

FROM THE CHAIR...

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

ALWAYS ABOUT THE TAXPAYER



**BY ROBERT A.
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LEGISLATURE**

A number of initiatives by your Legislature have dominated recent headlines. I take that as a sign we're headed in the right direction, exploring new ways of doing things that inevitably shake up the "norm" and thus become newsworthy.

Our #1 priority - blanketing Sullivan County in broadband signals - should finally give other Internet service providers impetus to up their game.

Our Move Sullivan bus service is about to reconfigure routes to better serve the working public - whether private transportation operators like it or not.

And our Care Center at Sunset Lake is soon to see a new management company at the helm, charged with implementing much-needed efficiencies and changes at this valuable facility.

Which brings us to our Certified Home Health Agency (CHHA), which we also plan on leasing to the same company that ultimately is chosen to operate the Care Center.

Some counties have already sold their CHHAs to private companies, but we're taking a more studied approach, ensuring residents are properly treated and employees stay County workers.

Is it new? Is it different? Yes, and yes. Will it work? I wouldn't be endorsing the idea if I didn't think so.

Ignore critics' name-calling, finger-pointing and character impugning - that's simply an attempt to demonize rather than debate. If there is a better way to do things in County government, one that respects the taxpayer above all else, I'm ready to listen.

We serve the taxpayer - every one of us in County government, elected or otherwise. And they expect us to do our jobs cost-effectively. So if there's a way to provide the same or better service at a lesser cost, we are mandated to explore that path.

If that hurts someone's feelings or runs counter to

their philosophy, so be it. We can afford what we can afford.

Contrary to what you may have heard, we have not received an unrelenting avalanche of calls and emails against the lease of the Care Center and CHHA. On the other hand, we have received quite a bit of public pushback on the 4% Energy Tax. That's clear proof that our taxpayers prioritize us scrutinizing every opportunity to save money. They are done with paying more, no matter the service or program.

In the case of the Care Center and the CHHA, we can save taxpayer dollars in a manner that does not harm services or put employees out of work. And along the way, we can ease the crushing burden on those same taxpayers.

That's the whole plan, in fact, so stay tuned...



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IF YOU WANT A PROPERTY, WE'LL WORK WITH YOU

Sometimes it seems like government is just waiting to pounce on taxpayers in dire straits, hitting them up with fees and penalties, and finally foreclosure, for not keeping up with their tax obligations.

I don't want Sullivan County to be that kind of government, and neither does County Treasurer Nancy Buck.

Thanks to the program she pioneered, 144 properties have been repurchased by their owners this year, thus avoiding being placed in our annual tax foreclosure auction.

Nancy and I agree that we should give folks every opportunity to stay in their homes, so long as we're not being suckered by someone pretending to be in a bad way. Our installment-payment and repurchase programs allow us to compassionately deal with those who truly are in a bind, without neglecting our legal obligation to collect all taxes and penalties that are due. We still have properties to auction off, of course, and that's set for October 20-21. More info, including a full catalog, is at aaructions.com.



Night meetings? Nah

I've once again heard the call for evening meetings of the Legislature. The reasoning sounds logical: people work during the day, so they can't come witness and comment on our proceedings. But that's not the full picture, and it's been proven inaccurate not just during my short tenure but twice before with previous Legislatures.

First off, not everyone works a straight 9-5, M-F shift (I certainly don't). So no matter what meeting day and time you choose, it won't ever be convenient to everybody.

Second, we've tried evening meetings before, and the turnout is no higher than the regular day meetings - and can be lower (including zero). The public comes out to meetings - and finds the time to do so - when motivated, be it in celebration, outrage or curiosity. They have little interest in spending their spare time at the Government Center, often after dark, at times in bad weather, particularly in the winter.

It's not appetizing to legislators or staff, either, who have likely spent the whole day at work already. And I'll point out that tired legislators can make tired decisions, which is not a good thing.

Can't make a Legislature meeting? Just head to www.sullivancountyny.iqm2.com/Citizens/Default.aspx and pick the video you want to watch.

COVID's just not gonna win this fight

Correct - we have to stay super-vigilant against the spread of coronavirus. Correct - we have to continue cautiously reopening schools, event venues and other public gathering spots.

But I can tell you that, thanks to the efforts of our Public Health Services crew and other County employees, we've held the line against COVID-19 for a good four months, and I'm confident we'll continue beating it back wherever it manifests.

While you may be tempted to focus on the fact that people are still wearing masks and that we've issued a number of health advisories about COVID exposures, you should also recognize that our schools, our casino and our government offices have welcomed people back - without causing a spike in our coronavirus numbers. And except for our gaming revenue, our sales and room tax numbers aren't as awful as we feared.

I'm not gloating. I'm just happy that we've survived this pandemic, and if we behave ourselves, we'll avoid a second wave. And don't we want to get back to our normal lives? I think that's the promise of 2021, and I'm looking forward to it!

In the meantime, stay up to date on the latest at www.sullivan.us/departments/public-health/coronavirus. And don't stop following the guidelines! We can't afford to backslide...

THEY DESERVE OUR APPRECIATION EVERY YEAR

Though I could not attend personally, I join with my fellow County leaders in saluting our hardworking employees at our Liberty campus: Public Health Services, Department of Family Services, Department of Community Services, Care Center at Sunset Lake, and those members of the Division of Public Works and Sheriff's Office who work in Liberty.

On a sunny September 18, our leadership team funded, organized and served food at the annual Staff Appreciation BBQ, held outside at the campus. And considering everything our folks have gone through this year - and done for the people of this County - it was more deserved than ever.

Thank you all!



Route 97 guardrails, pavement replaced

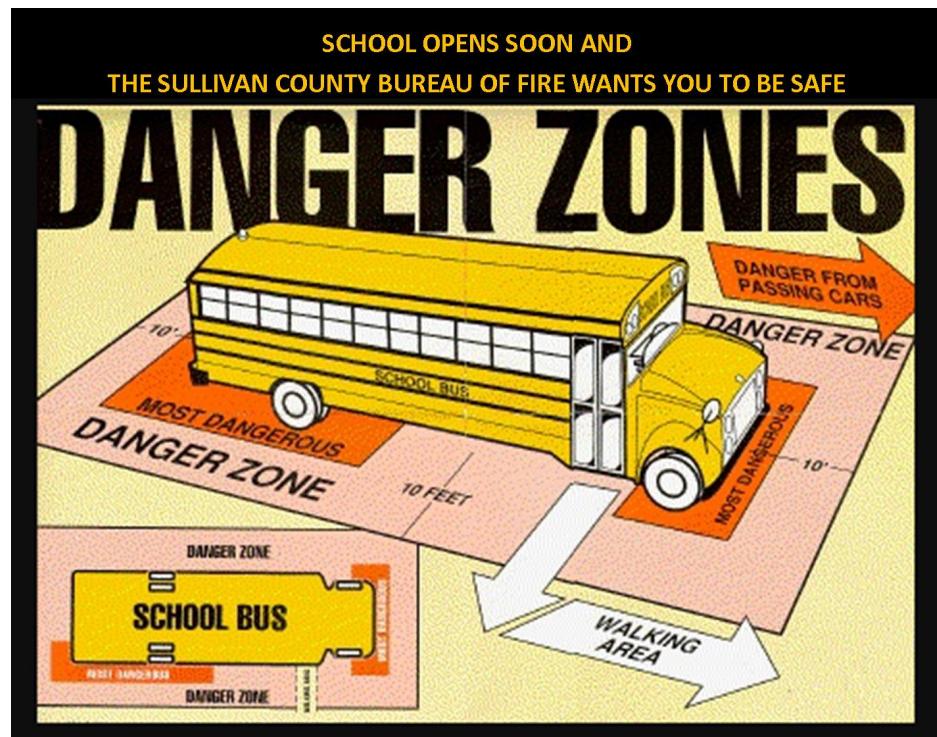
I'm very happy to report that the NYS Department of Transportation heard our pleas - including a letter I sent them earlier this year - to fix the sagging guardrails up and down Route 97 in Sullivan County.

The dilapidated look was definitely not what anybody wanted to see along the Upper Delaware Scenic Byway, but the DOT stepped it up a notch and fixed the roadbed itself, even repaving sections. Nice work!



MOVING SULLIVAN

I don't have a start date quite yet, but soon we'll be unveiling a new route for our Move Sullivan bus service, plus the long-delayed launch of the \$2-a-trip fare. I'll share more next month!



HEY, THIS IS REALLY IMPORTANT

Two issues are critically important for all of us to pay attention to right now: the 2020 U.S. Census, and the 2020 General Election. I've got the info you need to know on both. Please make sure you read the below, then participate!

The Census

- Sullivan County is near the bottom of Census response rates in New York State
- Every individual who does not respond will cost County residents up to \$3,000 in lost Federal aid, potentially raising taxes
- An undercount also may affect our representation in Washington, DC
- Don't wait for a paper form - the Census ends on September 30, 2020
- Fill out the Census online at www.my2020Census.gov
- Fill out the Census over the phone at 1-844-330-2020

The Election

- Election Day is Tuesday, November 3
- Polls will be open from 6 a.m.-9 p.m. in 32 locations across Sullivan County
- You can apply for an absentee ballot no later than October 27, 2020. The postal service, however, has said they cannot guarantee timely delivery for ballots applied for less than 15 days before the election (October 19)
- Early (in-person) voting begins October 24 at 9 a.m. at the Government Center in Monticello, ending November 1 at 2 p.m.
- Full details are available at sullivanny.us/departments/elections

UPDATE ON CARE CENTER AT SUNSET LAKE

The new board of the Sunset Lake Local Development Corporation (LDC) has already met several times in September to quickly move forward on finding a competent company to manage the Care Center at Sunset Lake in Liberty, along with the Certified Home Health Agency (CHHA). To keep up with their activities, visit sullivanny.us/Departments/sunset-lake-local-development-corporation.



Sunset Lake LDC Board meetings are held regularly at the Government Center in Monticello and are open to the public.

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



Bald is very beautiful

If you've never met Lou Monteleone, you should. He's an awesome guy, a community-oriented fella if I've ever known one.

And like me, he suddenly goes bald every once in a while. It's for St. Baldrick's, a nonprofit foundation that raises funds for kids with cancer - and we've unfortunately got plenty to go around. I'm proud to partner with Lou in these important fundraisers, and I encourage you to see what you can contribute by visiting his page on Facebook.



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 the month of September...

- **We filled** the vacant licensed nursing home administrator position at the Care Center at Sunset Lake.
- **We extended** furloughed employees' health benefits and vacation accruals to October 31, in the hope of bringing them back aboard.
- **We thanked** the dozens of individuals and organizations who donated goods and services to the County's Emergency Community Assistance Center, all of which have been used to aid those impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- **We authorized** the County Attorney to work with the Town of Highland and the Eldred Central School District in fighting a court action by the Millennium Pipeline Company to significantly reduce its property taxes.
- **We urged** the State to include counties in the development of a Scoping Plan to implement the policies of the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act.