mentioned his check on what other attorneys make who work in the county, as well as in other counties; commented on what personnel had done, i.e. outline of what is done by functions. He noted that he doesn't support this... too many variables. Legislator Noonan emphasized that the County Executive needs to handle this matter.

Lee Cane, Observer Corp

The Committee was convened at 4:50 on March 11, 2009 by Chairman Lomita and later adjourned at 5:30. All members of the committee were present except for Legislator Cummings.

Three resolutions were presented; 2 were passed and one was to be finalized at the regular meeting of the County Legislature later in the evening.

As announced at the previous meeting of the committee, Art Smith, Commissioner of the Budget was in attendance to present the first quarterly report on the state of the county's financial affairs.

He indicated that, while the state budget had not yet been passed, it is expected that there will be cuts in the revenues for DSS, the county nursing home, and Medicaid reimbursements.

With respects to the county nursing home there will be fiscal concerns due to a delay in receiving funds from the rebasing of costs from 1983 to 2002, the trend factor will be eliminated, and the institutional pricing status for which there are no real specifics.

Additionally there are dollars expected to be received through Federal Medical Assistance Percentage (FMAP).

Money for transportation upgrades is expected under the Federal stimulus package (American Recovery and Reinvestment Act).

There is a possibility that the county may have to again contribute to the state retirement system due to the losses experienced by the state pension fund. This apparently would not occur until after 2010.

Receipts for the county sales tax (8%) for 2008 were better than what was originally budgeted for. Note: the state receives 4% of the receipts. However, the first quarter for 2009 is down, which is not unusual.

Lee Cane, Observer Corp

The Committee was convened by Chairman Alan Lomita at 4:49 on April 1, 2009 and adjourned shortly after 6.. All committee members were present. Additionally, DCE Beckman was in attendance as were other staff people and Budget Director Arthur Smith and Chairman Donaldson and Personnel Director Bartholomew.

At the outset Chairman Lomita announced that there would be a special committee meeting on April 15 at 3 PM to handle the removal of properties from the tax rolls. Further, in May there would probably be a talk from the County Executive regarding the impact of the state budget on Ulster County.

There were 31 resolutions on the agenda. The majority of the resolutions were passed. Certain ones led to extensive discussion by the committee.

Initially, the committee moved into executive session to deal with the Public Health Department.

Following re-opening the meeting to the public the highlights of some of the

Legislative Public Works and Capital Projects Committee

resolutions dealt with by the committee and passed resulted in the following: refunding a group of bonds to take advantage of the improvement in the interest rates; the agreement between the county, the UC Sheriff and the UC Sheriff's Employees Association was referred back to the Criminal Justice Committee; various bridges and roads in UC would be reconstructed; and the 2009 Budget was amended to allow for the addition of federal stimulus money.

Lee Cane, Observer Corp

The Committee was convened by Chairman Peter Loughran at 5 PM on April 6, 2009 and adjourned at 6:04.

Committee Members present: Legislators Loughran, Fabiano, Decker, Sheeley, Hochberg; absent Felicello and Roberts. Additionally, DCE Beckman, Brian Cunningham, Dennis Doyle, Cynthia Ruiz, Commissioner Sheeley and staff people were present.

There were 9 resolutions on the agenda to be dealt with.

Initially, Chairman Loughran indicated that a clause should be inserted in any resolution for capital projects which involved the purchase of materials to the effect that such should be made in America.

The resolutions presented dealt with: the upgrade at the UC Area Transit facility; the construction of a 15,000 gallon diesel fuel storage facility; purchasing 7 transit buses scheduled for replacement; the purchase of an automatic vehicle locator and scheduling system....all of which would use federal stimulus dollars and thereby save the county considerable money; further, the Kerhonkson Bridge is to be constructed and inspection of the phases it passes through while under construction; and then 3 resolutions dealing with 2 bridges in connection with the old New Paltz Road.

There was a late resolution, which was also the last one dealt with concerning the execution of a license agreement or memorandum of understanding with the NYS Division of Parole (DOP) for use of space in the former county jail,

This would enable the DOP to have a presence in UC, which hasn't been true for some time. This development was viewed as a positive one allowing those on parole to more easily maintain their required meetings with their parole officers, as well as be supervised accordingly. While the DOP officers will be on the premises on a part time basis, DOP will cover the cost of using the space.

All the resolutions were passed.

Before adjoining Chairman Loughran expressed his concerns about the price of gas, which is again rising, and that apparently there does not appear to be any way to purchase gas in bulk and store it safely. Commissioner Sheeley indicated he would look into how this might be done.

Lee Cane, Observer Corp

YARD SALE August 29 & 30



April showers might bring May flowers but August definitely brings our annual Yard Sale. You've got plenty of time to scour your attics, cellars and living rooms for those special items you'd like to donate. When you're done, go back again and pick a few of those really nice things you just hate to part with. We're looking for quality goods that will sell. YOU CAN DO IT!

Once again, Emilie Hauser has been kind enough to offer her yard for the big event. More details will be posted in future Commentators.

EARTH DAY April 22nd



Take some time to consider the earth and your impact on its health. What can *you* do! Visit the NYS DEC at <http://www.dec.ny.gov/energy/50845.html> and find out about Climate Smart Communities. Then pop over to the Federal Government for even more tips at <http://www.earthday.gov/>