

## Dutchess County Legislature Board Meeting     May 12, 2025

The meeting began with a presentation of the 2025 Public Health Partnership Award to Ms. Renee Fillette, the Executive Director of Dutchess Outreach and the Dutchess Outreach Team. The award, presented by Dr. Melissa Nelson-Perron, the President of the Dutchess County Board of Health, recognized the commitment of Dr. Nelson-Perron and her team to addressing the needs of nearly 30,000 county residents who experience food insecurity and struggle to afford even a single daily meal, including transforming initiatives such as the Food as Medicine Program in collaboration with Vassar Brothers Medical Center and other partnerships at Nuvance.

There were also 3 proclamations. First, Legislator Doug McHoul offered a proclamation identifying May 2025 as Mental Health Awareness Month in Dutchess County and calling upon citizens, government agencies, public and private institutions, businesses, and schools to increase awareness and understanding of mental health, the steps that can be taken to protect mental health, and the need for appropriate and accessible mental health services.

Next, Legislators Versaci and Brendli, members of the Tick Task Force, read a proclamation concerning May as Lyme Disease Awareness Month. They noted the need for vigilance, that ticks carry diseases in addition to Lyme Disease, and that because of the mild winter, ticks were in abundance in Dutchess County. Signs are going to be put up in public parks with a QR code that can be scanned and then provide information about tick and where to get help.

Lastly, Legislators Faust, Drago and Rollison (Chairman members of the Public Safety Committee) recognized the vital public services provided by the emergency medical services system – consisting of first responders, emergency medical technicians, paramedic, emergency medical dispatchers, firefighters, police officers, trained members of the public, and other out of hospital medical care providers – by proclaiming the week of May 18-24, 2025, as Emergency Medical Services Week.

After unanimous approval of the minutes from the previous session, legislators presented committee reports as well as reports regarding events in the county. Legislator Gorman reported on the progress made by the Automotive Advisory Board for Dutchess Community College toward both a critical needs assessment and developing a curriculum at County high schools. Legislator Drago reminded about a Cornell Cooperative Extension Master Gardeners Program plant sale on May 16 and 17. And Legislator Faust described various events he attended including a 5K run benefitting Wappinger Hometown Heroes, a candlelight Vigil for Crime Victims in Poughkeepsie, a fundraiser for a Town of Poughkeepsie police officer in need, the grand opening of the Sports Museum of Dutchess County, and the Dutchess County prayer breakfast.

Other legislators circulated letters (1) supporting the National Park Service; (2) urging the Governor to reconsider the unfair burden that a payroll tax supporting the MTA puts on county residents relative to the services provided, and extended Mother's Day wishes to Dutchess County Moms.

Eleven items on the consent agenda passed unanimously and without discussion.<sup>1</sup> Attention then shifted to the central issue of the session which was first addressed by Minority Leader Valdes-Smith: the surprise decision (announced in a press release) to move forward with plans for a supportive housing shelter at 26 Oakley Street for single men, this despite a compromise agreement that had purportedly been reached between the Mayor of Poughkeepsie and County Executive Sue Serino, after months of negotiating and stakeholders' meetings, to limit the shelter to single women and families with children. Legislators and numerous Poughkeepsie residents voiced anger, disappointment, and dismay about the decision.

Assistant Minority leader Atkins spoke forcefully about what he labeled a "betrayal" built on "environmental", "institutional" and "political" racism, and pointed to the refusal of Republican legislators to listen to the city residents or even visit the proposed site. Legislator Kaul said she was blindsided by the news which she received via press release; she expressed alarm at the dangerous disrepair of the pods where homeless people are currently housed, and the failure to plan for them and their immediate needs while the shelter project moves forward. Legislator Brendli advocated for scatter site housing throughout the county instead of concentrating the region's homeless in the City of

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<sup>1</sup> These were:

Resolution 62, authorizing grant agreement with New York State Affordable Housing Corporation and amending the 2025 adopted county budget as it pertains to the Department of Planning and Development.

Resolution 63, confirming new appointments and reappointments to the Traffic Safety Board.

Resolution 64, authoring grant award with New York State Department of Criminal Justice Services Office of Research and Performance and amending the 2025 County Budget as it pertains to the Office of Probation and Community Corrections.

Resolution 65, amending the 2025 Budget as it pertaining to the Department of Public Works.

Resolution 66, authorizing preliminary planning expenses for the slope stabilization project on South Mill Road in the Town of Rhinebeck in and for the county of Dutchess, New York at a maximum estimated cost of \$378,750 and authorizing the issuance of \$378,750 bonds of said county to pay the cost thereof.

Resolution 67, declaring Dutchess County SEQR Lead Agency for the POU Development LLC Commercial Aviation Hanger Project at Hudson Valley Regional Airport.

Resolution 68, adoption of determination of no significant adverse environmental impact in connection with the POU Development LLC Aviation Hangar Project at the Hudson Valley Regional Airport.

Resolution 69, mortgage tax apportionment period October 1, 2024, through March 31, 2025.

Resolutions 70 and 7, approvals of applications to cancel a tax bill and to authorize a charge back by the Commissioner of Finance, Town of Rhinebeck.

Resolution 72, approval of application to correct tax bill and to order the local tax collector and or Commissioner of finance to issue a corrected tax bill or issue a refund where necessary to Town of Poughkeepsie.

Poughkeepsie, and chastised the Republicans for not working together with the residents of Poughkeepsie who alone will bear the burden of the project.

Legislator Metzger defended the decision to move forward. Asserting that there “was community involvement ... they came to our meetings and spoke”, he essentially insisted nevertheless that the decision of the “Republican caucus” had been made a year ago; while it “may not have been the result they were looking for,” he claimed, it was not the decision of the caucus to waste a year with negotiations between the County Executive and Mayor of Poughkeepsie to come up with a different plan.

Legislator Atkins responded that the community involvement was limited, that they had no voice in the location of the shelter, and that numerous questions that the community and he and others had posed to Sabrina Marzouka, head of Dutchess County Community & Family Services (about both the substance and process for county’s plans for addressing homelessness and about the ongoing negotiations with Mayor of Poughkeepsie Flowers) had gone unanswered.

26 members of the public – mostly residents of the City of Poughkeepsie including those who lived nearby 26 Oakley Street, 5 City of Poughkeepsie Council members, activists and several business owners – all spoke out against the Oakley Street plan:

- they pointed out that, if the decision of the Legislature had been made a year ago, then the year’s long negotiation with the City of Poughkeepsie was in bad faith;
- they criticized the failure of legislators for making decisions about Poughkeepsie without ever visiting the Oakley Street site or the neighborhood, and ignoring the voices of the people most directly impacted by their decisions who despite total opposition to the project had come to the table and agreed to compromise;
- they complained that the site was already negatively impacted by redlining, poverty, the location of the jail and the pods, and a lack of police response to drug users, garbage and gun violence; with the site’s proximity to schools and playgrounds, the children in the neighborhood who walk to school “who see enough on a day-to-day basis” would be further impacted by a troubled population housed in the shelter;
- one City Councilman called it a “cycle of abuse” from Dutchess County perpetrated against the City of Poughkeepsie”, a business owner described the Oakley St. neighborhood as being “severely affected by the associated problems of large-scale afflicted population of mentally ill, substance-addicted persons being sent here by other counties and states”, another business owner said “[w]henver we build ourselves out of the trenches by people that are actually from here, that actually care about this place, you guys find another reason and another way to give us your garbage”, and a third, arguing that overburdening Poughkeepsie with more concentrated social service placements... squanders taxpayer investments and undermines revitalization efforts that are already underway, summed it up by

saying, “The City of Poughkeepsie has long carried more than its fair share. We’re not a one-city to solution to a county-wide problem.”

- others complained of broken and empty promises to revitalize the area while at the same time actually spending to improve other areas of the county, and a decade of expressing concern about homelessness without planning anything other than “dumping” the problem on already blighted Poughkeepsie;
- they called out the needs of homeless school aged children living in poverty in the Hudson Valley and the disadvantages of short-term living in motels and hotels;
- they argued for scattering shelters throughout the county and for other avenues to reduce homelessness like free public transportation, tenant protections, raising the minimum wage, rent stabilization and more affordable housing;
- they warned that the building at 26 Oakley might contain asbestos; and
- they promised legal action against the county and collective political action to unseat those legislators who refused to give them a seat at the table.

A resident of Hyde Park, the only person addressing the legislature who did not address the homeless shelter, explained that she had chronic back pain and complained that New York State cut off her access to narcotic pain medication.