



Schoharie County Operations Review Committee

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Alicia Terry - Chair

Gilboa Supervisor

Harold Vroman

Summit Supervisor

Alan Tavenner

Schoharie Supervisor

Eric Stein

President & CEO Cobleskill Regional Hospital

Dan Crandell

Public Works Commissioner

Bonnie Post

Director of Community Services

John Riedl

Superintendent, Margaretville Central School (Retired)

Schoharie County

Operations Review Committee Minutes

May 10, 2021

Present: Alicia Terry, Harold Vroman, Dan Crandell, John Riedl, Alan Tavenner, Bonnie Post, and Eric Stein (by phone)

Also Present: Bill Federice, Steve Wilson, Fonda Chronis, Barb Schaffer, MaryAnn Wollaber-Bryan, Scott Haverly, and Kayla Redmond

The meeting was called to order by Alicia Terry at 8:35 a.m. on May 10, 2021.

John Riedl made a motion to approve the meeting minutes from April 19, 2021. Harold Vroman provided a second. The motion was carried 6-0.

Alicia Terry introduced Steve Wilson to the table to explain the methodology for gathering facts about County Systems.

Steve Wilson explained that there are three essential items for success:

1. Senior management endorsement or support
2. An established methodology
3. Management of tension and push back that may come from people involved

Steve Wilson discussed the methodology that he believes will help assist the Committee in their mission to find efficiencies to improve workflows within Schoharie County Government. He explained that the objective of the review or methodology is to align performance, function, and structure in Human Services, Human and Financial Resource Management and Tax Administration. Steve Wilson explained that the first step will be initial fact finding of the involved departments. He expressed the importance of understanding the specific functions and programs within each department. Steve Wilson then, reviewed the questionnaire with the committee. He

noted that each subcommittee will want to identify what is involved in this reorganization so that the right information can be collected. Steve Wilson explained how it may help to look at laws to see what is required in certain departments. Department Heads may have a clear financial benefit and a community need to keep certain functions. Steve Wilson stated that the Committee is not looking at the department, but instead the functions within it.

John Riedl asked what the first steps should be for the subcommittees to begin collecting data.

Steve Wilson thinks this will mostly be discussion and note taking to start with. He suggested completing the questionnaire and answer those questions. Then, the subcommittee can get together and discuss their findings. Subcommittee members should both agree on an accurate representation of the departments they analyze. Steve Wilson explained his thoughts on how a subcommittee might obtain their data. He said a subcommittee may first go to the places that have successfully reorganized and ask them questions. Next, he recommended speaking with department heads, personal contacts, and statewide associations.

Alan Tavenner arrived at 8:41 a.m.

Eric Stein noted that he thinks the key process might be aided if they have a model in mind prior to asking questions. He feels this will keep the conversation structured and focused.

Alicia Terry mentioned her desire to make sure a method is approved and well documented so a procedure is in place and the right questions can be asked to reduce any repeated work.

Steve Wilson suggested that each subcommittee group pick one department to do the fact gathering. Then, come back together and discuss their findings and identify how to make changes going forward.

Bonnie Post discussed the significance of the annual plan from each department. This will show the Committee what the departments' goals are and what was achieved. It will help identify problem areas but also areas the departments are doing well.

Steve Wilson stated the reports that are required by the State that might also be helpful.

Dan Crandell suggested obtaining reports from 2019 to compare with recent years to see how the COVID-19 pandemic had impacted departments.

Alicia Terry proposed that the Committee members review the methodology before they formally adopt it.

Steve Wilson and Fonda Chronis said they will be able to provide reports on accomplishments. Alicia Terry stated that the methodology and the questionnaire can be posted on the website for easy reference.

Eric Stein asked if the is becoming well known.

Steve Wilson answered yes, he believes all the department heads are informed of the project. He has had five meetings with the department heads so far regarding the Committee's purpose. He stated that he thinks there are a lot of concerns among employees. Most of the department heads that Steve Wilson has interviewed have indicated that their department's efficiency is not the issue,

but what they need are more resources. Most of the department heads are supportive as this analysis has never really been done.

Alan Tavenner and Dan Crandell expressed concerns they have in the written methodology and wished to go over it further before posting it on the website.

Alicia Terry agreed with Alan Tavenner to keep the methodology a draft and discuss it before posting it on the website. She asked to wrap up on the methodology and dive into the discussions with Barb Schaffer from Personnel and Fonda Chronis from the County Administrator's Office.

Barb Schaffer was introduced to the table and discussed her thoughts about the Human Services Centralization, Improvements for Tax Collection Rates and Strengthening of the Tax Levy System, and Centralization of Financial Functions. Barb Schaffer started by identifying what exactly she does as the Personnel and Civil Services Officer for Schoharie County. She stated that she oversees about 1500 Civil Service positions within the County. Currently, the Personnel Department sends an annual audit to the State that shows how many positions exist and how many were lost, classified, and created. Any position that becomes open under Civil Service, the Personnel office administers the list, classifies and certifies the list, and canvases the position that may open. Currently the Personnel office is run by two full-time employees, Barb Schaffer (Personnel Director) and Personnel Assistant, Melissa Wick. She explained that she also had one part-time employee in the Personnel Office that has since resigned. Barb Schaffer explained why adding more work by combining finance duties with personnel is not feasible. She expressed the need for more staff at that point to fill the roles necessary within the Personnel Department. She detailed the benefits that the Personnel Department covers. Barb Schaffer expressed her concerns of moving payroll and other finance duties into the Personnel Department. She feels it would be a conflict because the Personnel Officer does all the payroll certifications within the County to make sure it is being paid correctly. She stated that when someone goes to retire, NYS retirement will reach out to the Personnel Officer to obtain the employee's retirement roster to ensure that the person's retirement is processed correctly. The Personnel Officer is by law, the sole person that can create and classify titles in the County. The Personnel Officer then recommends to the Finance and Personnel Committees which grade and pay scale the new position should be set at compared to other titles. This conflict is her biggest concern with combining financial duties with the Personal Department.

Bonnie Post asked if Barb Schaffer has seen trends or issues that the Committee should be aware of.

Barb Schaffer stated that she finds a major lack in management training. She believes some of the department heads and other staff do not get the proper training. She stated that if the staff is not trained correctly, they will see kinks within that department as you will have someone constantly going back to remedy the mistakes.

Dan Crandell discussed how his department has been affected by the lack of training at the County. He believes that training should come from the Personnel Office, but it is not supported by budget.

Alan Tavenner tuned in and explained how supervisors fail to document issues. There is no progressive discipline.

Alicia Terry asked if Civil Services issues will occur if an employee with a certain title is moved to another department with the same title.

Barb Schaffer said no, but the employee could grieve it as it could be considered a change in working conditions. This does not mean that the employee will win, but they have the right to grieve the change. She explained how Civil Service might play a role in the need for employees to re-test for certain positions. She noted that a problem with this would be that the person retaking the test would need to score in the top three and be hired from a new list. If they were to fail the test, they would then be laid off and the County would then be paying them unemployment benefits. They then would have a right to go to an arbitration hearing with a law judge to determine if it was lawful or ethical to change the titles.

Alicia Terry summarized that Civil Service is going to have a large impact on the Committee's goal to reorganize.

Barb Schaffer agreed and stated that anyone coming in to replace her soon-to-be vacant position will need to learn the Civil Service Law which took her three to five years to learn. She mentioned that she has had a conversation with the State about her upcoming retirement and potential for combining finance with personnel duties. She said that the State agreed that the combination of duties could create a conflict of interest.

Bonnie Post agreed with Barb Schaffer's argument about the potential for conflict. She stated that having them separate creates a balance of power.

Alicia Terry thanked Barb Schaffer for her attendance and participation. She then, introduced Fonda Chronis to the table.

Barb Schaffer leaves the meeting at 9:50 a.m.

Fonda Chronis explained his role as a chief number cruncher for the County that tries to figure out what story the numbers tell. He also organizes and executes the County's budget process each year. Fonda Chronis stated that large government organizations will have challenges. He touched on how our departments in Schoharie County Government is set up and stated that the departments are very isolated. He referenced Barb Schaffer's and Bonnie Post's thoughts about checks and balances and stated how it is sometimes important. Fonda Chronis stated that the checks and balances should be looked at and understood to determine if it is getting in the way of efficiency and people working together or is it instead, a necessary barrier to ensure the public is protected. He believes that the Committee should work on making the departments work more fluidly. He explained that coordinating efforts from multiple departments can benefit the County. Fonda Chronis mentioned management training is necessary and lacking. He stated that succession planning is not done well in Schoharie County Government and needs improvement.

Fonda Chronis noted that all financial aspects are decentralized. He believes centralizing at least some of these are important and could be beneficial. Fonda Chronis also touched on how most people do not understand the County finances and how they work. He thinks there would be some efficiencies gained if there were some centralizations of functions and training.

Dan Crandell left the meeting at 10:05 a.m.

Eric Stein asked if the County holds management meetings with all the managers together.

Bonnie Post stated that the Department Head Association does have a monthly meeting. She explained that Steve Wilson has been holding meetings four to six times per year. He would occasionally hold a special meeting regarding the budget. Department heads would meet one on one with Steve Wilson and Fonda Chronis to talk more in depth about that specific department's budget.

Alicia Terry wrapped up the meeting and proposed to meet on May 24, 2021 at 8:30 a.m. She reviewed the agenda will consist of finalizing the methodology, and to discuss a draft of the Committee's report to send to the Board of Supervisors in June.

Alicia Terry adjourned the meeting at 10:12 a.m.

Recorded by:

Kayla Redmond