

FROM THE CHAIR...

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

WE'RE GETTING THINGS DONE

That's what you elected us to do, isn't it?
Get things done.

I've rocked the boat ever since taking office over a year ago, but it's all been about making positive, lasting change for taxpayers.

Sure, you've heard that before from a hundred politicians. But this time is different, and this Legislature is churning out example after example. In the last year, we've:

- Successfully adjusted to the fiscal realities of the pandemic
- Authorized an EMS study to provide a stronger, more sustainable EMS system
- Developed a shovel-ready industrial park behind the former Apollo Plaza in Monticello
- Committed funding to two major tourism projects in Callicoon
- Held on to the Discretionary Contracts Program and the \$200,000+ it spreads to nonprofits throughout the County

In just the last few weeks, we've:

- Entered the final phase of negotiations with Infinite Care to assume management of our Care Center at Sunset Lake, to better serve taxpayers, employees and those who use the facility
- Renegotiated the Sullivan County Visitors Association contract to improve our tourism reach and activities
- Issued a request for proposals from companies interested in operating our broadband wireless program, which promises to transform this County
- Implemented a new ethics law and a new room tax law
- Reconfigured the Human Rights Commission and welcomed a new executive director, after virtually no activity for a year and a half

And we've got more coming:

- A major composting initiative, aimed at better

**BY ROBERT A. DOHERTY,
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managing our waste

- Reorienting our Industrial Development Agency with new members and leadership
- Introducing a new approach to tourism infrastructure and events
- Likely eliminating the 4% Energy Tax, as we don't need it anymore

Leadership is not about going along to get along. It's not about making sure everybody's happy. It's about taking a stance, having a vision, setting a goal, and steadily putting effort toward that goal.

Even - no, **especially** - in the middle of a pandemic.

Change is painful only to those who don't want to change. My motto is, "If nothing changes, then nothing changes." And you didn't elect us to maintain the status quo.

For this Legislature, for this County, for you, it's "go" time.

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THAT'S SETTLED

I'm proud to say that in collaboration with the Town of Highland and the Eldred Central School District, Sullivan County worked out a reasonable deal with one of the largest taxpayers in our area, Millennium Pipeline. Millennium initially wanted their \$86.3 million assessment lowered to \$27.8 million and the difference refunded, which would have been a huge hit to all our budgets.

Instead, we approached them with a settlement to avoid expensive lawsuits, and they agreed to not ask for any refunds on taxes paid if their Highland assessment was reduced to \$62 million. We insisted it stay at that level through at least 2025.

We agreed with Millennium that that's a fair assessment, and we were happy to avoid digging into our pockets to refund previously paid taxes (which can easily happen in these cases).

Doing our part in pandemic

Thanks to our Public Health team, we've gotten more than 7,400 people vaccinated in Sullivan County as of the beginning of April. (I'm one of them.) And we plan to continue vaccinating as long as there is need and demand. Frankly, that may be for a while, as our number of infected remains stubbornly hovering around 250-260.

Deaths have gone past the 70 mark, and we typically have around a dozen people in the hospital due to COVID-19 at any given time. And even while eligibility has opened up to pretty much anyone over 16, the State's lagging behind the national average of people over 65 who have been vaccinated.

Plus there's those of us who won't get the vaccine, which doesn't make much sense to me, unless your doctor has ordered you not to take it. It's safe, effective and essential to getting our lives back to normal. Fighting that won't change the reality and will prolong the suffering in our health and our economy.

So we've all got work to do. The County's team of professionals is doing their part. Please join by doing yours.



Rev. David Coon of White Lake gets his second Moderna vaccine shot at SUNY Sullivan in Loch Sheldrake, where our Public Health staff has already doled out over 7,000 doses of various COVID-19 vaccines. To be notified of upcoming clinics, visit www.sullivanny.us.

Something we can all rally around

I haven't been digging around in our garbage, but our Solid Waste employees have, and they tell me that close to a third of the waste we ship out of here every year - at a hefty cost - is made up of "organics" like food and plant material. That's the kind of stuff you can compost, which is basically letting nature do her thing with decomposition, turning what we don't want into something we do: valuable fertilizer.

Some of us already have a composting pile in our backyards. But plenty of us don't, for whatever reason. So I talked to our Sustainability Coordinator

Heather Brown & Recycling Coordinator Bill Cutler about setting up a Countywide composting program.

They ran some figures and discovered that by diverting just 20% of those organics to a local composting initiative, we could save over \$380,000.

And we could *sell* the compost we make. If you're a taxpayer, businessperson or government leader, that should be music to your ears.

But it should also ring in the ears of us who are environmentalists, gardeners and lovers of our natural beauty.

'Cause in addition to saving money, it will keep more tractor-trailers from making unnecessary trips. We'd be reducing greenhouse gas emissions, improving soil quality, and controlling erosion, all at once.

So this is something I think the entire County can support, and I'm excited to say you'll be hearing a lot more about this.

New faces, new ideas at the IDA

If you haven't already heard, change



is brewing at the Sullivan County Industrial Development Agency (IDA).

The Legislature just confirmed two new board members, each of who are accomplished businessmen eager to help our economy without hurting taxpayers:

- Sean Brooks, owner of Prestige Towing
- Craig Fleischman, owner of the Monticello Bagel Bakery

More changes are coming in the board chair and CEO positions, too, all geared toward revamping the IDA as a nimble, forward-thinking organization that works closely with the Legislature to accomplish important economic development goals.

#1's not too bad

We're the first of 62 counties in NYS to have a completely digital, downloadable, interactive, up-to-date Hazard Mitigation Plan through the State's MitigateNY program.

Check it out:
sullivan.mitigateny.org

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



Wanna talk? Or shout?

You'd think my critics would have figured it out by now. Well, at least the ones who actually want to make a real difference.

Yelling at me isn't going to get you anywhere. Sure, it might feel good at the moment, get you some likes on Facebook, encourage a few fellow arm-wavers. (Hey, I've done it too...)

But it won't persuade me. It won't change my mind, or scare me, or force me into reconsidering.

Nope, the people who actually make a difference - the ones who honestly disagree with me and want me to look at something from another angle - talk to me over the phone, in between meetings, through emails. They engage me in conversations rather than accusations, firm but calm discussions, their goal always fixed on making something better rather than tearing me or my colleagues down.

So don't follow the poor examples set by the so-called "Truth (Spin) Squad" or other hotheads. They aren't interested in listening. But I am, so long as we can start with a dialogue, not a diatribe.

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 activities in February and March...

- **We authorized** the annual Countywide Litter Pluck, when you can dump roadside trash at our waste stations for free from April through June.
- **We executed** agreements to launch a major rebuild of East Broadway (County Route 173) in Monticello.
- **We enacted** a Human Rights Law that paves the way for a new, Legislature-appointed nine-member advisory board.
- **We kept** the Certified Home Health Agency (CHHA) in house, rather than continuing to consider selling it to a private firm.
- **We renegotiated** the Sullivan County Visitors Association's (SCVA's) contract, in order to ensure they have ample operating funds while also utilizing some of that funding for an expansion of tourism infrastructure initiatives.
- **We supported** the creation of a volunteer Vaccine Coalition which will help local people learn more about COVID-19 vaccinations.