

WARREN COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

COMMITTEE: MUNICIPAL SHARED SERVICES

DATE: OCTOBER 26, 2006

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

SUPERVISORS O'CONNOR
 MASON
 VANNESS
 SHEEHAN
 BELDEN
 TESSIER

COMMITTEE MEMBER ABSENT:

SUPERVISOR MERLINO

OTHERS PRESENT:

MAYOR LEROY AKINS, CITY OF GLENS FALLS
WILLIAM THOMAS, CHAIRMAN
JOAN SADY, CLERK

SUPERVISORS:

 CAIMANO
 GERAGHTY
 GIRARD
 KENNY
 STEC
 F. THOMAS

JOANN MCKINSTRY, CONFIDENTIAL SECRETARY TO THE
 COMMISSIONER OF ADMINISTRATIVE AND
 FISCAL SERVICES

JUDY VILLA-WHITE, CITY OF GLENS FALLS COMMON
 COUNCIL

SUZANNA BERND, GLENS FALLS CIVIC CENTER

MADELINE FARBMAN, *THE POST STAR*

CAMERON TESSIER, CITY OF GLENS FALLS RESIDENT

AMANDA ALLEN, LEGISLATIVE OFFICE SPECIALIST

Mr. O'Connor called the meeting of the Municipal Shared Services Committee to order at 10:48 a.m.

Mr. O'Connor welcomed Mayor LeRoy Akins, City of Glens Falls; Suzanna Bernd, Glens Falls Civic Center and Judy Villa-White, Glens Falls Common Council to the meeting. He noted that three new members had been added to the Committee and they were Mr. Belden, Mr. Tessier and Mr. Merlino.

A brief history of the Committee was provided by Mr. O'Connor at the start of the meeting. He apprised that the Committee had been formed several years earlier upon the request of a prior Mayor to combine the City of Glens Falls' dispatch service with Warren County's; in its existence, the Committee had met four times, Mr. O'Connor estimated. He added that the Committee had been inactive for some time until a new administration entered and the Committee had been reformed for dialogue and discussion purposes.

Mr. O'Connor reminded the Committee that during their last meeting he had assured the attendees that the State Legislature would pass the sports authority legislation they had initially sought. He stated that he still believed that the authority would be granted if the request had been presented; however, Mr. O'Connor noted, the issue had been voted down at the last Board of Supervisors meeting. He added that during the October 13th Board meeting, Mr. Girard had given an impassioned speech requesting the support of the Board for the City of Glens Falls and the Glens Falls Civic Center. Mr. O'Connor said that many of the Supervisors had responded positively to Mr. Girard's request and it was decided by Mr. W. Thomas that the Committee

would be expanded by three members to include representatives of both the City of Glens Falls and Northern Warren County.

Mr. O'Connor stated that in past years, during a prior administration, there had been communication problems between the City of Glens Falls Common Council and the Warren County Board of Supervisors, leaving both parties with hard feelings. He noted that under the current administration, lead by Mayor Akins, these problems had dissolved, leading to a much more productive working relationship between the two groups. Mr. O'Connor apprised that he had met with both Mr. Caimano, Budget Officer, and Mr. W. Thomas recently and it was decided that although they would love to assist the City of Glens Falls financially, funds were not available within the budget. He stated that the Committee had been called together to discuss any matter pertaining to the relationship between Warren County, the City of Glens Falls and the Town of Queensbury, keeping in mind that financial assistance was not available. Mr. O'Connor added that the primary focus of the Committee was to establish dialogue and make recommendations for assistance when available.

Mayor Akins addressed the Committee giving a brief history of the City of Glens Falls in relation to the rest of Warren County. He apprised that during the 1960's the stores located in downtown Glens Falls began to move to the suburbs of Warren County, now the Town of Queensbury, due to a perceived parking problem. Mayor Akins said that the residents and churches followed the trend, leading to a severe displacement of sales tax from the City, and the Town of Queensbury became a very large successor to the City of Glens Falls. He added that over the years the City of Glens Falls had suffered tremendous losses while the Town of Queensbury had become the developer of a plethora of hotels, motels, restaurants, shopping plazas, stores and such. In addition, he advised, commerce had been lost to the City of Saratoga which was a highly visible college town with racing and casino attractions.

Continuing, Mayor Akins apprised that in 1976 he was employed by Warren County as the Public Information Officer/Tourism Developer where he worked in affiliation with the I Love NY campaign to bring tourism to the area. He noted that he had worked with the Mayor at that time to develop an authority for the Glens Falls Civic Center, which was constructed in 1979. Once completed, Mayor Akins stated, Mayor Bartholomew, in conjunction with Ned Harkness, Civic Center Director, developed ties with a hockey team, and the Adirondack Red Wings were brought to the Civic Center. The City of Glens Falls once again became a hot spot in northern New York, Mayor Akins said.

Mayor Akins advised that over the years the use of the Glens Falls Civic Center had declined due to increased costs and the development of the larger Knickerbocker Arena (now the Pepsi Arena) in Albany. The decline of the Civic Center coupled with the migration of local businesses from the area had caused economic distress to the City of Glens Falls, he stated.

Mayor Akins said that the Civic Center, which was currently under new directorship, was being used as efficiently as possible to increase revenues and new efforts for growth were being made. He added that they had reached out to the tourism industry to bring new attractions to the Civic Center and success was achieved in association with Pathway Tours. Mayor Akins said that one year ago, in May of 2005, 110 motorcoaches were brought in for the two day Daniel O'Donnell and Jim Nabors Concert event. In addition to advertising the concerts, Pathway Tours had

promoted the Civic Center and Warren County together, he added. However, Mayor Akins noted, the majority of the 6,000 attendees of the O'Donnell/Nabors event did not sleep, eat or entertain themselves in the City of Glens Falls, and that commerce was lost to businesses in the surrounding areas. In essence, Mayor Akins said, the Civic Center had been developed as a tool to discover regional economic activity and there was a great opportunity to succeed in that area.

A new roof, restrooms and other renovations had been made to the Civic Center resulting in debt in the neighborhood of \$2 million, Mayor Akins estimated; he added that because there was currently no hockey team in residence \$80,000 per year in estimated revenues were lost. Mayor Akins advised that in addition, the East Field Stadium required approximately \$700,000 in renovations. He added that the Stadium was used regionally by the baseball and football teams of both ACC (Adirondack Community College) and Glens Falls High School, as well as other regional groups.

Mayor Akins apprised that great plans had been made to further cultivate the City of Glens Falls. He said that several new condominium plans had been proposed for the City and Mayor Akins estimated that businesses would return to the City. In order to develop a feasibility study, Mayor Akins advised that the City of Glens Falls, in conjunction with Warren County, had applied for a New York State grant through the Warren County Planning Department.

Because the Civic Center Authority would expire in 2008, and the Board of Supervisors had declined the opportunity to seek an authority, Mayor Akins suggested that a regional authority be requested to include Warren, Washington and Northern Saratoga Counties. He said that this would encourage the three Counties to work together to attract larger conventions and meetings by advertising the area as an entertainment destination, much like what was done in Branson, Missouri. He added that Branson was only a community of 7,500 individuals but boasted 10,000 more theater seats than New York City, with all of Broadway included. Though small, the city drew a large volume of visitors each year, Mayor Akins said, and those were the desired results for this area.

Mayor Akins suggested that large sporting events, such as the Empire State Games and the Special Olympics, could also be targeted for placement at the Glens Falls Civic Center if the location were cultivated to meet the needs of those events. He added that although they were grateful for the monies given by Warren County each year, 2% of the sales tax and the \$100,000 provided each year did not yield the same buying power as when the funds were originally committed. Mayor Akins cited that through the Civic Center, a tremendous opportunity existed to increase attraction and draw a larger number of visitors to the area, thereby increasing the occupancy tax and revenues received.

Mr. Kenny said that he supported the idea of a regional authority; however, he thought that it would be difficult to obtain the support of Saratoga and Washington Counties. Although the entire region would benefit from a regional authority, he noted, it would be difficult to obtain funding because the other Counties were experiencing budget constraints, just as Warren County was. Mr. Kenny thought that the Board should support the development in any way possible and that efforts should begin to secure the regional authority prior to 2008 when the Civic Center's authority expired. He added that the number of visitors to Warren County had increased and could be proven by the amount of occupancy tax received. Mr. Kenny cited that in the first year

of collection the tax had totaled \$2.5 million and had increased to \$2.8 million in the second year; Mr. Kenny estimated that the occupancy tax would exceed \$3 million in its third year.

Mr. F. Thomas left the meeting at 11:16 a.m.

Mayor Akins stated that events and attractions needed to be planned for the shoulder seasons when the visitation was at its lowest and Mr. Kenny agreed. Mr. Kenny advised that during the Tourism Committee meeting held earlier in the week, information was distributed that reflected the flow of visitors to Warren County as opposed to other Counties of New York State. He added that examples of events held in surrounding Counties intended to boost tourism were also disclosed; Mr. Kenny noted that the Civic Center may be a useful tool in attracting such events to the area. Mayor Akins stated that because the Civic Center had never been aggressively marketed, it had not been given the opportunity to reach its full potential as a venue. He added that a strong sales team needed to be developed to market to new groups and attract them to the area.

Mr. Caimano said that he appreciated Mayor Akins vision and especially his use of Branson, Missouri as a comparison. He suggested that if a regional authority were realistic, the group needed to reach out to Senator Little and Assemblywoman Sayward for their assistance. Mr. Caimano added that they could not force Saratoga or Washington County into supporting a regional authority; however, with the assistance of Senator Little and Assemblywoman Sayward the Counties might be more easily persuaded. Mr. Kenny stated that there may be grant funds available in support of their plan and Mr. Caimano said that if there were Senator Little would know of the availability.

Cameron Tessier, resident of the City of Glens Falls, asked for clarification on the amount of funding the City received from Warren County. Mr. Caimano responded, stating that the City of Glens Falls received 2% of sales tax and Mr. Kenny added that they received a minimum of \$30,000 from the occupancy tax revenues generated in the City of Glens Falls.

Mayor Akins noted that the City of Glens Falls had requested \$4,500 to assist with the additional costs of the Daniel O'Donnell concert in May of 2006, and the Board had agreed. He added that because the number of attendees were not as great as anticipated, the funds were not used and had been returned to Warren County.

Mr. Caimano stated that if a regional authority were truly desired, the Supervisors of the Towns of Moreau, Fort Edward and Kingsbury should be invited to the next Committee meeting in addition to Senator Little and Assemblywoman Sayward.

General discussion ensued.

Mr. Belden asked Mayor Akins if the City had appointed a tourism representative and he replied affirmatively. Mayor Akins noted that the representative had recently started meeting with members of the motor coach industry and she would be attending events similar to those attended by Pam Morin, Group Tour/Convention Promoter. Mr. Caimano stated that the City's representative had an open invitation to attend any Tourism Committee meetings and also to attend any conventions in which Ms. Morin would be participating.

Mr. Mason suggested that there may be some positions or departments that could be combined

with those of Warren County to save costs for the City of Glens Falls. Mayor Akins stated that the financial support and maintenance of the East Field Stadium might be responsibilities that could be transferred to Warren County. He said that because the Stadium was used regionally it could feasibly be remanded to the County.

Mr. W. Thomas said that these were the types of issues to be discussed further by the Committee. He noted that the East Field Stadium was a treasure to all residents of Warren County, as well as the Civic Center.

Mayor Akins advised that, as in Cooperstown, a program could be developed to offer a baseball camp at the East Field Stadium. He noted that several major league baseball players had begun their careers in the area. Mr. Belden suggested that the East Field Stadium could be used as a project to launch the grant process with Senator Little. Mr. VanNess stated that there was a \$400,000 New York State grant available and the East Field Stadium rehabilitation seemed to be a wonderful project to apply the grant to.

Discussion ensued.

Mr. Girard thanked the Committee for their participation and noted that although the timeliness of the meeting was not good, in budget terms, the discussion was very helpful. He noted that although the rehabilitation of the East Field Stadium was needed and would boost visits for the seasons it was used, the Civic Center could be used year-round. In terms of economics, Mr. Girard stated that the grant funds might be better used to assist in boosting attendance at the Civic Center as a year-round attraction. Mr. Girard added that the East Field Stadium was a great responsibility, the upkeep of which was too financially draining for the City of Glens Falls to maintain. He said that the Stadium could be better maintained by Warren County, and he added that he thought Senator Little could do more to obtain funding for the rehabilitation project if Warren County owned the Stadium.

Mr. Caimano reminded the Committee that 2% of the sales tax was given to the City of Glens Falls annually. He said that if they could reach an agreement to reduce the funds given to the City, Warren County could feasibly assume the financial burden of East Field Stadium without increasing the current budget.

Mr. Tessier stated that he was always in support of Warren County assuming the responsibilities of East Field Stadium, however, when the attempt was made in prior years the request was denied by the City of Glens Falls Common Council.

Discussion ensued.

Mr. VanNess expressed that although the members of the Common Council had changed, hard feelings had been caused between the parties due to old issues. He stated that the groups needed to work out these issues and develop a smoother working relationship for the best interest of both parties. Mr. VanNess noted that the Civic Center currently had a parking issue which he felt could be cured by the construction of a parking garage. Mayor Akins replied that there was a development proposed for parking and a bridge for visitors to reach the Civic Center safely.

Mr. Belden stated that he felt the Committee was on the right track and he suggested that they meet every other month to stay up to date on current issues.

Mr. Belden left the meeting at 11:48 a.m.

Mr. Caimano noted that the American Yankee Association would be holding their convention here in the summer of 2007 and would be staying at the Queensbury Hotel in the City of Glens Falls. He advised that he had attended a meeting that morning with the group and found that they were very concerned about the convention as all of their calls to the Queensbury Hotel had gone unanswered. Mr. Caimano asked Mayor Akins if he could assist in the matter and the Mayor said that he would.

Mr. Sheehan stated that the efforts of the current Mayor and Common Council were appreciated and he felt that the past practices should be forgotten as they now had a good basis to grow from. He noted that they needed to have some indication of what the Common Council was requesting of Warren County prior to meeting with Senator Little and Assemblywoman Sayward. Mr. O'Connor agreed that the Committee needed to move forward with current business and not dwell on the unfavorable issues of the past.

Mr. Stec apprised that he valued the working relationship that he had developed with Mayor Akins and the Common Council, as well as the Supervisors of Glens Falls. He added that what could be done for the City's venues was more appropriate at the County level and it was fair to say that the Civic Center contributed to the economic well being of Warren County. Mr. Stec noted that it was important to remember that the Town of Queensbury was not the only entity to benefit from the migration of businesses from the City of Glens Falls as they were required to split sales tax with every town in Warren County based on assessed values. Mr. Stec stated that he was in favor of supporting the Civic Center authority if the appropriations were made on a County-wide basis through use of the occupancy tax. He said that he was concerned about the implementation of an authority depending on the lines used. For instance, Mr. Stec stated, it would not be fair to require the Town of Queensbury to divide the sales tax received with the other Towns of Warren County if those Towns were not to be included in the authority and contributing funds.

Although many prior projects had hinged on control issues in the past, Mr. Stec advised that in his dealings with Mayor Akins and the City of Glens Falls Common Council, he was given every indication that they wished to work with Warren County in the future. Mr. Stec added that he was a proponent of using occupancy tax revenue as a funding mechanism for the Civic Center.

Mr. Caimano stated that the bed tax had already been used, and furthermore the funds could not be used to make building improvements in any regard.

Mr. W. Thomas suggested that Senator Little and Assemblywoman Sayward be contacted to schedule a meeting with the Committee in November. Mayor Akins advised that he would work with Mr. W. Thomas to contact the appropriate parties to invite them to meet with the Committee. Mr. VanNess stated that the Common Council should be contacted and a plan devised to determine for what purpose funding would be requested, and Mr. W. Thomas advised that Senator Little would have a determination in mind.

Mr. Geraghty stated that if the City of Glens Falls could show better results with respect to increased tourism, it would be easier to justify the use of bed tax monies to promote events at the Civic Center.

Discussion ensued.

Ms. Villa-White thanked the Committee for meeting and allowing her to attend. Ms. Bernd stated that the Civic Center had held two sold out events in the past year, a pre-season River Rats hockey game and a Godsmack concert. She added that there was a concert scheduled for the night before Thanksgiving which she thought would likely sell out and that there were several events scheduled in which high attendance was anticipated.

As there was no further business to come before the Municipal Shared Services Committee, on motion made by Mr. VanNess and seconded by Mr. Sheehan, Mr. O'Connor adjourned the meeting at 12:03 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,
Amanda Allen, Legislative Office Specialist