

WARREN COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

COMMITTEE: HUMAN SERVICES

DATE: FEBRUARY 6, 2012

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

SUPERVISORS STRAINER
GIRARD
FRASIER
SOKOL
WOOD
VANSELOW

OTHERS PRESENT:

CHRISTIE SABO, DIRECTOR, OFFICE FOR THE AGING
DANIEL G. STEC, CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD
PAUL DUSEK, COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR
JOAN SADY, CLERK OF THE BOARD
KEVIN GERAGHTY, BUDGET OFFICER
SUPERVISOR CONOVER
SUPERVISOR MASON

COMMITTEE MEMBER ABSENT:

SUPERVISOR LOEB

SUPERVISOR MERLINO
SUPERVISOR TAYLOR
SUPERVISOR THOMAS
DEANNA PARK, DIRECTOR, COUNTRYSIDE ADULT HOME
DON LEHMAN, *THE POST STAR*
PLEASE SEE ATTACHED SIGN IN SHEET FOR ALL OTHERS PRESENT
CHARLENE DiRESTA, SR. LEGISLATIVE OFFICE SPECIALIST

Mr. Strainer called the meeting of the Human Services Committee to order at 9:31 a.m.

Motion was made by Mrs. Wood, seconded by Mr. Girard and carried unanimously to approve the minutes of the previous Committee meeting, subject to correction by the Clerk of the Board.

Privilege of the floor was extended to Christie Sabo, Director of the Office for the Aging (OFA), who distributed an informational sheet listing the actual expenses for The Cedars mealsite, as well as an amended proposal for reorganization of the OFA Nutrition Program. Copies of this information is e agenda to the Committee members; *a copy of the agenda is on file with the minutes.*

Mrs. Sabo announced that the meeting was being held today to discuss the mealsite reorganization plan, said plan included the centralizing of the kitchens to the Warrensburg site. She advised that she was still awaiting approval from the New York State Department of Health (NYS DOH) to implement the relocation of the Warrensburg mealsite to the Countryside Adult Home. Mrs. Sabo advised that she and Deanna Park, Director of Countryside Adult Home, would be meeting with the Department of Health on February 8, 2012 and they would also discuss whether or not the Department of Health would approve a plan to move all of the cooking to the Warrensburg site. She noted that she had been asked by some of the supervisors to provide a breakdown of expenses by meal site for the Committee members review.

Mrs. Sabo explained that the funding for the Nutrition Program was provided through both state and federal dollars and they are reimbursed at different rates. Mrs. Sabo noted that the SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Appropriation Program) was reimbursed at 100% through state funds. Currently, she said, the Bolton and Johnsbury sites, as well as some of the routes for the Glens Falls site were reimbursed through SNAP. However, Mrs. Sabo explained, if expenses were taken away from the Bolton and Johnsbury sites, those expenses could be appropriated to other Warren County sites; therefore, a savings could be realized if other sites were moved into those budget lines. Mrs. Sabo noted the OFA also had a NSIP (Nutrition Services Incentive Plan), which provided 100% reimbursement for food only for Warrensburg, Bolton, Chestertown, Luzerne, Johnsbury, The Cedars

and all of the Hamilton County sites. Lastly, she said, they received Federal reimbursement for congregate or home delivered meals at approximately 18% for one and 17% for the other. In addition, Mrs. Sabo noted, there were meal contributions received, as well, which offset total expenses.

Because each of the sites prepares a different number of meals, Mrs. Sabo said she had included the number of meals and the cost per meal and a very approximate cost to the County. She advised this was an approximation based on the different funding streams and rates of reimbursement.

Chairman Stec entered the meeting 9:36 a.m.

Continuing with review of the plan to centralize kitchen expenses, Mrs. Sabo noted the only savings at this time would be in staffing as she left the lease and food supply costs the same in the 2012 budget. When looking at the different scenarios, Mrs. Sabo explained that they did not want to close any sites, decrease the number of meals served or have waiting lists. Therefore, she added, by combining to one kitchen, they could reduce staff and yet still prepare all the meals in the same manner, with the exception of on site preparation. Under this plan, Mrs. Sabo said she had budgeted for and anticipated increased mileage costs with this plan and purchasing better containers to transport the meals. Concluding, Mrs. Sabo said, this proposal was contingent on approval from the Department of Health to move the mealsite to Countryside.

Mr. Dusek noted that the estimated savings in the original reorganization plan were about \$129,000 per year and he asked if that figure was still accurate and Mrs. Sabo responded that she anticipated the savings would be a little lower than that after reimbursement.

Mr. Dusek advised that there had been considerable concern raised about not preparing meals at the mealsites, leading them to explore the possibility of reducing staff to a level that would still allow the meals to be prepared at the sites.

Mrs. Sabo explained that she had considered reducing the budget lines for substitutes and per diem workers, as well as reducing the hours for staff to twenty hours and to fifteen hours, respectively. She said she estimated savings by reducing to twenty hours of \$33,567 and by reducing to fifteen hours would be a savings of \$50,350. Mrs. Sabo said she also considered capping the mealsite reimbursements and estimated an annual savings of \$8,800 if they capped the leases at \$8,000 per location. She noted if they capped the lease amount at \$6,000, the annual savings would be approximately \$17,000. Mrs. Sabo said this would require renegotiating leases with some of the towns and/or churches.

Mr. Dusek summarized that by capping leases and reducing staff hours, the annual savings would be approximately \$67,000. However, he added, before proceeding with further review, he would like some guidance from the committee. Mr. Dusek reminded the Committee that the original proposal was to consolidate the meal preparation and there had been considerable concern with regard to not preparing the meals at the various sites. As a result, there was an alternate approach which Mrs. Sabo had just outlined, which would yield considerable savings, as well.

With regard to capping leases, Mrs. Sabo advised that The Cedars lease, which was currently \$10,300 per year and had just been renegotiated. She noted she would be opposed to capping that lease because they currently absorbed a lot of the costs of the program and while The Cedars represented the third highest lease cost, they prepared in excess of 80,000 meals.

Mr. Girard asked for clarification on the intent of capping lease payments and Mrs. Sabo explained that they would request that the various lease holders consider decreasing the terms of the lease to not to exceed \$8,000.

Mr. Girard asked if Mrs. Sabo felt this was feasible and what the success rate might be and she responded that for the most part, it wouldn't be a huge dollar amount and for one church, it would be about \$2,000, but a better alternative than moving the site.

Mr. Girard asked if this was the leverage option to cap the lease at a reduced amount as opposed to moving the meal site to a central location. Mrs. Sabo said that she would hope the lease amounts would decrease anyway if the food wasn't actually being prepared there. While polling the various AAA sites across the state, Mrs. Sabo noted that very few paid any type of lease to the churches or the towns as most of the spaces were donated.

Mr. Girard said that while he was aware that Mrs. Sabo had no control over the approval process with the Department of Health, he wondered if the other cost and operational issues had been resolved and Mrs. Sabo said she had spoken with Julie Montero, Fiscal Manager for the Department of Social Services, who had confirmed with their accountant at the State that he did not anticipate any problems with the reimbursement. Mrs. Sabo said they would do all of the ordering through Countryside and they would track the expenses to make certain it was not costing Countryside any more to have the meal site there and it would be a flat rate reimbursement to them. She said she anticipated some savings in volume discounts due to the increase in food they would be ordering.

Mr. Girard asked about the cash investment in transporting the meals to the sites in bulk and Mrs. Sabo responded that she had budgeted an additional \$15,000 for the coolers and equipment and \$10,000 for additional mileage.

Mr. Girard queried as to the status of the Department of Health approval and Mrs. Sabo said they were waiting on the MOU (Memorandum of Understanding), which she had sent in and they had a meeting set up for February 8th. She noted she did not know how long the approval process would take, but had used six months as a worst case scenario.

Mr. Strainer said that one of the biggest concerns expressed to him was the retention of the congregate sites and he asked for confirmation that the food would be delivered to the sites and people could still gather and eat the meals there if they chose to and Mrs. Sabo responded affirmatively.

Mr. Strainer asked what the procedure was if the staff person was ill and there is no one there to take their place and Mrs. Sabo noted that they have per diem substitutes.

One of the issues that arose, Mr. Strainer noted, was the Warrensburg meal site was in need of extensive repairs and it had been very difficult to locate another site in Warrensburg and Countryside was about the only alternative and seemed to be a good fit. He said one of the concerns he had heard was that the residents of Countryside had their meals at a specific time and that the meal site might infringe on that and he wondered if that had been addressed. Ms. Park responded that would not be an issue and that they planned to serve the residents first and then serve the meal site participants.

Mr. Strainer asked how many meals they planned to prepare per day at Countryside and Mrs. Sabo said she estimated about two hundred. Mr. Strainer asked where the meals for the Luzerne Meal

Site would be prepared and Mrs. Sabo responded at The Cedars. However, she noted, Luzerne was a more difficult move because they are so far away and didn't easily go to either location. She added that due to the increase in numbers experienced since their move from the fire house to the town hall, the town had incorporated full-time senior coordinator. Mrs. Sabo reported that from January 2011 to January 2012, Lake Luzerne had an increase of 200 participants for the month.

Mr. Vanselow asked what the current occupancy was at Countryside and Ms. Park responded they were currently at forty residents. He asked if the kitchen facilities at Countryside were capable of preparing an additional two hundred mid- day meals. Ms. Park said it was her recommendation that they implement the Warrensburg Meal Site initially and bring the other sites in gradually to make certain they could adequately produce an extra two hundred meals per day.

Mr. Vanselow asked what the time frame was for phasing this plan in and Ms. Park said it depended on the Department of Health. Mr. Vanselow asked how long they anticipated the trial of the Warrensburg Meal Site would take before adding another location and Ms. Park said she anticipated at least a one month trial, possibly two, so that they could iron out any problems that may arise.

Mr. Strainer asked if they had addressed transporting the Warrensburg residents to the Meal Sites and Mrs. Sabo apprised that Ms. Park had agreed to let them use the Countryside van to transport people from a centralized location to Countryside. Mr. Strainer noted there was no other feasible option for relocating the Warrensburg Meal Site; however, he added, there had been discussions regarding keeping the congregate sites open and just trying the Warrensburg site for the time being.

Mr. Conover said there was merit in the proposal to move the Warrensburg Meal Site to Countryside and maintaining the other sites as they are presently constituted, which would avoid a number of the concerns that had been raised. He said when you looked at the net costs of the County for these sites, it was a little more than \$200,000 for five sites. He noted there might be ways to achieve other economies within the programs at the existing sites, whether in efficiencies with hours of staff, or perhaps the Towns could assist in some fashion. Mr. Conover said that Supervisor Monroe was unable to attend the meeting today, but he knew that he would like to see the Chestertown Meal Site continue to prepare the meals in the same way. Mr. Conover further noted that given the reimbursement data provided by Mrs. Sabo, the Bolton Meal Site was really a zero cost. Concluding, Mr. Conover said his recommendation to the Committee was to maintain all meal sites as they currently operated and move the Warrensburg meal site to Countryside.

Mr. Strainer asked how many people attended the Bolton Meal Site on an average day and Mr. Conover responded anywhere from a handful to thirty or forty, depending on the meal being served and the weather.

Mr. Strainer reiterated that the intention was never to compromise the meals for the seniors; however, he added, Mrs. Sabo was given direction to reduce her budget and in looking at that, there were few options, other than to reduce employees at the congregate sites, which was not popular with anyone.

Mr. Merlino said that he agreed with Mr. Conover and noted he would continue to fight to retain the operations as they currently are at the meal site in Lake Luzerne. He suggested they consider a part-time person because there are many occasions where a full-time person was not needed and there would be more flexibility with a part-time person. Mr. Merlino said that in talking with the seniors in his town, he had learned that they enjoyed being able to smell the food cooking and the social interaction. He reported that the meal site in Luzerne was growing and it was important to him

that they continued to offer the option to cook the food on-site; he added that there were too many things that could interfere with the meals being delivered to the sites, such as weather conditions, vehicle malfunctions, etc.

Mr. Strainer asked if Messrs. Conover and Merlino were willing to assume some of the salary costs for the meal site employees and Mr. Conover replied that Bolton did not have a municipal building that they operated their meal site out of so they were in a different situation. However, he added, he did not know how many hours were required for the second person, but felt it may be possible to create some efficiencies there. He said he would also discuss the lease arrangement with representatives of the Episcopal Church and perhaps the town could assist with trash removal, etc.

A discussion followed regarding the variables with the different meal sites as some were located in municipal buildings, some were leased, etc., and Mrs. Sabo noted there was really not a "one size fits all" scenario for any of the congregate meal sites.

Mr. Dusek reported that in putting the 2012 Budget together, the priority was to get the tax rate as close to zero as possible and to stay within the 2% property tax cap. He noted the Budget included funding for the meal sites as is through April and there are funds in the Contingent Fund to continue to support the sites. In working with Mrs. Sabo and listening to the discussion today, Mr. Dusek said he believed there were some real possibilities to minimize labor and cut costs at some of the meal sites.

Mr. Dusek recommended that a good interim approach would be to relocate the Warrensburg Meal Site to Countryside and subsequently meet with town representatives for the various meal sites and perform an individual analysis and consider reducing staff hours, or renegotiate leases, and determine where they were with regard to costs in the next budget cycle.

Mr. Strainer said he would like to thank Mrs. Sabo for bringing in a lower budget every year since he had been Chairman of the Human Services Committee.

Mr. Girard said he agreed with Mr. Dusek with regard to getting the Warrensburg site up and running, noting there was a learning curve before adding other facilities and asked for confirmation that all other meal sites in Bolton, Chestertown, Johnsburg, and Luzerne would stay independent for the time being and revisit the issue in the next budget. Mr. Strainer agreed and said that he hoped the congregate sites would be able to implement some cost saving measures.

A motion was made by Mr. Girard and seconded by Mrs. Wood to approve the relocation of the Warrensburg Meal Site to Countryside, pending approval by the New York State Department of Health.

Mr. Vanselow asked Ms. Park if she was completely comfortable assuming this responsibility and if she felt the residents would be pleased and Ms. Park responded affirmatively to both questions.

Mr. Strainer called the question and the motion was carried unanimously to approve the relocation the Warrensburg Meal Site to Countryside, pending approval of the New York State Department of Health. The necessary resolution was authorized for the February 17th Board Meeting.

Mr. Strainer summarized that the other meal sites would continue to operate as they were currently, while savings options were researched. He noted that on occasion he delivered meals for The Cedars and if the other supervisors had not visited the meal sites, they really should.

A discussion ensued regarding the number of attendees at the various sites, the number of home delivered meals, and the cost per meal for per site.

Mr. Dusek recommended that he, along with Mrs. Sabo and the Budget Officer, meet with the respective town supervisors at the individual meal sites, compile information and report back to the committee.

Linda Bennett, a resident of Bolton Landing, said that a lot of her questions were answered today and speaking as a blue collar worker, she understood trying to keep costs down, but she always wondered why it was easier to get rid of a "janitor" than it is a "teacher". The employees at the meal sites are paid approximately \$11.00 an hour with no benefits and she stated she thought it would be difficult to find the appropriate person willing to work only three or four hours a day. Concluding, she said, it was sad that it was usually services to the elderly that were the first to get cut.

Mr. Strainer said that while he agreed with Mrs. Bennett's comments, one of the problems was that the meal site programs were not mandated, and all non-mandated programs had to be reviewed and considered for possible cuts and improvement in efficiencies.

Lorraine Lafave, a resident of Bolton Landing said that when this first came out they were very upset that the County would even consider cutting meal sites as a way to save money. She noted the elderly were the most vulnerable residents of our society and compared having a parent eat a meal from a tin container as compared to going to a meal site and having dinner served with dignity on a plate and have the enjoyment of interacting with other community members. Mrs. Lafave said the demographics in Warren County were changing and the number of seniors was increasing and that a decision like this should not be made based on short term goals.

There being no further business to come before the Human Services Committee, on motion by Mr. Girard and seconded by Mr. Sokol, Mr. Strainer adjourned the meeting at 10:21 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Joan Sady
Clerk of the Board