

FROM THE CHAIR...

A Monthly Roundup of News from the Chair of the Sullivan County Legislature

A MOMENT TO MOVE FORWARD

I was deeply gratified to welcome Fallsburg Police Chief Simmie Williams to our June 16 Facebook Town Hall, and I was just as deeply moved by his wise, caring words. Fair or not, Simmie has always had to choose his words carefully, having been held to a higher standard for his entire life - by his family, who raised him to do right; by his community, whom he serves as chief of law enforcement; and by society, which continues to view African-Americans, particularly black men, differently than others. I was fortunate to be raised in the most diverse corner of America - the Bronx. I'm also fortunate to have sent my kids to a diverse school district.

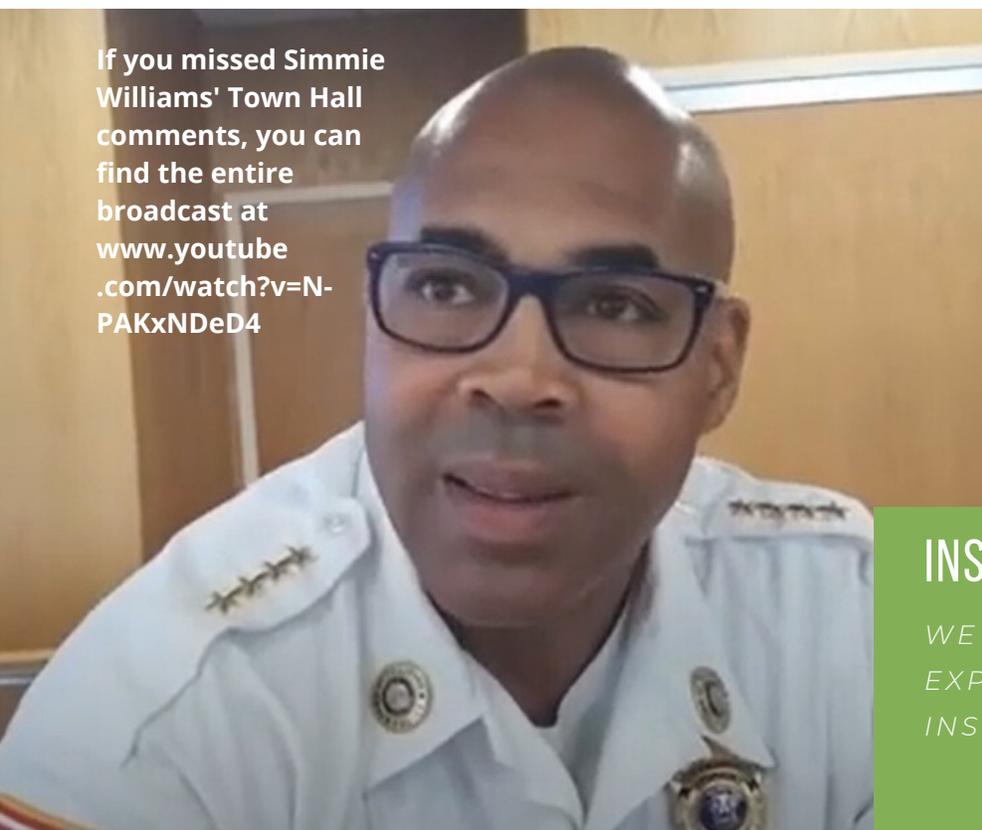
BY ROBERT A. DOHERTY, CHAIRMAN, SULLIVAN COUNTY LEGISLATURE

But our diversity isn't always celebrated, & racism has indeed reared its ugly head here more times than any of us know. I get it: words from a white, Republican



man aren't necessarily desired or appreciated right now. But it is important for me, as your Legislature Chairman, to say that I stand with those who are calling for a different, better way of interacting with one another. I stand with those who seek to look beyond skin color & identity politics and instead judge each other on what we say and how we act. I stand with those who know most of our police are good. I stand with those who look to eradicate racism without losing our collective memory of it. And I stand with Simmie Williams, indeed, all those who share his commitment to do the right thing.

If you missed Simmie Williams' Town Hall comments, you can find the entire broadcast at www.youtube.com/watch?v=N-PAKxNDeD4



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TAKING CARE - EVEN IN OUR JAIL

Our Sheriff's Office and the State were recently slapped with an unfounded lawsuit by the New York Civil Liberties Union (NYCLU). It was an opportunistic gambit to embarrass us.

It failed.

As NYS Supreme Court Judge Stephan Schick noted, the case had no merit, and our new County Attorney Mike McGuire didn't even have to argue our side of it in order to get it dismissed in late June.

The legal team for five of our inmates claimed we had disregarded the health and safety of those inmates during their stay in our old Jail in Monticello (they're now in a brand new Jail with far more modern facilities).

The problem with NYCLU's case was that it was based on allegations, not fact.

Fact is, we were (and are) taking very good care of our inmates and staff at the Jail, with masks and social distancing mandated, daily temperature checks, and regular visits from on-site medical personnel.

This was one of our new County Attorney Mike McGuire's first big challenges, and he proved to me exactly why we needed to hire him. He will continue to represent us very well in the years to come.



Our new Jail off Route 17's Exit 104 in Monticello not only has the latest equipment and most humane conditions but is now also outfitted with the necessary signage to ensure compliance with COVID-19 guidelines.

We're still working

Though COVID-19 has knocked us around a bit, Sullivan County government continues working for you, the taxpayer. Here are a few ways how:

- Our Public Works crews are actively milling and paving County roads near Cohecton, Mountindale, Yulan, Youngsville, White Sulphur Springs, Liberty and Livingston Manor
- Our public-serving offices, like Aging and Veterans, continue not only to take appointments but directly outreach to citizens
- Our Care Center is closed to visitation but remains staffed and operating 24/7
- Our Sheriff's Office and 911 Center haven't stopped taking calls
- And I'm particularly proud to note that we have busy employees who nevertheless are stepping up to help other departments as needed!

CORONAVIRUS: WHERE WE'RE AT NOW

You've probably been following the numbers like I have. Sullivan County is way down from the hundreds of active COVID-19 cases we faced as April turned to May.

As of the date of this writing, June 29, we're down to just 10 active cases (see our dashboard below), with no one in the hospital because of coronavirus.

That's really good news, not just for our health but for our economy, as we are definitely still in recovery mode.

By the time you read this, we may be in Phase 4 of the NY Forward Plan, but that doesn't mean we're fully reopened. There will be limitations on gatherings for weeks to come, perhaps months, and a lot of us are wondering just what school will look like when September arrives.

Plus, there's always the risk that a second wave will sweep across us, with the attendant reversal in phases. We literally cannot afford that, in health or finances.

I've entrusted the guardianship of our health

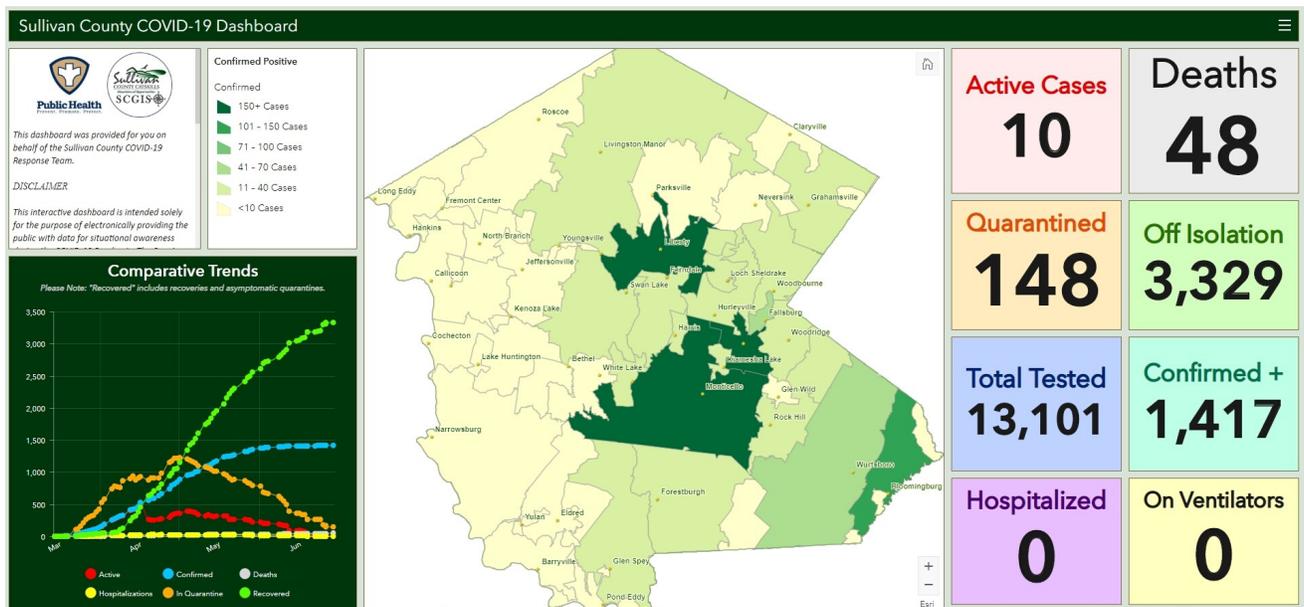


to our Public Health Services Department. That's their area of expertise. Mine happens to be in running successful businesses, so myself and my colleagues have been focused on this County's financial recovery.

As you've probably heard, our current fiscal situation isn't good - it's lousy. And I'm not gonna lie to you: climbing out of the hole COVID put us in will take a good year or more. It will take more cuts in programs and services, possibly more in personnel, too. We're not sure yet, but I can promise you we're taking a very close, very hard look at every option we have. We owe that to taxpayers, who have had to do the same with their households.

For now, let's celebrate our improving numbers and thank the folks who made that happen. We couldn't have gotten this far without them!

(Dashboard below available at www.sullivanyny.us.)



WELCOME BACK... TO THE NEW NORMAL

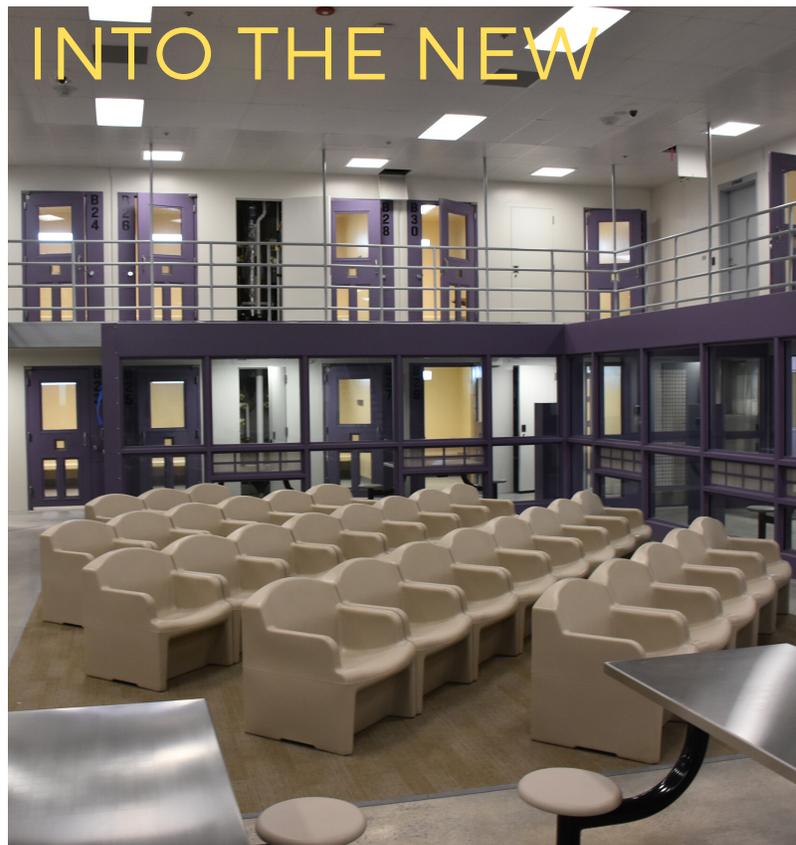
County government is open again, but it's not business as usual. All of us (except people like me, who have a lung condition) are wearing masks and social distancing. I've been eager to welcome people back to our offices and meetings, but expect a few changes. Take a look at the picture at right. Those are chairs that used to be next to each other, now spaced six feet apart. And if you want to sit in one of them, you'll need to be in the first group of people who show up, as no more than 25 members of the public can be in attendance. But we are live-streaming every meeting now, so tune in to <http://sullivancountyny.iqm2.com/Citizens/Default.aspx> to watch!



OUT OF THE OLD, INTO THE NEW



Without warning (by design, for everyone's safety) on June 5, our Sheriff's Office scooped up the staff and inmates of our Jail - nearly 200 people in all - and transferred them from the decrepit place we'd occupied for the past 111 years to our new facility on the other side of Monticello. Expertly handled, it's changed a lot for the better.



HOW TO GET IN TOUCH

- **Looking for the Chairman?**
845-807-0435 or
Robert.Doherty@co.sullivan.ny.us
- **General question? 845-794-3000**
- **Need a specific name or number?**
www.sullivanny.us/countydirectory



Our Town Halls are changing - tune in!

I launched our Facebook Live Town Halls way back in March, as the COVID-19 pandemic roared into New York State. Since then, we've averaged twice-a-week broadcasts that have brought you the latest, most interesting info on coronavirus, with a huge range of local and State-level guest presenters.

Considering how well that's worked, it's time to broaden the scope to topics beyond COVID-19. There's a lot going on in County government, and there's a lot of good people doing good things that I want to highlight.

So even once we reach the State-designated Phase 4 of reopening, you can expect the Town Halls to continue, bringing you a behind-the-scenes look at how your tax dollars are spent. Tune in every Monday and Thursday at 1 p.m. to www.facebook.com/SullivanCountyGov for the newest Town Halls. And if you missed any, check out the archive at www.sullivanny.us/departments/publichealth/coronavirus.

WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO

While Legislature meetings are viewable online, not everyone has the time or ability. So let me fill you in on our latest activities...

- **We authorized** a reorganization of County departments that County Manager Josh Potosek estimates will save well over \$800,000.
- **We issued** a call for unity, justice, action and constructive dialogue in the wake of George Floyd's tragic but galvanizing death in Minnesota.
- **We thanked** the Sullivan County Sheriff's Office for the long-awaited and very smooth transfer of inmates and staff to the new Jail, finally abandoning the 111-year-old Jail behind the Courthouse, along with the move of the Patrol and Civil divisions from the much older Bushnell Building to our new complex along Route 17's Exit 104.
- **We agreed** to join those County employees who are taking a 4% pay cut for the rest of the year, in order to help balance the County's budget amidst the destabilizing effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has dropped our sales tax revenues by 30-60%.