

Public Meeting

January 19, 2005

1:00 p.m.

A public meeting was held on January 19, 2005 at 1:00 p.m. in the Courtroom of the County Court House, Delhi, New York.

The meeting was called to order by Chairman James Eisel, Sr. The Chairman stated that the meeting was being held to hear the public's concern regarding the future of Countryside Care Center and introduced County Attorney Richard Spinney, Clerk of the Board Christa Schafer and Assistant Clerk of the Board Lori Koronowski. He stated that anyone desiring to speak to come up to the podium and provide their name and town in which they live. Prior to opening the floor for comment he asked Mrs. Schafer to read several letters received regarding Countryside.

The first letter the Clerk read was received from the Countryside Resident Council. It stated that the Council was in favor of building a new facility and have been informed and updated on the plans throughout the years. They were quite excited at the prospect of a new facility, especially reading how wonderful and successful the new Otsego County Nursing Home turned out. Delaware County needs to take care of its own and by privatizing, the Board of Supervisors will have no control of who and how residents are being taken care of. The Council stated their home is over forty years old and the elderly are more important than prisoners and compost.

The second letter read was from Edith Storck a resident at Countryside who was unable to attend the public meeting because it is difficult for her to walk. Ms. Storck asked the Supervisors not to sell her home of one and half years, adding it is all the home she has. She praised the aides, nurses and housekeeping as wonderful.

The last letter was from Georgiana Merwin of Tompkins who questioned how the Board of Supervisors could justify the dismissal of the Chaplain from his duties at Countryside. She said at one point in her life she had a mom, dad, and sister at Countryside and she knows how much it meant to them to have someone minister to them to the end. She asked why no one has looked into grants as there seems to be grants for everything, including floods, fires, jails, composts, agriculture, etc. She pointed out that the elderly and infirmed citizens paid their taxes and contributed to society all of their lives and deserve better than this treatment. Ms. Merwin suggested the minister be re-instated to his post, and given a raise and furthermore, it is the will of the people to not privatize Countryside.

Lynne Attonasso of Delhi and an employee of Countryside, thanked the Board for the opportunity to speak. She stated that she has been there through five administrators and was thrilled to be working on a new facility with Countryside Care Center Administrator Kurt Apthorpe and Director of Nursing June Egan. Building a new facility became a vision for many and how wonderful it was. The elderly are already made to feel like old machinery. The current building does not meet the American for Disability Act (ADA) criteria. She questioned if the Board of Supervisors gave any consideration as to what would happen if the new owner were to close. Further stating, that it is not true that all nursing homes have to meet the same standards. She remarked that local government moved too slowly to build before however, the Board moved quickly last week to schedule this meeting. In her opinion, Delaware County is the field of dreams and if we build, residents will want to come and the number of residents will again grow.

Jerry Pellegrino of Meredith, questioned what the Board will do with the money if Countryside were sold. He suggested putting the money in a reserve and use the interest towards supporting the needs of senior citizens. He asked how much taxes would be reduced if there was no subsidy for Countryside. He recommended the Board document what the short and long term implications to the taxpayers would be based on the sale of Countryside. He further suggested that the Board put a clause limiting the use of the property in the deed, as well as clauses that identifies what the buyers have to do to bring Countryside up to snuff, the term of sale including an implementation plan as to where the buyers funding is coming from. Mr. Pelligrino felt that the formation of a small task force that would report back to the Board should be developed. This task force should consist of a Supervisor from the Board, an individual from the healthcare field and a citizen of the county to perform periodic reviews of Countryside and make sure that certain terms are being lived up to. He requested that more details be given out, adding it would make things easier for the public to understand. In conclusion, he suggested the Board bring in an objective, neutral third party with expertise in nursing home care that would provide information and make recommendations to the Board.

Joe DiPalo, Executive Director of Margaretville Memorial Hospital and Mountainside Care Center of Margaretville stated that health care is not a local issue, whatever decision is made will have a regional effect and the impact will affect surrounding counties. Thought must be given to the fact that if Countryside is sold and the private buyer closes in three years, what happens then. The Board needs to understand their actions have an overall effect now and in the future.

Barbara Onasch of Delhi, stated that her mother was in a private nursing home and over a period of three years her parents savings were gone and her father lost his home. Her mother was then moved to Countryside where she received quality care. She remarked that no matter what a private buyer says, they need to make a profit and they will turn you out. She urged the Board to not sell Countryside.

Ashley Scobie of Hamden and a LPN at Countryside, spoke as a patient's advocate and as a granddaughter. She urged the Board to research every possible solution, suggesting the calling of senators for more money. In her opinion, the jail and landfill have not been successful projects. Her 100 plus year old grandmother is a resident of the facility and loves it there, it would kill her to move, she deserves a life there.

Edith Fleischer of Walton, stated there are other options. At the last Board meeting it was mentioned that the state will pay 90% to build a new facility and the county subsidy would be reduced from 3.9 million dollars to \$250,000. The county is not wealthy but, it can absorb and afford to spend \$250,000 on the elderly. She stated there is a need for an adult home and suggested turning the old facility into one. She reminded the Board to think of themselves too, someday they may need this type of care. She stated in her own personal experience she has seen when a facility goes from public to private, corners are cut and the ones that suffer are the ones that can't speak for themselves. If the residents don't have relatives to speak for them they are warehoused and in her opinion, no one would want that to happen.

Tom Briggs, Director of the Office for the Aging, spoke as an advocate for the elderly. He stated that we need to look at the broader picture, adding only when we look at the entire continuum of care and when we explore the long term consequences of our actions are we able to make the right decision. He said that until a few days ago, he was inclined to favor the sale to a benevolent private investor, adding the residents would be cared for, employees would receive similar wages and taxpayers would benefit from a financial windfall. This will work for the short term but, in five years will we be running into the same problem. The county will continue to

pay its share of medicaid and by selling we will be giving up a key component, we will not have control. Mr. Briggs suggested one way we can affect medicaid costs is by expanding our long term care services and make the client's home a viable alternative to institutionalization. In conclusion, he suggested that the county in much more detail consider the idea of building a new facility, creating a single point of entry for the long term care system and to grasp and maintain control of the continuum of care.

Ed Chytalo of Delhi, stated it was not his intention to beg the Board to close or keep Countryside open. He was there because he believes a decision has already been made to sell as it is considered a tax burden and questioned whether taxes will go down noticeably. Before closing he suggested the Board research the background of the buyer, make sure they are financially sound and have good work ethics. The Supervisors are elected officials and should act responsibly, let employees know as soon as possible so they can find gainful employment. He said that Delaware County is a beautiful place to live and work and he wanted his children as he did to overcome the obstacles of this economy.

Jane Hymers of Delhi, remarked that she is concerned over the future of Countryside. Her father held the position for eighteen years as Commissioner of Social Services and at that time the county home was also the county hospital. The hospital part was closed during WWII. The Commissioner and his family had to reside in the home, she had the first hand opportunity to realize how absolutely necessary a nursing home is. She asked that the Board to listen well, do their homework, and make sure to dot their i's and cross the t's before selling Countryside.

Jerry Phelan, CSEA Labor Relations Specialist, stated he is a resident of Otsego County and they just recently went through the exact same situation and chose to build a new facility. He said that Kurt Apthorpe pointed out the other day, that 90% of the cost including interest is reimbursed through medicaid to build a new facility. He declared that Mr. Apthorpe is certain if done correctly, the county subsidy could go down to a quarter a million a year. In his opinion, this is really about the care of mom, dad, grandma and grandpa. He pointed out that the difference between the private and public sector is the efficiency and quality of care. If privatized, in order to make a profit, cuts would be made, probably to the staff-patient ratio which would have an impact on mom and dad. He questioned what CSEA could do to assist the Board and offered several suggestions. Self-funded insurance is what Otsego County did and it is a win-win for everyone with projected savings of hundreds of thousands of dollars a year. Another suggestion was establishing a self-funded drug plan which would allow the buying of prescription drugs from Canada which is legal because the employee is buying the drugs not the county. CSEA has ways of reducing costs to the county's workers compensation self-insurance fund by providing proper training and equipment. He offered to work together cooperatively with the county to save Countryside.

George Lawson of Meredith and CSEA Union President, stated that he has worked for Delaware County for 26 years, is a husband, father of five children, a landowner and taxpayer. He is concerned about the employees and the elderly. If the county considered building, we would get the new rates and if we sell the new owners will receive the new rate. A share will be paid by New York State and a share of the burden will remain with the county. We need to invest in our elderly, community and future by building a new facility. He offered to supply transportation to the Board to tour the new Otsego County Nursing Home.

Jenny Kilpatrick of Walton stated that she has worked for the county for 20 years at Countryside and Public Health Nursing and is an advocate for the elderly. Not all the residents can make their voices heard and they should never have to worry about what will happen in the last years of their lives. They should be treated with loving care, they are moms, dads, brothers,

and sisters. She said to turn this very personal decision into a business decision is wrong, we were brought up to take care of others.

Janice Armstrong of Andes, thanked Mr. Apthorpe and his staff for the phenomenal job they are doing. Her mom did not want to be a burden on the family and made a decision to live at Countryside where is she very happy. Now, however she feels like a burden on the county. Mrs. Armstrong stated she realizes the home is a tax burden however, in her opinion it should have been considered before the jail. She questioned if Countryside were sold and the new owners fail, would residents be homeless or be forced to live with relatives. She urged the Board not to make a rash decision and to look at the residents as your own.

Clayton Palmatier of Hamden stated that he realizes a decision has to be made and offered several suggestions. First, check with other counties to find out how they operate their facility. Second, get state and federal representatives involved. He stated that the taxpayers should be allowed to vote on this. Mr. Palmatier said he was born in Deposit and has family in Tompkins and each time he drives by the Cannonsville Reservoir, he recalls the grief he experienced caused by the reservoir, the digging up of graves, and the loss of farmland.

Joan Chytalo of Hamden stated that she has been a lifelong resident of Delaware County and has worked for the county 20 plus years, the past eleven at Countryside. She referenced the statement made by Colchester Supervisor Lucille Freyer, "we need to understand that it is the nature of the Board to move slowly, like a slow-moving machine, but in the end the decisions made will be the right decision for the taxpayers of the county." Ms. Chytalo explained the series of events that have taken place in the past four years. It is not the slow decision process that is frustrating she said, it is the lack of decision that has brought us to where we are today. This lack of decision has cost thousands of dollars and has been fiscally irresponsible for the county taxpayers. If the Board chooses to sell, thoroughly investigate the potential buyer, make sure they can deliver on their promises, find out if their proposal is financially sound, and determine whether their proposal will meet the economic challenges of our community. If the Board decides not to sell, do not remain status quo, move ahead, there is four years of work already done. And, lastly she asked that the Administrator be allowed to do his job.

George Conklin of Walton and an employee of Countryside, commented that they get their information from quotes in the newspapers, adding in his opinion, there has to be a level of honesty, residents and employees have a right to know what is going on. He suggested that the Board ask the buyers to put everything in writing. Further stating, that once the home is sold it is final, you can't go back home again.

Mark Stepano a CSEA representative from Saratoga County, commented that the county is not alone, counties across the state are having problems but, they can be addressed. At this point in time he is working with Warren County who is facing the same fiscal problems. He offered CSEA's assistance to find a new site for Countryside.

Barbara Palmatier of Hamden and a 32 year employee of Countryside, stated that she loved Countryside's residents and employees. She implored the Board not to sell Countryside but, to build a new facility. She asked that county residents be allowed to vote on whether to sell or not. It will not be the same for the residents or employees if Countryside is sold. She heard the reason the county wants to sell is because of taxes, she commented she did not care what taxes go up to as our residents and elderly are most important in our lives.

Jeff Staples, Minister of the Delhi Baptist Church, reminded the Board not to forget their morale obligation. He asked that Countryside not be privatized and that the morale structure of

the county be maintained.

Kent Schermerhorn of Delhi stated his mother is a resident of Countryside and the staff goes above and beyond the call of duty. He doubted if the facility were sold the new owners would favor the staff going above and beyond the call of duty or that the atmosphere of Countryside would be transferred. His concern if Countryside is sold, is there a safety net and if the new owners could repair the building and still make a profit. He questioned what the facts are and requested a list of advantages and disadvantages be provided to base a decision upon. In his opinion, a fact finding team consisting of the Board and residents needs to be established to do the detective work. He provided a quote from the movie Forest Gump, "we have to do the best with what God has given us", and encouraged the Board to do the same.

David Reade formerly of Walton, now a resident of Countryside, declared that when he arrived at Countryside he could not walk and now he can which shows the type of care provided. He feels that the proposed buyers are just saying what we want to hear. Yes, the facility is losing money he said but, a new home would probably make money which would relieve the tax burden. He asked to let the taxpayers vote, see what they think. A new home in his opinion is the way to go.

Loretta Smith of Walton, a former employee and now a volunteer at Countryside, stated that she wanted Countryside to remain open. She claimed that former Franklin Supervisor George Rich was an advocate of the facility and would turn over in his grave if Countryside were sold. In conclusion, she read a quote from Martin Luther King Jr., "the measure of man is not where he stands in comfort and complacency but, where he stands in times of challenge and controversy."

Al Perkins of Delhi commented that he has listened to everyone and is in favor of selling Countryside. One must look at government like a business, its tough to have a portion of a business losing four million dollars a year. The county needs to find ways to save taxpayers' money. He stated his father-in-law is in a private nursing home and is treated well. He suggested the public vote on the issue, let citizens vote for themselves.

Since no one else desired to speak, the meeting was declared over at 2:52 p.m.

Public Meeting

January 19, 2005

6:00 p.m.

A public meeting was held on January 19, 2005 at 6:00 p.m. in the Courtroom of the County Court House, Delhi, New York.

The meeting was called to order by Chairman James Eisel, Sr. The Chairman stated that the meeting was being held to hear the public's concern regarding the future of Countryside Care Center and introduced County Attorney Richard Spinney, Clerk of the Board Christa Schafer and Assistant Clerk of the Board Lori Koronowski. He asked that anyone desiring to speak to come up to the podium and provide their name and town in which they live. Prior to opening the floor for comment he asked Mrs. Schafer to read several letters received regarding Countryside.

The first letter the Clerk read was received from the Countryside Resident Council. It stated that the Council was in favor of building a new facility and have been informed and updated on the plans throughout the years. They were quite excited at the prospect of a new facility, especially reading how wonderful and successful the new Otsego County Nursing Home turned out. Delaware County needs to take care of its own and by privatizing, the Board of Supervisors will have no control of who and how residents are being taken care of. The Council stated their home is over forty years old and the elderly are more important than prisoners and compost.

The second letter read was from Edith Storck a resident at Countryside who was unable to attend the public meeting because it is difficult for her to walk. Ms. Storck asked the Supervisors not to sell her home of one and half years, adding it is all the home she has. She praised the aides, nurses and housekeeping as wonderful.

The last letter was from Georgiana Merwin of Tompkins who questioned how the Board of Supervisors could justify the dismissal of the Chaplain from his duties at Countryside. She said at one point in her life she had a mom, dad, and sister at Countryside and she knows how much it meant to them to have someone minister to them to the end. She asked why no one has looked into grants as there seems to be grants for everything, including floods, fires, jails, composts, agriculture, etc. She pointed out that the elderly and infirmed citizens paid their taxes and contributed to society all of their lives and deserve better than this treatment. Ms. Merwin suggested the minister be re-instated to his post, and given a raise and furthermore, it is the will of the people to not privatize Countryside.

Jim Thomson of Delhi, a representative of the Governmental Affairs Committee of the Delaware County Chamber of Commerce, Chairman of the Delaware County IDA and the Delaware County Local Development Corporation, spoke on behalf of the Delaware County Business Community. He stated that he understood that much pressure is being given by the employees, residents and families of Countryside to not sell. In his opinion, fear tactics are being used and asked that the facts be looked at instead. The decision to sell Countryside is a business decision. Taxpayers have been asked to bear an increasingly large tax burden over the past years and this must stop. The New York State Comptrollers Office released a report stating that Delaware County residents could expect an increase of 16.9% in taxes each year for the next ten years to pay for the increased cost of medicaid. He further stated that taxpayers cannot bear anymore taxes. Mr. Thomson felt that privatizing is the right thing to do for everyone, taxpayers would be protected from massive increases resulting in a win-win situation.

Kathy Johnson of Meredith stated that private nursing homes will not accept the level of care needed for some residents and we need to take care of our people. Privatizing is a business decision she said, and our elderly deserve better than that.

Mary Beth Silano, Executive Director of the Delaware County Chamber of Commerce, remarked that she realized many people are connected to Countryside and that this is a very sensitive subject. The Chamber is concerned about the businesses in Delaware County, the projected increase of medicaid, and the double digit increase in health insurance and workers' compensation. She pointed out that residents and businesses of the county cannot afford increases and that businesses are closing. Ms. Silano read a resolution passed by the Chamber supporting and urging the county to minimize the continuous tax burden to residents and businesses by selling Countryside.

Amanda Church of Kortright, questioned if so many taxpayers were concerned, why were they not at the public meeting to voice their opposition. Most residents did not want to be put in the facility but, are comforted by the staff, adding they should have a say about what goes on. Also, she asked was consideration ever given to the fact that the present staff may not want to work for the new owners. Further stating, the Board said they listened to the comments made at the budget hearing, and they should listen now. Money does not buy faith and happiness.

George Lawson of Meredith and CSEA Union President declared that CSEA is completely opposed to selling Countryside. Look at our neighboring county, they just moved into a new state of the art building which provides a better quality of life for the residents, and they expect to reduce the county subsidy to zero in the next few years. He asked the Board to join them on a trip to the Otsego County nursing home. Further stating, that CSEA is willing to help reduce Delaware County's subsidy suggesting the reduction of health insurance costs, workers compensation savings and the reduction of liability costs. He pointed out that medicaid costs are the county's responsibility whether we privatize or not. In his opinion, it would be a terrible shame not to keep our nursing home public. He asked if the community is so worried about businesses in the county than why are there so many empty store fronts.

Cynthia Cobb of Delhi and employee of Countryside, commented that Countryside has the finest above board staff and residents. She questioned if the home is sold and closes, what would happen to the residents. She stated she is in favor of keeping our nursing home the way it is.

Ruth Martanis of Meredith stated the taxpayers should vote on a decision to sell or not.

Sophie MacIntrye of Delhi, commented that she worked at Countryside for 13 ½ years and stayed there because it was home, stating she is not in favor of privatizing. She questioned where the Board had been all those years when equipment was breaking down and employees didn't even have the necessary equipment. No one asked the employees what they felt. We built a jail which has a multitude of problems but, we can't build a building for the elderly. In her opinion, if selling the home came up for a vote there would not be support to sell. She asked that consideration be given to building a new facility, as some of us may end up there someday. This is not a new problem she said, we have spent a fortune on architectural drawings and nothing has become of them. People have walked through the door of Countryside and remarked they could feel the love and warmth – the care of the employees is the reason why. In closing, she asked the matter be put to a public vote.

John Osterhout of Meredith, stated he serves as a pastor and has visited a lot of nursing

homes, adding his mother is in Countryside because it provides the best care. In his opinion, our employees are the best around and we should be proud of them. We may be there someday and once it is sold, we can't go back.

Nancy Wahl of Downsville and a nurse at Countryside reinforced what Ms. MacIntrye said. She stated the Board has let Countryside down not just this year but, years ago.

David Reade formerly of Walton, now a resident of Countryside, remarked that he listened to the people from the Chamber of Commerce tonight and was glad that the Chamber was not on the Board of Supervisors.

Cheryl Ceresna of Hamden and a nurse at Countryside, commented that she did not come with a prepared speech but, was speaking from the heart. She stated she has worked at Countryside for a long time and anyone that works there does so with compassion. She feared and would be heartbroken if the residents had to be moved out, adding the employees understand and relate to their lifestyle. Further stating, that no one from the outside could understand. The new jail and composting facilities were built and she challenged the Board to build a new facility for the elderly, they need to stay there.

Ken Prestidge of Hamden, and an employee of Countryside stated that he has been to a lot of meetings regarding the future of Countryside. In his opinion, the decision to sell Countryside should not be taken lightly and said due diligence must be taken as Countryside is the crown jewel of Delaware County. He asked the Board to make sure they knew what they are selling and hoped the right decision would be made.

Dan Flaherty of Hamden stated he moved his mother to Countryside from a nursing home in Baltimore, Maryland. In his opinion, Countryside provides top notch care and has caring employees. He noted that if Countryside is sold, we will lose control of the quality of care and employees.

Since no one else desired to speak, the meeting was declared over at 6:40 p.m.